

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Fraser Falkiner (Jum) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/661>

### Tape 1

- 00:40 And then over to England. And we went to Runnymede, where they've got a big air force memorial. It's got the names of all the
- 01:00 Allied air force blokes who were killed and that was a very spectacular place. And then we were back to London. They flew us straight over to Paris, and we had a big time at the Arc de Triomphe, special seats, and they had Chirac and all the
- 01:31 big procession around the Arc de Triomphe and thousands of flags.
- Was that the 50th year commemoration, was it?**
- Yes, of the end of World War II. And then we were back to London, and spent a night there. And then, on the Sunday,
- 02:00 we had this big service in St Paul's, where all the Royal Family were there and the VIPs [Very Important Persons], which was very good. Then we came home. And we did all that in twelve days.
- 02:34 I suppose there were about sixty of us or so. Mainly air force, but quite a few army and a couple of navy and merchant navy, one Australian nurse. But we had the VIP treatment everywhere.
- 03:02 **Jum, can I take you back a few more years? You were telling us about your childhood years, and your family background and your father's work, a little bit about your early family life?**
- 03:34 My family started in the Riverina, out of Deniliquin, near the little village of Conargo. My grandfather bought half of the Peppen brothers' sheep,
- 04:04 the Austins and Milliners brought the other half of their stud and they kept one minella, which is still in existence, and grandfather took his to the north side of the Billabong Creek, and called his part of the
- 04:30 run, some sixty thousand acres, 'Beoonoke', which is still in existence today. And grandfather had five daughters and five sons and all
- 05:00 the boys worked on the properties. By this time he had spread Beoonoke and it was split into a property called 'Moonrea' and another one called 'Zara' and 'Wanganella' and 'Wanganella Estate'.
- 05:30 It was very big, at one time, I think, a hundred and sixty five thousand acres on it. My father, then, I don't know if there were quarrels amongst brothers, which would be impossible.
- 06:04 My cousin, George Falkiner, G B S Falkiner, he decided to leave, and he took some of the sheep and resigned from the board and founded 'Haddenrig', which is a very famous Marino stud,
- 06:33 his son George is there looking after it. The Austens and Milliners split up, and the Milliners called their part of the old Wanganella
- 07:00 run 'Wanganella Estate' and built a house there. And the Austins held the original Wanganella homestead, which is still in existence and then they split up and grandfather brought,
- 07:31 well, it might have been after grandfather's time actually, our company bought Wanganella Estate, which adjoined Beoonoke. The homestead, we've got a picture of the old homestead there,
- 08:00 that was built by the Milliners. It was burnt down in 1933. And after the war, I'd been jackerooing at Beoonoke and Moonrea for a bit, there was a manager's house at Wanganella Estate, and when I got married
- 08:30 I went over there as manager of the estate. But that was actually when I got back from the war.

**What year were you born, Jum?**

The 9th of the 9th, 1919.

**09:08 I believe you were quite young when your family moved to England, so what memories do you have of the property and so on?**

Well, my father, he was still on the Board of Directors of S S Falkiner's, of Beoonoke, and he bought

09:30 a property for himself called 'Gromgol', which was on the Murrumbidgee, not that far from Hay. That's near a little town called Carrathool. Father spent a lot of time there. He also had this house in Melbourne, and in the

10:00 hot weather he used to move mother and all of us kids, because there was six of us, too, down to this house near St Kilda, in Melbourne to escape the heat. But I think I was about

10:30 three or four when we took off for England. I can remember when we first arrived, we stayed in London in a, I think it was a big flat. And father used to take us

11:00 house-hunting practically everyday. And we found this lovely house at Rygate, which is in Surrey, which is about halfway between London and Brighton, called Colley Manor, which was a beautiful big house. It was opposite Rygate Heath, which had its own golf course

11:30 and golf club, over six acres of garden, a very big garden for England. It was a wonderful childhood that I had there, really.

12:00 The eldest one of my family was my sister Bea, who incidentally is still alive and she's in her 90s, and she lives in France. She's an artist. My elder brother Travers, he was in the air force

12:30 and had quite a remarkable career. He was in bomber command and he was an observer. He was on ferry commands. He'd start with transporting aircraft across the Atlantic, then he was posted over to England and he went on to Wellington bombers

13:00 and he was a navigator. Then he was transferred to the Middle-East and he was given a job as a navigator on a torpedo-carrying Wellington, which must have been a hazardous job, I think, if nothing worse. Anyhow, he and his crew were shot down

13:30 near an island called Nisyros, I think its name was. They got in the dingy and managed to paddle ashore and an old Greek priest hid them. Travers and the priest, when the Germans used to go by, used to get behind the high altar and drink the wine. And they eventually got a

14:04 sailing boat and managed to get to Turkey, and they got picked up then by the RAF [Royal Air Force]. The RAF picked them up in Turkey, then back to England. From there he went on to a transport squadron, and he was stationed at Hendon

14:30 which was near the aerodrome of London. They used to fly all the English VIPs about, his aircraft. They were the personal crew for Sir Archibald Sinclair, who was Minister for Air. And he was there until the end of the war, with trips after the invasion of France and all over the place.

15:03 My second brother, he joined the army, and he was in the Middle-East in the Seventh Division in the armoured vehicles.

15:32 He got through without a scratch and he came back to Australia when the Japs were (UNCLEAR), and he was due to go to Borneo, or up north, but they were so short of manpower that he was made a reserved occupation,

16:00 and was more or less told that his army days were over and that he better go work in the bush, which he was quite happy to do. My other sister, she joined the WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force], the Women's Air Force, and she was three years older than I.

16:36 She was stationed out here in Australia, and she ended up marrying an air force bloke so that was that. I had a younger brother, but he passed on, he got sick.

**17:05 Jum, we were talking before about your childhood in Surrey. What was the name of the village you lived in, in Surrey?**

Rygate. We were about two miles from Rygate which was a lovely little town, I should say.

17:30 As I said, it was halfway between London and Brighton. There was a main road out of Rygate going to Dorking, which was quite a big town, and Colley Manor was on the Dorking Road, opposite Rygate Heath.

18:06 But we had a lovely childhood there, really. It had two tennis courts on it. My father was a very good tennis player, and we used to play a lot of tennis and go in the local tournaments and things.

18:37 **Was this with the wool trade? What sort of work was he doing?**

He was a director of FS Falkiner and Sons Propriety Limited, which was the Marino sheep stud in Deniliquin, Conargo, which is still in existence,

19:02 but he was an inventor, too. He was an extremely good blacksmith. He could make anything in the blacksmith's shop. He invented the first electric shearing machine,

19:32 which was rather wonderful. Before it all used to be by the blades. The Beoonoke's Head was a very big shed. There was fifty stands on the boards for shearers. Which meant you had to get fifty blade shearers at the time, which was very hard to get quite often.

20:04 So not only that, he worked in the shed as a kid on the board, carrying the fleeces. It was a straight board, fifty yards long, or a bit longer. The roustabout at each end,

20:30 he was a long way from the wool room which is the middle, off the board, the poor roustabout, he'd have to run twenty five yards every time he picked up a fleece, run back, and he was going bang, bang, bang. Father, later on, he invited a....We had a property in Queensland, too, then.

21:03 And he invented a semi-circular shearing shed at Isadowns, which was built. We used to sell them rams. It was a big shed. I think there were sixty stands there.

21:39 The wool room was in the middle. The roustabouts all had the same distance to run to the wool tables to throw their fleece and it's still standing there and it was an all metal shed.

22:00 He had a lot of [it] built actually in Germany, at one stage. No, he was before his time really. He was a very good engineer. And also, when he was up in Queensland, after World War I

22:31 he bought an aeroplane. He bought a pilot with it, an Englishman called Jimmy Egan who actually got a job with one of the wool firms in Melbourne. They had a lot of these Avro aircraft, two seater things.

23:01 My father had so much travelling, with his place up in Gromgon and up in Queensland, that he bought this aeroplane and Jimmy Egan, who was a very good mechanic, apart from being the pilot as well, there was plenty of work for him, always, to do with various tractors and machinery and stuff. And then when father

23:30 wanted to go up to Queensland, he'd hop in the aeroplane and Jimmy would fly him up to Queensland, which saved him a lot of time. I can remember one of my very earliest memories, I suppose I was about three at the time, it must have been just before we went to England. Something had obviously gone wrong, though, because all that country there is terribly flat,

24:01 You can land anywhere. I don't know who was flying it or what but anyhow, they overshot and I can remember seeing this aeroplane that couldn't stop where a dam was, and it was nose first with the tale sticking out, and the engine in the water. That's one of my earliest memories.

24:35 Oh, father too, when he was up in Queensland, of course. You can see in the papers today, all this rah about the sugar cane. He was on some place where they were growing sugar cane, and he was sitting over a trough of water,

25:00 and he had a stick of sugar cane and a sharp knife and he was cutting the sugar cane, peeling it to chew it, and he noticed that all the trash and leaves and things all floated, but as soon as he got to the good sugar thing, it sunk to the bottom.

25:30 So he thought, 'Ha, I'll have to make a sugar cane harvester.' So he invented a sugar cane harvester then. It was a wonderful machine. It had a big electric motor on it, it was like a

26:01 tank. Like a header today, it used to cut the sugar cane off about an inch or two inches under the ground, because that's where the main part of the sugar was in that plant,

26:30 and it used to take it up on rollers, and it had a big rotating drum on it, which had a big fan on one end. It was an enormous great rotating....because sugar cane sticks were very large. It had this big fan at one end, and it caused a draught, which

27:00 was the same specific gravity as water, and it used to blow all the trash and leaves and parts that were no good out the back and then the rest was....dropped down and chopped up into six inch lengths, and fed into

27:32 wagons alongside each side, and it was a non-stop machine. It was very successful. He decided when the Japanese

28:00 invaded China, before World War II, and all the Japanese, who used to cut the sugar cane by hand in the Hawaiian Islands, were all recalled home to go home into the Jap Army.

- 28:30 So father thought this was a good opportunity. 'I'll take my sugar harvester over there.' And he'd had it operating in Cuba for a bit because he had an American mechanic who was making the sugar cane harvester. I forgot to say his first... When it was going on a trial on the sugar cane fields in Cuba,
- 29:00 where it was all cut by hand by the Negroes, it was deck cargo on a smallish ship that was going across to Cuba from Florida. The Negroes got onto the ship at night and cut all the guide ropes and pushed it into the sea.
- 29:34 So that set him back a bit. But I think he must have spent a terrible lot of money on the sugar cane harvester, in one way or another, but then it worked in the Hawaiian Islands.

**So was that the sort of business he was mainly doing while based in England?**

- 30:03 Yes, he was doing this all over the thing, he never stopped travelling.

**What about your mum? Can you tell us a bit about the sort of woman she was?**

She was a lovely woman.

- 30:33 She loved and spoiled all us kids, and we loved her very much. She was terribly busy with this very big house, and us kids to look after, although she had a permanent nurse and we little ones had a governess at one stage,
- 31:03 before we were old enough to go to preparatory school, then we were shot off to boarding school. But she loved the garden, it was a beautiful garden. Oh, she had plenty
- 31:31 to do. She had a car and a chauffeur who used to drive everywhere. If she wanted to go up to London or anything, she had no worries although there was a very good train service from Rygate to London. It was on the London to Brighton railway track.
- 32:09 But my elder sister, the one that's still going, she went to boarding school, then she went on to an art school in a town called Redhill
- 32:31 and she got a scholarship to the Slade which was the big English art school in London. She did very well there, she ended up, she got a scholarship to the Royal Academy and she did a few busts and paintings and some of them are still
- 33:00 in the Academy. Then she came back out here. I had an aunt, mother's sister, who lived in Ceylon. Every now and then, mother made trips and stayed with her sister in Colombo, and Bea, this eldest sister, she went out there once.
- 33:33 She ended up marrying a planter, a tea planter, in Ceylon, he was in the army. She got rid of him.
- 34:01 Eventually she met another bloke, an English Army fellow. They got married, then they went to live in England. Then she met another bloke and she married him, and that is when they went to live in Noumea.
- 34:35 She was in tropical country a lot. She can do anything.
- 35:01 **I'm wondering what sort of things you got up to as a child in Rygate? Were you interested in sports? What were your hobbies and so on?**
- I was very keen on shooting. I had a very good air rifle to start with, then I had a shotgun, a four ten. And
- 35:31 the gardener used to tell me which were the pesky birds that used to eat his seedlings and things, and I was a friend of his and I used to shoot them for him. I used to go for walks up Rygate Hill, it was a beautiful bit of country, and over on Rygate Heath. As I said, we used to play a lot of tennis
- 36:01 with my sisters and brothers. I think I'd just started to play cricket, too, at this time. But then the holidays, when you were at boarding school, are fairly short. We always thought they were far too short. We used to go in for the
- 36:30 tennis tournaments in Redhill and in Rygate. We had plenty to do. We used to build huts and cubbies and things in the garden and all the things that kids do. We had lots of friends and neighbourly kids, which were all
- 37:01 good friends or most of them. Later on, I went to prep school. I used to pester mother so much when my eldest sister, she was away in London, and elder brothers, Travers and Bill, were both at boarding school, and then
- 37:31 the next sister, she went to boarding school and I was at home more or less on my own. I made such a nuisance of myself, "I want to go to school with Travers and Billy." I used to make myself such a nuisance. I went to prep school, I think, when I was just seven years old, which I loved.

- 38:02 I loved sport, I played a lot of cricket and football. In sports I could high jump. I did well. In fact,
- 38:30 I ended up head of the school. Then I went to big school, to a school called Radley which is near Oxford. I enjoyed that very much.
- 39:05 I got into the cricket team when I was very young. At prep school we played soccer, which was a bit of a blow when at Radley, we played rugger there so I was a bit at a disadvantage
- 39:30 but I soon picked up rugger and enjoyed it very much. It was a big rowing school also but I didn't row, I was too keen on cricket.
- Were you a batsman or a bowler?**
- I was an opening batsman but I was also a slow bowler.
- 40:07 Actually, in an old magazine there, I took more wickets last century than any other bowler who had been at school and there were some pretty good players as well, like Ted Dexter and some of those English players.
- 40:38 They had this queer thing in England. There were a few schools that played.... They had a school ten days at Lords. There was Eton and Harrow
- 41:00 and Winchester and Sherborne and, I think, Westminster and a couple of other schools, and they used to play their school matches at Lords. And they were known as the Lords schools. We were not a Lords school, and then they used to pick a team
- 41:31 from the rest of the schools in England and they were called 'The Rest.' Anyhow, I managed to get into the 'Rest of England' team, and I got in actually as a bowler, not as an opening batsman.

## Tape 2

- 00:35 Yes, out of those two, the Lords team and 'The Rest', they used to pick a team to play against the British Army which was a great honour.
- 01:00 It went on for about ten days because they were three day matches. The team, I think, we played the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, against the army. I think, if I remember, I got picked to play against the army and I think, from memory, Gubby Allen was the English captain,
- 01:30 who ended up English captain to tour Australia. But I played for the Young Amateurs of Surrey which was fun, to play at the oval at Lords.
- So if you had an ambition to play test cricket, would it have been for England or for Australia at that time?**
- 02:02 Oh, it would have been for Australia, I think. In Germany at the last camp I was in, which was really a hospital, because I'd been sent there.... There was an English plastic surgeon,
- 02:30 that's when I was hoping to be repatriated, but this German doctor said, "Oh, no, there's an English doctor down Frankfurt who's doing plastic surgery and this man can go and have his eyes and mouth...", my mouth when it healed up stuck together, and he said, "He can have plastic surgery there," which quashed my escape. But when I got there,
- 03:00 not only was it plastic surgery but there were a lot of blind blokes there and there was a big bloke from South Australia who'd been shot down in the Middle-East, Graham Williams, who played cricket for South Australia, he was a fast bowler, and him and I used to talk.
- 03:30 He was teaching the blind blokes. He'd got this job teaching the blind blokes Braille and weaving of cane and stuff and making baskets and that. It suited him, it was better then being out in the camp. He was a colossal bloke. He and I became friendly, and we used to talk cricket and this and that.
- 04:06 Some of General Patten's tanks came by. We knew the war was just about over but we had stayed in the hospital. Graham and I, we
- 04:31 hitch-hiked home to England with the Yanks. At this time they had an unofficial test tour of Australian ex-servicemen, nearly all of them, to tour England. The war had finished. They picked, naturally, Graham,
- 05:00 as he had played for South Australia. Graham more or less said, "Oh, well, my mate here has played a fair bit in England, he ought to be useful." And I went and practised with them a couple of times at Lords. But then I was still waiting to have my plastic surgery, and I got my order from the air force to

- 05:31 report to hospital so that ended my chance of playing in the Australian team. It was a pretty good team, they did pretty well. I know Graham Williams, he bowled Hutton out twice.
- 06:04 Then I went into the Queen Victoria Hospital at East Grinstead. I had two or three goes there
- 06:35 because they don't like to rush the plastic surgery. They did one eyelid at a time. They take the skin from behind your ear because it's got the wrinkle there where your normal wrinkle goes.
- 07:02 But he was a wonderful man, Archie, or 'The Maestro', we used to call him. Some of the blokes, it nearly made you sick to look at them, they were so bad. Their hands burnt off and their faces...
- 07:32 But he used to talk to the boys and say, "Well, we'll fix you up the best we can but remember, you've got to get used to being stared at. When you're in a bus or a tram or walking down the street, people are going to stare at you and you've got to get used to this. There's no use us fixing you up and you then not being internally fixed up."
- 08:03 And he used to organise three or four blokes, or who was a reasonably fit walking patient, he used to get them to walk down the pub in East Grinstead. And he used to make a point in the evening of going down there if he had time. And he used to have a beer
- 08:30 with the boys and things. Of course, the people in East Grinstead got used to these queer looking people, but I know when I was there, I had just one of my eyes done, and I had a bandage around my head. I looked like a pirate or something. But he arranged for a whole lot of us, a big busload of us, to go to
- 09:02 Ascot, to the races. It was the first Ascot Gold Cup. The war had finished, it was the first one they'd had for four or five years. He arranged for us to get into the members', and the Royal Family were there and the Princess.
- 09:34 There was I, looking like a pirate. People would stop and talk to you and things. And I used to say, "Oh, I used to fly an aeroplane." He was a wonderful man.
- 10:09 **I believe you were only a teenager when your family returned to Australia?**
- Yes, when I left Radley, I was very keen
- 10:31 to go to Cambridge, to university, mainly to play cricket. I said to my father when he happened to be over in England for a short visit, the exchange rate was terrible then, for every
- 11:00 hundred pounds Australian you sent, you only got seventy five English pounds. He was grizzling all the time, and Mum was making do. She and Dad had a flat in London. I said, "Oh, any chance of me
- 11:31 going up to university?" Father said, "No. There's no chance at all," he said. "You can come back to Australia and do some bloody work. By the time you're twenty one you'll be a useful member of society." So that was the end of my cricketing aspirations.
- 12:09 So I came straight back and went to Beoonoke as a Jackaroo. My cousin, Matt Falkiner, he was manager there.
- 12:37 I lived in the house, but had my meals over in the jackaroos' quarters, because we had about six or seven jackaroos always there because it was a very big place and there was a lot of country. There were two outstations.
- 13:06 There were a lot of people working there, our own blacksmith's shop and big horse yards, and lots, and the shearing shed was about a mile away and we used to keep the
- 13:33 show and sale sheep and rams down there. It was all irrigated out of the Billabong Creek, we had our own pump. I did quite a lot of time getting used to being out here and working down at the shed with an old retainer,
- 14:01 Les McMaster, who was looking after these show and sale rams. There'd have been about thirty or forty of them on these irrigation grass plots so they didn't get dirt or dust in the wool. We used to mix our own special meal to feed them with. We used to bring them in
- 14:31 in the afternoon. If there was rain about we'd bring them in so they didn't get wet. Then I'd be irrigating the plots and things roundabout this sheering shed. Then I tried to sort of settle in and got used to the life a little bit, I started doing the ordinary Jackaroo
- 15:01 work. Usually you had your own hacks. I soon learned to ride a horse, which was not much fun. Often there would be three or four of us working down at the shed in the big sheep yards there.
- 15:32 We'd go down on our horses. They gave me this old horse, hack. It knew more about the place than most people. When we got to the last gate, which was about half a mile from the horse yard, one of the boys got off to undo the chain

- 16:00 round the gate and I, being not used to riding, I had slack reins and this old mare, she knew she was nearly home, and as soon as the gate was open, she [shot] off like a rocket, bolted straight through the thing. And around these horse yards were all these Murray Pines.
- 16:31 So I couldn't manage to stop her. I wasn't going to bail out at that speed so I put my arms around her neck. Some of these branches tore the shirt off my back and scratched, then she pulled up outside. I was a long way first home that night. But I was warned then
- 17:03 to always keep a firm grip on your reins.
- You'd spent your best part of your childhood and teen years in England. This was a very different environment, coming back out to the country and dealing with life then...**
- It was very different.
- 17:32 We had a good, nice lot of jackaroos, usually five or six jackaroos there. My cousin was not a bad bloke, and his wife was a nice woman. Their kids, I used to like their little kids. The overseer was a very nice bloke who came from Queensland.
- 18:03 Our local village was Conargo, which was really a post office, a post office and a store combined, a few cottages and the Conargo pub.
- 18:40 We had our own cricket team. There was a tennis court there.
- 19:00 There always seemed to be something to do. We were tired because we used to have breakfast at half past six, then we all used to assemble at the stables near the horse yard, and the
- 19:30 overseer used to give the orders for the day, tell you what you were to do. Usually when you were away, you'd get the cook in the jackaroos' quarters, used to cut a whole lot of sandwiches and wrap them up into parcels.
- 20:02 If you were going to be away all day you would take your sandwiches with you and you'd fill a bottle of water and off you would go. My brothers had both been there for some time. Brother Bill gave me a sheep dog
- 20:30 which was a lovely little mongrel bitch, she was as cute and as intelligent as anything. A dog was more use than a man, a good dog. It was a colossal change, the whole thing. I don't know if you've ever been in that Riverina country, but there is miles and miles of flat.
- 21:00 (BREAK)
- 21:35 We had a very big irrigation set-up at Beoonoke. The ones down at the shearing shed with our own, it would have been a big twelve inch pump. Then we had another
- 22:00 bigger pump up near, past the homestead, which was, from memory, a fourteen inch pump. It was a big fellow. The main channel out of that used to go out for about two miles, out onto this plain. I spent a lot of time trudging around on the banks
- 22:30 with a shovel, opening bits so it would water various parts. So there was never a dull moment. There was good duck shooting along the creeks and things.
- 23:10 Once every three weeks or something, one of the senior jackaroos would say, "Go and see the overseer and say, 'Now, there's a few boys who
- 23:30 want a haircut and things, can we have a utility and go into Deniliquin?'" which was twenty or thirty miles away. If he was in a good mood he would say, "Oh well, that's all right." And so all the jackaroos, we'd pile into the back of the utility, whether you wanted a haircut or not. Just to go into...
- 24:00 I think there was seven pubs in Deniliquin, although there was only a population, I think, of about three thousand, and we used to do a bit of shopping. On Saturday nights in those days, the shops were open until ten o'clock on the Saturday night, which they might be now, I think, but they were closed for a long time.
- 24:45 We had to obey orders and do as we were told because, I mean, a lot of these boys were
- 25:00 young fellows who had just left school, just left home a lot of them, country boys mainly. We were responsible to look after them as though we were parents. That was the way the jackaroos were treated.
- 25:30 When I was manager at Wanganella Estate, I used to have the jackaroos over usually on Sunday lunchtime if there was nothing doing. I usually only had three jackaroos, it was a small place,
- 26:02 they'd have a change of diet. Oh, and we had a few exciting times. We had picnic races once a year, which were very exciting,

- 26:42 which were in two classes, really. There were trained horses, that would be ones that you were allowed feed in the stables and give them hard oats,
- 27:00 and then there were paddocked horses, which had to eat just what they could scrounge to eat in the paddock. My old uncle Otway, he had bred a lot of racehorses and he had a very
- 27:30 fine horse called David, which won a Sydney cup. It was a stallion. He had it up at Beoonoke north, and it used to come down and run with our mares, even if they weren't thoroughbreds. But some of them were pretty good gallopers. The boys would get their hacks out
- 28:01 and come picnic races they'd put their hack into the untrained section of the picnic races which were fun. We were always given the day off for the two days of picnic races. A couple of blokes might stay at home who weren't interested in racing.
- 28:41 But in the early days, before my time, Deniliquin used to have a very big sheep show.
- 29:19 **So what had you learned those first couple of years, coming back to the property? What were you learning about jackarooing, about sheep?**
- 29:30 **What were the lessons?**
- Well, I learned, being one of the family, I learned all about.... As I said, I spent a lot of time down at the sheep house with the top rams and things, and you learn how to open sheep,
- 30:01 how to look after them. It's like grooming a horse, or anything, it's a matter of practise. I learnt to shear, not very well but I could use the blades. I think I was better with the blades then I was with the machine. The shearing time at Beoonoke,
- 30:30 it used to go on for six weeks usually, the shearing. We used to shear thirty or forty thousand sheep. In the wool room, you had the wool tables where they would throw the fleeces out, and all the little pieces would fall through the
- 31:00 rails onto the floor and be swept up, and you just had the big fleece like that. And it would be skirted, for all the short wool, around the neck, quite a lot of grass seeds there, so that would go in a special basket. Then the fleece would be rolled up and it would be carried to the wool classer. And he'd be at a long table, from here
- 31:30 to the couch away, and the rousties would put it in front of the classer and he'd look at it and test it for strength and colour etc, etc. Then he'd turn around and put it into the sections of this big board behind. My first job, working in the shed
- 32:01 so I'd learn a bit about wool, was to carry the wool away from where the classer had put it and put it into these great big bins, about six of them, with the different lines of wool, from the strong wool to the medium to the fine wool to the coloured wool, to everything.
- 32:30 My brother had the same job at one stage. He worked it out that you walked twenty three miles a day carrying the fleeces. You learnt a lot like that. You learnt about wool. And you would ask the classer why he put a fleece in that bin and not in this bin.
- 33:04 You had to learn everything from really the bottom up.
- So what about the shearers? What sort of characters did you encounter?**
- Oh, lots of odd ones.
- 33:39 I think we had thirty stands at Beoonoke, or fifty, but we usually had a couple of blade shearers, too. They used to shear all the ram lambs, because they weren't castrated like on most sheep stations.
- 34:14 For every shearer, there would be one or two roustabouts. So you wound up with a shearers' hut, quarters, where they slept. They had
- 34:30 single rooms or, if they wanted to share with somebody, they could put these folding beds in and share with somebody else, and they had their own cookhouse and their own cook. And then there was a little cottage where at normal times one of the station hands lived with the boss of the board and his secretary,
- 35:00 his secretary used to brand all the wool bales and things. They used to be in that room, then on the other side there was the roustabouts' quarters and they had exactly the same as the shearers. They had their own cooks, and their own lavatories and things another hundred yards away.
- 35:33 Outdoor pits I think they had to be, according to the unions they had to be a hundred yards away from the sleeping quarters. It was a busy time. It used to go on for six weeks or eight weeks,
- 36:00 the shearing at Beoonoke. And when I went to Wanganella Estate, we had our own small shearing shed. We used to put on about six or eight shearers. I used



- 36:30 to class the wool myself there. But the shearers were a very mixed lot. There were regulars who had a circuit, they'd come rolling in the day before shearing in some of the funniest looking old cars you'd ever seen in your life, old open tourers mainly,
- 37:01 and they'd have all their gear and swags in them. They used to do a circuit. If where they were shearing, if they were happy with them as shearers, they'd say, "Well, can I come back next year?" And you'd say, "Okay." If you didn't like somebody, or if
- 37:30 they were shearing badly, you'd tell the boss of the board to tell him not to come back. And then there were quite a few locals from Deniliquin who came out to shear. They would come out every year or they might have their run up to Hay.
- 38:03 But some were old. I can't quite remember what it was, for every five shearers, or six shearers, you had to have one learner, this was according to the shearers' award
- 38:34 so there wasn't going to be a shortage of shearers. You used to have to watch the learners, but usually they'd pick it up so quickly and they were very, very keen, they were earning good money.
- 39:04 **John, at this point in the late 30s, obviously you were extremely busy, but I was wondering what you knew about what was happening on the other side of the world? Back in England and Europe and that potential threat of war?**
- Oh, I had, as I said, I had lived a long time and I had extremely good friends
- 39:32 and I had this family away from home, the Watsons in Yorkshire. And as I said, my father was away a lot but, when mother and my sisters went to Ceylon to stay with my aunt,
- 40:00 I used to spend the holidays up with these people, the Watsons. I was at school, Bill was my best friend at school and I shared a study and things with him at school and I used to treat their home just like my home. We kept on writing. They met mother and father, and we used to
- 40:30 communicate by mail. No, that was when war was inevitable. A lot of my friends at school had joined the war, actually,
- 41:01 had joined the services before the war, the ones that had gone to university, there were air force squadrons at Oxford and Cambridge, and quite a lot of them had gone to the Naval College at Dartmouth.
- 41:32 A lot of boys went straight from school to Sandhurst, the military college, but by the time [war] had started, half of them.... My old masters. We had one master at school, he was a great big fellow, a hell of a nice bloke.

## Tape 3

- 00:32 I refer to the family company as 'SFS', because that's the way it was known, F S Sons Propriety Limited. As I said, it was the largest Marino stud in the world. We sold rams, before the embargo was put on,
- 01:01 to all over the world, to South Africa, everywhere. We had a depot in Queensland where we used to send a thousand,
- 01:31 fifteen hundred rams up every year because we had a lot of clients in Queensland. Those nice big open places, those people would [order] fifty or sixty rams in one order. We used to go to sales in Western Australia, Adelaide,
- 02:00 Melbourne and Albury, all the country sales. After the war, when I got back, I spent a lot of time.... I'd been posted to Wanganella Estate as manager.
- 02:33 I enjoyed that very much, because I was in charge of our sheep. And we had a new general manager then, Basil Trapem, who had been managing Audrey Stud in Hay for many years and was a very fine sheep man.
- 03:00 He decided to put this Beoonoke stud sheep, a special stud, a Wanganella Estate... I had the Beoonoke and the Wanganella Estate special stud sheep under my control which
- 03:30 was wonderful. I used to have buyers down, and I could explain the breeding and everything to them. Before, it had been rather unsatisfactory. I'd go to a sale in Melbourne or Sydney or something, the big ram sales there, and somebody
- 04:00 would ask me the breeding of a certain ram or something like that. Well, I would know more or less, but not.... Most sheep breeders are pretty thorough. When I had them there and they came, I was able to

tell them the breeding and I was able to get rams in and say, "Well, here's the ram you bought and here is his sire," and people were a lot more happy with that.

04:33 We increased our stud sales quite a lot. It was a highly competitive business, ram selling. I had a very good sheep classer called John Sherwin

05:00 who travelled around a lot. He brought us in a lot of new business.

**Was the property, was the business greatly affected during the war?**

That's a hard one to answer. It was and it wasn't, as regards to a lot of things,

05:31 improvements and things like that, that should have been done but weren't due to a shortage of labour but I mean, as regards selling rams, and our main business was selling rams and growing wool, and

06:02 people, even though the war was on, they still had to have rams to join with their ewes so they'd have lambs, to grow their wool. And also, of course, at that time, with the war, the price of wool rose considerably so wool growing was no longer a hobby,

06:30 it was a most serious business because you were getting a very good price for the wool. I think the war possibly, if anything, it helped the wool industry.

**So did F S Falkiner and Sons have concerns about the impending war and what it would mean for their business?**

07:06 We knew that it was inevitable. As I said, I came straight from England to Jackaroo at Beoonoke and I can remember my cousin Max, who was the boss at Beoonoke, listening to the radio and the news there,

07:31 and that was when the Battle of Britain was on or before when the Battle of France was on, and Max saying, "Gee, I would like to be in one of those fighter aircraft, shooting the Germans down." and I said, "Oh yes, that would be lovely, wouldn't it?" never dreaming that I would end up doing that. However...

**08:03 Where were you when you heard the radio broadcasts about the war?**

I was up in Deniliquin at Beoonoke. It was then that I decided that I would join the air force and I had a cousin, old Fred Knight,

08:31 he was in World War I, at Gallipoli and things, but he was a lawyer by profession and he'd been made legal advisor to the air force for Southern Command. And I, being a smart alec, thought that I'd give old Fred a ring

09:02 and, seeing as he's in the air force more or less, see if he can get me into the air force quickly. So anyhow, he did that and I was one of the very early into the air force. I think the Empire

09:30 Air Scheme had just started. My service number was 200220 and I think the Empire Air Scheme start at 2000000 so I was within the first hundred or so.

10:02 So however, I joined. I had to do a medical in Melbourne and I remember I got a lift down by the air force. They were doing a survey in the Deniliquin area for some unknown reason.

10:30 They had an old Anson, a twin engined Anson, funny old plane. And my cousin Les, my elderly cousin Les, knew the pilot well and he had stayed at Zara and loaded up the Anson with watermelons and goodies from the Riverina. And he said, "Oh, Jum's got to go down for a medical

11:00 on Friday. Can you give him a ride in your Anson?" So he said, "Sure." The Anson had a thing, when you took off you had to wind up the undercart. They said, "You've got to work for this trip."

11:32 And I think I wound that wretched wheel up until we were just about in Melbourne, then they said, "Right, you better start unwinding now." I spent the all the trip winding this wretched.... They landed at Point Cook. It was rather a funny story, really.

12:03 As I was saying earlier, my uncle bred racehorses and they were very good jumpers by this sire, David, and the races were at Flemington on the Saturday and I had to report on the Sunday for my medical examination for the air force.

12:30 And I went up to Flemington and there was this horse in the jumping race but it was by this sire David, you see. Its name was Warbird. I met a bloke

13:02 in the members' there who had just joined the army, I think he had the army uniform on. We were having a drink together, and he asked what am I backing? I said, "Oh, I'm backing this Warbird. I've just joined the air force and that's my David." He said, "That's funny, I got a tip from a girl who..."

13:31 I think was having an affair with a jockey, "and he gave Warbird as a tip." I said, "That will do me." I think I was earning nineteen shillings and eleven pence three farthings as a Jackaroo, because you didn't have to pay tax if you were under a pound,

- 14:00 and I think he had about ten pounds each way on it, this friend. Anyhow, sure enough Warbird came in and won, and I was so pleased with my miserable little thing but I think I collected about ten pounds. It was an enormous win for me. We had a hell of a party, he had won so much money
- 14:32 that they had to get somebody... He put it on the tote, not with a bookmaker, and they had to escort him off the racecourse in case somebody robbed him, he had so much money, I always remember that. Going to the wretched medical the next morning,
- 15:04 if you were going as air crew, they used to stand you on a thing sort of like a table and they used to spin you around like that and then make you stand barefoot and see if you fell over or not, all sorts of queer things. Then they'd say, "That's all right. You've got flat feet, though." It was a queer, queer war.
- 15:35 **What other faculties did they test? Eyesight?**
- Oh yes, you had to have those before they would take you for a medical. But the thing that made us a bit cross who joined in Melbourne, they immediately put us on the
- 16:01 train and sent us all up to Sydney, to the North Shore, to a big initial training school there so we were cut off from family and things. It didn't matter, they kept us busy just marching up and down and turning around in circles
- 16:36 and then we did two months there, this square-bashing. While we were there we had to do ground subjects, like theory of flight and how to work an obsolete machine gun.
- 17:10 I think everyone sort of got through that. Then we were posted to various elementary flying schools. There was Mascot, Narromine,
- 17:30 about four of them. I was very pleased because I was posted to Mascot, which was the aerodrome of Sydney. By this time my mother had come to live in Sydney, which was just by luck. And so I was pleased as punch to be flying Tiger Moths
- 18:00 which were a delight. They also had the instructors from the Kingsford Smith Aero Club. They'd commandeered all their instructors and made them join the air force and they were our instructors. They were extremely first class, not
- 18:30 somebody who had been through an instructors' school and didn't know much more about flying than we did. I was terribly pleased, it was a great spot. We were close to Sydney. But it was funny when we were flying in Sydney there, in a Tiger Moth, because
- 19:00 the temperatures vary, and being near the coast there are a lot of funny winds and updrafts and things. After about eleven o'clock it got terribly bumpy flying around in a light aircraft. We used to get up at nearly
- 19:31 daylight and start flying, it was more or less just after daylight, and get the best weather for our flying. And then we'd go to sleep doing our ground subjects in the afternoon. It was funny that, it was so true, though. Up early, and I suppose it was high tension
- 20:01 learning to fly and enjoying it so much and then, on these hot summer Sydney days, sitting in a classroom, some dreary instructor waffling on about some wretched old First [World] War machine gun. However,
- 20:30 the officer in charge of ground subjects, he was really a delightful bloke, and he said to us one day, he said, "I know all you boys are going to find it hard, these afternoon classes but," he said,
- 21:00 "I'll tell you something. Don't worry, you will all pass." I think the snores grew louder. It was a delightful time there.
- What about the Tiger Moth? The plane itself?**
- Oh, it was a lovely aeroplane to fly, lovely, once you got the
- 21:30 hang of it. It was fully aerobatic. Once you learned to control it, which was very simple, and you had confidence in yourself, you could do slow rolls, you could do
- 22:03 stall turns. They were great. A lot of us, strictly illegal, flew under the Harbour Bridge. Of course, I wasn't one of those, but I had one friend
- 22:30 who was near the end of a course and he reckoned he was pretty good. And he had a girlfriend who lived with her parents at Point Piper, or one of those posh parts of Sydney, so he thought he would give her a bit of a shoot-up one day. So he went down there and did a few slow rolls and a loop or two,
- 23:01 aerobatics, then flew back, very pleased with himself, saying, "That will cheer her up. That will give her a thrill." He'd only been on the ground for a short before there was this terrible, "Report to the commanding officer!"

- 23:31 His girlfriend, this house or flat she was in, was alongside the air force headquarters or something like that and he was so low they could take the number of the Tiger Moth and everything. He was very nearly scrubbed off the course. He managed to talk himself back into it.
- 24:04 **How did the pilots that flew under the Sydney Harbour Bridge, how did they come to do that?**
- Well, Mascot's very close and it was an enormous temptation. After all, it was just like flying through the space.
- 24:31 It was so high, there was no risk or anything, it was not dangerous. But it was frowned upon by the authorities. Small boys, you know what they're like.
- So you did these training runs over and around Sydney from Mascot?**
- Yes,
- 25:08 we used to have a low flying area along Cronulla and the beach, along the seaside there. We were allowed to low fly there with the instructor.
- 25:30 I remember one day there with this instructor of mine, who was a delightful fellow, there was a fishing boat, about two or three hundred yards off the shore and, because we had an intercom mouthpiece, he said, "We'll
- 26:00 give this bloke a bit of a frighten." We were on our way home so we were flying pretty low and we went a bit lower and we went past this thing. We might have buzzed him on our way down the coast and he was not very friendly, he threw a bottle at us as we went past.
- 26:30 Another friend of mine had an interesting experience. The big oyster leases there, near the North Shore somewhere, miles of sort of flat water with the oyster beds
- 27:02 and we used it as a practise forced landing ground. When you were flying along with your instructor with you and he'd cut your engine and he'd say, "Now, you've got to pick out somewhere where you can make a forced landing."
- 27:30 Of course, naturally, you'd look around to see if you could see anything. You might be up at three or four thousand feet and you'd see this big, it looked like a big flat clay pan, and you had no engine, so you used to have to circle backwards and forwards until you got
- 28:00 opposite and then come in to make your landing. And then usually the instructor who was with you, just when you'd straightened up to make your run in, he'd switch the engines on. Now this friend of mine, Bill Rice, he was doing this with his instructor,
- 28:32 anyhow, he flattened out and was coming in to land beautifully and he tugged the thing and the engine wouldn't start so he had to force land on these oysters so that was not so good. But they didn't tip up or anything, they were happy and he was happy. They were sort of walking around
- 29:00 looking at the engine and what they could. An old fisherman sort of bloke came from a hut nearby and said, "Oh you're in a bit of trouble, are you?" He said, "We're in a lot of trouble, we were practising a forced landing but the engine conked." He said, "Oh, I'll go and ring up and get somebody to come and help you."
- 29:33 He said, "While you're here, I'll get you a bag of oysters, too." So they arrived back at camp, once they'd sent a mechanic out and fixed the engine and took off again, Bill Rice turned up with a beautiful bag of oysters for us. Not a bag, a big sack.
- 30:01 So there were a lot of funny things that happened.
- Were there any accidents amongst your group?**
- Very few at elementary, mainly taxiing accidents on the ground. I can't remember anyone being...
- 30:32 Oh yes, I do remember once, because for some unknown reason there were no parachutes in those days. The only time I ever saw one was when I did a cross country you might have a funny old parachute.
- 31:01 It was a friend who was flying with an instructor and whether they'd been on a cross country I don't know, but the instructor had a parachute on and they were somewhere over Randwick. They weren't on a cross country, they were practising aerobatics.
- 31:33 The usual thing was the instructor would do a slow roll and then say, "Okay, do a slow roll," and the pupil would try and do one.
- 32:00 The pupil was in the front cockpit and the instructor behind him. Anyhow these blokes, the instructor did a slow roll then told the pupil to do one. Anyhow, they finished and the pupil said, "How am I going? What was that like?"

- 32:30 and there was no answer. He turned around, and if you could stretch your neck a bit you could see the back cockpit, and there was nobody there. What had happened was this instructor, you have a safety harness that comes across with a pin through it, it was attached with a piece of string or cord
- 33:02 and what had happened was, when they'd done a practise slow roll, this cord had been too short and it had half pulled out, the pin had half pulled out and then the second time when they went upside down it pulled right out and the instructor had just dropped straight out of the.... And he landed in the main street in Randwick.
- 33:37 He didn't have a parachute. They reckoned he was still alive for a few seconds when they picked him up. That's the only bad one I remember. There was carelessness,
- 34:04 whoever had been servicing his aircraft and left the cord too short. In Canada, though, we had quite a lot of nasty accidents there. We were flying Harvards then,
- 34:34 at a place called Camp Hordern. It was midwinter and there we were in our little light overcoats down to about our knees and oh, cold, you've no idea. But
- 35:00 alongside the aerodrome, about two miles away, was this big range of, they weren't like the Rocky Mountains or anything, but they went up to about two thousand feet. This camp Hordern was close to the Great Lakes. At that time of the year, the weather there
- 35:30 can change so quickly, it can be a lovely sunny day and then all of a sudden these snow clouds come in and you can't see at all. There were quite a few boys that got caught flying, taking off in good weather and then one of these snow
- 36:00 clouds came along and they ended up in these wretched hills. We used to see these Harvards being carted back looking like a concertina. Usually the bloke would be decapitated with his head sticking out because you couldn't see through your windscreen when the snow was on it.
- 36:35 No, there were quite a lot of accidents there. We started night flying there as well, which is not much fun, and landing on the snow. The aerodrome was rolled snow. So you could judge your height, they put these
- 37:00 strips of black ashes across, otherwise you just couldn't judge your height. It was all a bit scary, but they were very good aeroplanes to fly. Each instructor had about three pupils.
- 37:38 We had a really good instructor, me and the two mates. He was an English sergeant who had just come back from England, and was an instructor. He was a colossal bloke, and a very good instructor.
- 38:10 He was posted back to England, and we got this terrible Canadian, who had just come from flying instructors' school,
- 38:31 he was called Flying Officer Hunt. He was so awful that the three of us, we used to complain to each other. We said instead of advancing our flying, we were going backwards. We could feel that we weren't
- 39:00 doing at all well. We had a meeting and decided we better see the chief flying instructor so I got the job to go and see him and I explained the position. I said, "Really, we've got to the stage where we are losing all our confidence," and half your thing in flying is confidence.
- 39:30 I said, "We're so miserable because we love flying. We did well at elementary and did all right with science and so and so." He said, "You better come up for a fly with me." So he took me up in a Harvard and he did all sorts of aerobatics and turned it inside out and things.
- 40:00 He said, "Now, my boy, do a few of those." I said, "Sure, sir." I was very happy flying before this awful instructor, so I did a few aerobatics and things with him, came in and landed. And he said, "No worries, my boy. You're doing fine.
- 40:30 And tell your friends not to worry." He said, "I'll find another instructor." So anyhow, he did that. What happened to that other bloke, I don't know. He got posted back to the instructor school, I don't know. There he should have been. Or he should have been chucked out.

## Tape 4

- 00:53 **Could you repeat what you just told me about the different stages,**
- 01:00 **the progression for a pilot?**

Well, yes. The promotion in the air force, for the ground crew it was a bit different, but for those air crew, the lowest form of life was an AC2, an aircraftsman 2, which is when you joined up and then you became an AC1

01:30 after you'd square bashed for a bit. Then when you went to elementary flying school, you became an LAC, which is a leading aircraftsman, which you were terribly proud of. From there you did your

02:00 elementary flying and then your service flying training at your SFTS [Service Flying Training School]. At the end of your SFTS was a wings parade where we were presented with our wings. This happened to me when we were in Canada at Camp Hordern. Some of the

02:30 top notches, this included your ground studies and your flying abilities, some got commissioned, and some got their wings but remained sergeants. I got my wings but I remained a sergeant, I wasn't very brilliant at doing these lessons.

03:00 We were also rated, then, as twin engine or single engine pilots. From Camp Hordern, we went on embarkation

03:30 leave for ten days to Nova Scotia where we waited in appalling conditions at a large aerodrome that was being built at a place called De Burt, it really was a shocker.

04:00 There were Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and quite a lot of English, all air crew, in this enormous hangar, all in these double decker beds. I think there were six wash basins

04:30 and six lavatories for about two and a half thousand men. It was the thaw in Canada and all the snow was melting. There were duck boards everywhere and if you trod off the duck boards you'd get bogged. And the food was appalling because the place was only fit for four or five hundred

05:00 men at the most and there were close on three thousand of us. We had to queue for a meal for literally hours. Two friends of mine, we decided we'd had enough of this and our spies had whispered that the submarines were so bad in the

05:30 Atlantic there was no chance of any of us leaving this depot. It was a departure depot for UK. So we went AWOL [Absent Without Leave] and went back to beautiful Quebec city and booked into the Chateau Frontenac

06:02 and had us a ball for ten days. My friend Peter Watson, who played piano very well, we decided after we'd got there on the Saturday, I think it was, that we would all go to church in the morning and see who we could pick up.

06:34 I went to one church, we all went to different churches. Peter went to this thing and they said, "We've never seen your uniform before." And he said, "I'm an Australian pilot." They said, "Come back for lunch." He said, "I've got two friends here...." They said, "Well, bring them too." And so we went to this lovely

07:04 house and we were treated as regally. I think they gave us a drink and we had a beautiful meal and they had, I think, two or three lovely daughters and I think they thought we were quite nice.

07:32 And there was a piano in the room. After we had the meal, Peter sat down. Somebody said, "Does somebody play?" And Peter said, "I play a bit." So Peter played the 'Moonlight Sonata' beautifully for them. And old Mother whoever-she-was was so impressed. "What a lovely boy he is."

08:00 So we said, "Well, I suppose we couldn't take these girls out tonight, could we?" And she thought we were such lovely boys we were allowed to take them out that night. There were some funny things happened. We got back to

08:30 this awful embarkation depot, De Burt, nobody even knew that we'd been away for ten days, whatever it was. I tell you, we were very pleased to get on a boat, submarines or no submarines. We got one of the

09:00 big liners that had been converted into a troop carrier and we slept all over the place, in hammocks. It was pretty rough going, we used to have to do watch,

09:30 in turn, looking for submarines and things. But they sent this boat, an Atlantic boat, it went so fast that they thought it was most unlikely that a submarine could catch us unless we more or less ran into it, they couldn't chase us or anything like that

10:03 because we went too fast. But I must say that when we got near the coast of Ireland, I was very pleased to see a big Sunderland flying boat coming over because the Germans had a big four engine

10:34 bomber that did long range trips over the Atlantic or down to Spain and back. Then we landed at Liverpool, which was all excitement. And they popped us straight onto a train....

11:06 When I say straight off the boat and straight onto the train, we went straight through to London and they unloaded us. We were sent to an air force camp at Uxbridge. It was sort of a reception

11:32 depot. We were there and we were given a little bit of leave. We were allowed off for the day, and had to be home twenty four or forty eight hours, I can't remember which. But we waited there

- 12:00 for our postings and we were all keyed up to know what the hell we were going to fly. I think that was the first time I saw and heard the Spitfire, this lovely whistle, then 'whoosh', it was over the thing. I thought, "Gosh, I'd like to fly one of those."
- 12:38 Menzies must have been Prime Minister then, too, because we went to Anzac Day service at St Martin's in the Field and there were a lot of Australian troops
- 13:01 and soldiers and all of us and we went to this service and I remember Menzies being there. And when we came out, there was an old First War digger had put on his uniform and said, "Come on boys.
- 13:30 Come on boys. Just around the corner, here, I've got a pub, come and have a drink." So this old fellow, he had this pub just at the back of St Martin's and he gave us sandwiches and drinks, then back to Uxbridge.
- 14:04 I got my posting then to an operational training unit up near the border, just near Liverpool. Actually I think it was
- 14:31 North Wales, it would have been. When I was dropped at the train I saw a lot of Spitfires flying around and I said, "It can't be true. It can't be true." But sure enough it was the Spitfire OTU [Officer Training Unit] so I was very happy but you couldn't,
- 15:00 it being a single seater, you couldn't do any duel in it. We had been flying Harvards which had radial engines, and the Spitfire had a Merlin engine. So what they did, they gave us,
- 15:30 They had these Miles Masters which hadn't been fitted out for the war but they had been a training aeroplane for a long time. They were very powerful but not at all manoeuvrable. They were a wooden frame. You could do duel in them, and they gave
- 16:00 us a little bit of duel just to get us used to the inline engines and the instruments, really, more than anything else. In a hangar they had this Spitfire jacked up, with its wheels down, but jacked up on props.
- 16:37 Without starting the engine, we used to have to do circuits and bumps on this jacked up aeroplane which had everything else work except the engine, the flaps worked, all the controls.
- 17:02 You had to pretend that you were taking off and making a circuit, then coming in to land. That was the only instruction you really got. Of course, we were all so thrilled. Sit in this lovely little cabin. It was beautiful.
- 17:34 And then the day came when the instructor at the service flying thing, said, "I think you've looked at these things long enough. You better go and fly one for a change,"
- 18:02 which we did. But the worst thing about Spitfire is that you are sitting about as low as I am and you had his great big engine and you couldn't see at all out the front when you were on the ground. You had to look out there to see where you were going, over the wing.
- 18:30 The only way to see where you were flying was to zigzag, go like a snake. The boys got a lot of trouble with the taxiing. Nearly all the accidents we had were taxiing accidents. In fact there were so many that
- 19:03 they said, some big, I don't know what he was, an air commodore or something up from London, to say that with the speed we were prancing Spitfires, the Germans didn't need to shoot any more of us down.
- 19:30 That was on a Sunday, we all crawled in for this big lecture on.... We went back and resumed flying and within about the first ten minutes there was somebody...This aerodrome, they were putting ditches and things all over it, drainage ditches. Somebody went into a ditch
- 20:00 and turned onto their back and the fire cart went out in case this caught on fire. So somebody coming in to land hit the fire cart and it went arse over tit and this was in half an hour of us being pep-talked. So anyhow,
- 20:30 somebody called out over the Tannoy system to cease flying for the day. These things happen.

**Do you remember your first flight in the Spitfire?**

Oh, I'd never forget it.

- 21:11 In those early Spits, Mark Ones, they had no automatic under cart which was a great surprise to us all because the Harvard had one.
- 21:30 What you had to do was push a lever into the 'up' position, and then you had a thing like an old gear lever, and you had to pump that a few times to make it go solid. Then you had to flip the lever again and pump about thirty times

- 22:00 and that would raise your under cart. Well, your normal flying position was your throttles and boost and your wireless was with you left hand, and your joystick was here, and you flew in that position. Well, to do all this manoeuvring to get yourself airborne, until you got the knack of it
- 22:31 you had to fly with your left hand and then do this pumping. Well, you'd see fellows on their first ... until they got the knack of this pumping thing, they'd go along like a bloody kangaroo. And as soon as you felt the thing, you could hear
- 23:00 the click and the light went on to say that your wheels were up, a green light, you could change around and you could start throttling back. For my first solo, I did everything required, I didn't hit anyone's thing.... And I pumped her up and I still had full throttle and full boost, everything going flat out,
- 23:30 going up like a rocket, and by the time I'd shifted round to fly properly, I started to throttle back and bring the boost back because the boost controls each of your propellers. By this time I was at five thousand feet
- 24:01 instead of doing my circuits at about two thousand feet. I was doing about four hundred miles an hour and still climbing. Being very inexperienced, I thought, 'God, I'm going much too fast, I'll have to slow down.' So I pulled my throttle back and then I put my nose down. But instead of slowing down, as soon as I put my nose down, that great big Merlin engine...
- 24:34 my speed increased. In England, too, it's terribly hard unless you know the country well, all the little villages and towns and things, unless you're looking all the time, you don't know where the roads are. 'Where the bloody hell am I? Where's the aerodrome?'
- 25:01 Putting my nose down, I eventually found the aerodrome, came into the circuit doing about three hundred and fifty instead of a hundred and fifty. I managed to slow the thing down eventually.
- 25:30 They had a little lever up here, you just flipped it. And you only had ninety degrees of flap. Not like most airplanes where you can adjust your degree of flap. Full flap or half flap or three quarters.
- 26:02 It just went 'boosh' like that and you dropped like that. Well, I thought I better come in for this landing. I did a beautiful circuit at the right speed and everything correct, then I flipped my little flipper
- 26:32 and instead of feeling the jerk as it dropped, one wing dropped like that and I thought, 'God, I'm going to do a slow roll.' I gave it full bore with the engine and what had happened, only one of these wretched flaps had come down
- 27:03 and I was just about to do a slow roll but I gave it the full bore and the engine saved me. I flipped the thing and I got up to two thousand feet and I flew over our dispersal point and waggled my wings
- 27:32 which was the sort of thing that you did when you were in trouble. Also my wireless wouldn't work. It was a clapped out old Battle of Britain aeroplane. So anyhow, I continued and did a couple of circuits like that. Then the
- 28:00 flight commander came up and pulled in alongside me and waggled his wings and I waggled my wings and we made signs at each other. He said, "Come on in. You will have to formate on me and don't use your flaps." Well, in Canada we'd done about two or three hours' formation flying, that was all.
- 28:32 So anyhow we did a circuit around together, and he was saying, "Come in, come in, get closer." And my wing was just about ready to touch his wing. He was saying, "Come in, come in, come in." Anyhow, we did the circuit and came in to land and he landed too, without his flaps you see.
- 29:03 We just floated and floated and I thought, 'Christ, we'll end up through the fence.' We pulled up in time. He was very nice about it. He said, "You did a good job." I was damn glad that was my first solo, which I'll never forget.
- 29:31 **So he guided you in to land?**
- No, he was flying here, and I flew alongside him, and I just did formation on him. I put my wing tip about that far away from him, and adjusted my throttle and everything,
- 30:01 just formation flying. If I had been experienced, it would have been no trouble at all. Once we got experience, we used to do the aerobatics in formation. I was very much of a new Jum.
- How were you trained in the Spitfires to do aerobatics?**
- 30:31 You just had to go and do them yourself. You done aerobatics in Tiger Moths and a Harvard, and then you done aerobatics usually when you first joined a squadron. One of the
- 31:00 senior older pilots would take you up and say, "Okay, formate, and we'll do a few aerobatics." You'd follow them around. They were so beautiful to fly, so easy, it was a pleasure, an absolute pleasure. They were so delicate on the controls.
- 31:30 (BREAK)



- 32:07 From the OTU we were posted to various squadrons. Like on my course, there were quite a few Australians and New Zealanders
- 32:30 and Canadians, and myself, and two other Australians, Bill Brew and Alan Ball and myself, we were posted to Seventy Two Squadron and at that time, too, they were just forming
- 33:02 the first Australian Spitfire Squadron, Four Five Two and a lot of the boys were posted to the Isle of Man where it was forming.
- 33:31 Bill, Alan Ball and myself were lucky, we were posted, as I said, to Seventy Two and our CO [Commanding Officer] was an Australian, Des Sheene, who had been through the Battle of Britain and done terribly well. He had been shot down a couple of times and he knew the score. We were posted to
- 34:01 him, which was at Acklington which is just south of Newcastle. We were very pleased to go there because Des was a lovely man. I'm sure he's still alive, because he was,
- 34:32 he was very young. I think he was wing commander when he was put in charge of Seventy Two and he would have been only, I think, about 23. He was very experienced, knew the score and was a great help to us, particularly as we were Australians,
- 35:03 not that he favoured us at all. We were there for a couple of.... Seventy Two was on rest, they had been down south, in defence of London, then they had been at Acklington on a rest period.
- 35:34 We were at Acklington for about three weeks or so, which was lovely, because we had time to get to know the other pilots and do flying with them in formation and all sorts of tricks. Then we were posted down south to
- 36:00 Gravesend which is on the Thames Estuary. We were in the Biggin Hill Wing. The format was that there were two squadrons based at Biggin Hill and one at Gravesend and they used to take it in turns, rotate.
- 36:32 It was a horrible little place, Gravesend, a horrible little aerodrome, too. It was on top of a hill and you had to be very careful coming in to land that you didn't go too far over the top of the hill. And also it was a nuisance because if there was a do on, you had to fly
- 37:00 over to Biggin Hill for the briefing and everything and when you got back you had to land at Biggin Hill again and the debriefing. Then when you were tired out and exhausted, you had to fly back to Gravesend, which was not much fun. It was not a very popular spot.
- 37:46 In fact, we were posted back to Gravesend when I was shot down.
- 38:04 We had, the new Canadian squadron had joined us, the 401.
- 38:41 **One of the things that we didn't cover was your move from Mascot to Canada, the completion of your training at Mascot, then you went to Bradfield Park.**
- After Mascot,
- 39:01 I think we were given ten days of embarkation leave. As I said, I was lucky because my mother had just moved up to Sydney, and sister, Dod. Then it was all terribly secret. We were to be sailed to
- 39:30 Canada. The ship we sailed on was the Oranje,
- 40:00 we were all on that. As I said, it was meant to be a complete secret. Well, there were a lot of us air force, and there were a few civilians on board, still.
- 40:34 Every private boat in the Sydney Harbour was out to wave us goodbye, this terrible secret that we were leaving for New Zealand. Anyhow, we got to New Zealand safely and at that time
- 41:00 there was news of a German raider in the Pacific, somewhere around the Cocos Islands or somewhere in there. We were joined by a whole lot, I don't know, about a thousand New Zealand air crew
- 41:31 and also, and I saw this with my own eyes, I saw these gold bullion, about the size of that cake, these gold bullion bars. I'm leaning over there, and they're loading all this gold onto the ship.

## Tape 5

- 00:31 ...the New Zealand contingent of air force blokes, and proceeded across the Pacific. Now I was leaning over the rail and saw a lot of busy-bodies
- 01:00 on the deck below and they were loading all these bars of gold which I suppose would have weighed

fifty pounds, they were great big gold bars. We took off for Canada and the

- 01:30 wireless announced, the German radio announced, that the ship we were all on would meet a lot of trouble because, apart from the cargo of gold, there were a whole lot of Empire air trainees going to Canada.
- 02:00 We took off. We had to keep watch. We had a merchant ship which had been converted into a sort of destroyer. It had a few little guns on it, some ack-ack guns, and it escorted us away from New Zealand.
- 02:31 And then just as we thought we were getting into the danger zone it cleared off. Oh, we did have a proper destroyer, the Ajax, I think it was, escorting us too, and it cleared off. And there we were in the middle of the Pacific with no escort. And we stopped at Suva
- 03:00 but we weren't allowed off the ship there, and we eventually go to the Hawaiian Islands and put into Honolulu and we anchored out in the bay. We weren't allowed ashore or anything but they had very kindly arranged, the Americans,
- 03:30 because they weren't in the war then, and sent a team of dancing girls to welcome us, and sing and dance. And I remember there was one boy, he dived overboard and he decided he was going to stay in Honolulu but he was fished out with a fish hook and confined to barracks.
- 04:07 We then left for Vancouver. We arrived in Vancouver on Christmas Eve,
- 04:33 1941 and then we got no leave or anything, we were put straight onto a troop train
- 05:03 and headed east and had no leave, no nothing. We spent Christmas Day on the train but we stopped at some
- 05:30 siding, I can't quite remember where it was, Bamfor, a big place in Canada, and we were given permission to leave the train and we walked up. It was as cold as hell. We went back onto
- 06:00 the train. But it was not much fun. We had a lovely Negro railway attendant who was looking our part of the....It was a
- 06:30 Pullman carriage, I think, and he had us all into the luggage van, I think it was, on Christmas Day. He was a very good tap dancer and things, and he put on a performance and entertained us for a couple of hours, I'll always remember him. Then we proceeded
- 07:00 on through Calgary, we stopped there. There was quite a few of the air gunners and wireless ops were unloaded there but we never got off the train, we were allowed into the canteen on the railway platform, then we proceeded on to
- 07:30 Camp Hordern which had been a military camp in World War I, there was still a lot of huts and barracks and things from then. We got there early in the morning and it was bright sunshine. Then we had to get off
- 08:00 and have a medical inspection then and we were all waiting outside this building, to have our medicals, and one of these snow storms came through. We could hear all these Harvard aeroplanes flying around. The next minute was you couldn't see the end of your nose, this show had come in.
- 08:30 We were all stomping and getting as cold as cold. We eventually got our medicals done but it gave us a bit of a warning of the weather there. It was really terrible. But the runways there,
- 09:00 I don't know what they were in ordinary times but they were just rolled snow with these rows of cinders put across so that you could try and judge your height. Anyhow, the weather was shocking there and we were getting behind with our flying times.
- 09:31 Myself and a couple of blokes, we got sick of this sitting on our behinds. There was no flying because of the bad weather. We were only about seventy miles north of Toronto. We decided we'd go and visit Toronto. We got hold of a taxi, and we were fairly well cashed up as we had
- 10:00 been doing nothing but being paid, so we went to Toronto and booked into the Royal York, which was a magnificent hotel, and we were sitting there one afternoon, plotting what we could get up to, and a bloke came in wearing
- 10:30 a dark blue raincoat and some sort of a cap. He came up and said, "What are you? Australians, are you?" We said, "Yes we are. Sit down and have a drink." He said, "Oh, have one with me," so he bought us a drink. He said, "Where are you?" We said, "Oh, we're at Camp Hordern but I'm afraid the weather
- 11:00 has been so lousy, we're taking a few days off." And he said, "I'll give you a bit of advice," he said, "I would get a taxi, or however you got up here, and get straight back to Hordern because I'm Air Vice-Marshall..., who was the boss of the Australians in Canada.

- 11:32 He said, "Get in as quick as you can and get back there," he said, "And I've never seen you." So we did. We booked out, and packed up and we got a taxi back to Hordern, we were there that night.
- 12:01 So anyway, we had our few days AWOL. But we were lucky. And that went on and then we had the wings parade. And when we'd done our course, which was a good two months,
- 12:34 some of us got commissioned, and most of us didn't. Then we went to this terrible embarkation depot at De Burt.

**So were you commissioned at that point?**

No, I wasn't. Then we crossed the Atlantic...

- 13:03 **I think we're up to speed now. You were talking before about being posted to squadron and you did tell us about your first solo. Was Gravesend the first base you were posted to?**

Yes, as I said.

- 13:30 We were part of the Biggin Hill Wing which were three squadrons there, defence of London, and had been very badly blitzed in the Battle of Britain. Nearly all the buildings and everything had been blown up. We had one squadron at Gravesend and two at Biggin. When we
- 14:00 went south to join the Biggin Wing, we went straight to Gravesend. We did two or three weeks there, then it was our time and we went to Biggin Hill, which was much more civilised.
- 14:30 But when we were at Gravesend we were billeted out because there weren't any buildings, apart from a wooden shack which was our dispersal point. We were in some magnificent old, very old, wonderfully stately home.
- 15:00 It was unbelievable. It had a park with deer and things, it was really something. Then when we were posted over to Biggin, it was pretty scruffy there. We were billeted out in small houses because most of the aerodrome had been blown up, most of the buildings had been blown up
- 15:33 during the Blitz. In fact, the last building that was left standing, the station commander thought, 'Well, we've had enough of these Jerries coming over bombing us.' So he called the army in and it was the clothing store, and he got the army to blow it up
- 16:01 so there was nothing left for them to bomb but it was a dispersal point, where all the aircraft were parked, and all around it were just a wooden shack with a wood heater in it and a few deckchairs, that was all. We used to
- 16:30 read magazines and wait for one of the blokes who was on duty on the telephone. There would be nearly always two blokes in readiness. They'd have their Mae Wests on and their aircraft would be warmed up, and their parachutes in the aircraft.
- 17:00 You never know if there was a scramble, which meant you had to run out to your aeroplane and get in it and wait for your controller to call you up and tell you where to fly and at what height. We had our own code of symbols, of bogies
- 17:30 and friendly, and you just did as your controller said. You were in a section of two, or before that they might have called a flight to readiness, in which case there would be six aircraft all ready to take off and you would be airborne within two minutes.
- 18:03 Also at Gravesend and Biggin we were very close to the south coast and there were a lot of convoys in the Channel. We used to do this wretched convoy patrol, I never liked them and I don't think anyone did much.
- 18:32 Even though they didn't always have a naval escort, they sometimes did have torpedo boats or a destroyer but say there had been two from another squadron doing convoy patrol and you took over from them, as soon as you got within distance to take over,
- 19:02 the navy would immediately start firing at you. We had on the fuselage, we had a lamp that we could flash, and we had the colour of the day, and we could send a letter, not SOS [distress signal] red
- 19:31 but you could send the colour of the day but the navy stopped. We used to send them rude messages on our Morse code. But every now and then, it was really quite frightening because you were circling the convoy, usually at about cloud base, which was often the case,
- 20:05 you'd see one of these enormous explosions. It might be in the middle of the convoy or actually hit a boat, and it was these bloody long range guns from Boulogne and Calais firing and lobbing these shells. And you're looking around to see
- 20:32 where the hell the aeroplane was and it was clear skies, so I never liked them much.

**So you did your first operations out of Gravesend?**

Oh, no. When we were at Acklington, the start of Newcastle, we did quite a few interceptions from up there because we only had the North Sea between us and

- 21:00 Denmark and Belgium. We used to have to do readiness, and also dawn patrols and dusk patrols, along the coast there. There were odd occasions that we would get an interception,
- 21:30 mainly Messerschmitt one hundred and tens, which were long range twin engine fighters and were very fast. They used to come over and have a poke around. We did intercept them occasionally but not often. They were usually too fast and aware when we were getting near but
- 22:00 the squadron actually had one very good day there. They intercepted a flight of German bombers coming across the North Sea there and they shot down two or three of them, without loss. There was always something.
- 22:40 I mean, all the time, if you weren't flying you might be on twenty four hours leave, where you couldn't go anywhere, anyhow, you more or less had to stick around. Then you were on readiness.
- 23:12 Sometimes it was a two hour readiness and sometimes it was half hour readiness and so you couldn't go anywhere in case your flight was called up to be on readiness.
- 23:32 Well, I mean Newcastle was a very big town. We used to see also some of these poor bomber command blokes coming back at dawn, having bombed Germany or something, and on odd occasions they'd been shot to hell. Particularly some of
- 24:00 the old Wellingtons that had fabric fuselage and you could really see right through them they had so many shrapnel holes and things in them. How they ever kept flying, you always wondered. We used to guide them in and they used to land at our aerodrome.
- 24:30 There was not much we could do for them, they often had wounded gunners and people with them. One day we had an interception. I wasn't actually on the readiness this day. It was this dawn scramble
- 25:00 and two of the boys took off and intercepted this queer looking aeroplane which was a bi-plane with a cabin, the most odd sort of aeroplane to see flying around in wartime.
- 25:30 They also started to go in a bit closer, but they were a bit wary. Then all of a sudden this big white flag came out of the window, it had a cabin with a window in it and this white flag came out. Luckily they weren't Americans or otherwise they would have been shot down.
- 26:00 But the boys, when they got close enough it wagged its wings, and they escorted it. It landed at Acklington, it was two Danish boys. This old aeroplane had been in a shed on their farm for the duration of the war
- 26:30 and they decided to fly across and give themselves up. There was a big railway line alongside of this property. At night they tuned up the engine and they only started the engine up when the trains were coming to drown the noise and they saved
- 27:00 their petrol rations and they punched a hole in the wall of the cabin so they could refuel as they flew along and they had their jerry cans full of petrol in the cabin with them. One night the weather forecast was good, they decided to give it a go and they waited for the big goods train
- 27:30 to come alongside their landing strip, as they called it, and they started up and took off with the train. They got up to about two thousand feet. An engine like that, like in the Tiger Moth, your oil pressure is one of your most important things.
- 28:03 Their oil pressure just went back like that, and they shook hands and said, "Well, we can't turn back now. We've had it." So they continued across the North Sea and it was faulty instruments, not their oil pressure. Our couple of boys intercepted them and they landed
- 28:30 at Acklington. I can remember looking at that wretched aeroplane and how they got it to fly, I'm buggered if I know. Being two wings, they had the main struts and then there were wire struts also, to give it more strength.
- 29:00 The struts went through onto the bottom. They drilled holes and poked the wire through and then done a twitch on the thing, and that was holding the two wings from collapsing. They got no publicity at all about that,
- 29:30 they were terrified that their families in Denmark would be punished.

**John, can you recall for us your very first operation and what that was like?**

No, I can't. My first operational flights were, as I said, mainly on these dusk and dawn

- 30:00 patrols. The dusk ones, we used to take off just as it was starting to get dark. The Spitfire was not a very good night fighter. They'd usually go on for an hour and a half or so and you'd have to come in and land in the dark, which wasn't much fun.

30:31 We had these fair poles with ling lamps on them, which if you knew which way you were going into wind....You could only see them from that way, the light. This was shaded, so coming into land you could see it because it was open but

31:00 anyone coming this way, because the Germans did have a few intruders coming in but I really can't remember. It wasn't until we went south and started on these daylight sweeps, as they were called,

31:32 where we'd usually be escorting Blenheim bombers, and they were pretty well slow old things, Blenheim, twin engines. But the idea

32:00 at this time or shortly after we got down there, the Germans had decided to go into Russia, the idea of these sweeps was to keep as many of the

32:30 Luftwaffe [German Air Force] in France and so they didn't go on to the Russian front. So these sweeps became pretty big things. We'd sometimes escort twelve Blenheims, sometimes twenty four. And there would be

33:00 a close escort, usually, of Hurricanes. The Blenheims would cruise at about twelve thousand feet and the close escort would more or less cruise with them or around them.

33:33 At another couple of thousand feet, there might have been thirty six Spitfires. Then there would be another top cover of another thirty six Spitfires. And that would be what was called a 'beehive'. It was very, very confusing when you first started

34:03 until you got the sort of knack of it. There were that many wretched aeroplanes flying around, you didn't know if you were Arthur or Martha but I was a sergeant pilot, and I had good eyes. The CO said that,

34:30 "You can see well. You can go Arse-End Charlie." We used to fly in three sections of four align at stern and Arse-End Charlie was usually number four and your job was to watch behind, to see if anything was coming down on your squadron or the bombers.

35:03 I spent most of my time as Arse-End Charlie and Dez, that was the CO, he used to say, "I'm sorry, Jum, old boy, but we've got a couple of losses and I've got two new pilots, I can't put them Arse-End Charlie. So I'm afraid I'll have to make you Arse-End Charlie again." I said,

35:30 "That's all right, sir." I did a terrible lot of Arse-End Charlies. I was shot at more times than I was able to shoot at Germans. But every now and then your turn comes and you get your chance. It all happens so incredibly quickly.

36:00 You read some of these books and things but it's not quite right. You read about fellows shooting an aircraft down and following it down and seeing a bloke bail out and the engine on fire and things like that but if you started doing that you would be shot down before you finished firing your guns because there would

36:30 be someone else backing up and bang you down and you could squirt at something and break. That's why our squadron was pretty strict on claims, as regards claiming shooting somebody down.

37:02 I got one confirmed. I had my friend Jack Merritt flying behind me and we had a bit of a mix-up and I got this Jerry, I knew I got him. Although you weren't meant to break RT silence, I was so excited I called out, "I got one, Jack!" and switched off.

37:32 Anyhow, when we were back at Biggin for debriefing, the wing commander said, "Who was it that said, 'I've got one, Jack!'" and I said, "I did, sir." He said, "That's all right, I'll confirm that. It went down like a rocket," so I was very pleased with that.

38:00 There wasn't time. As Arse-End Charlie, if we did see something coming down at us, you'd break RT silence and say, "I'm turning in. They're coming down," and give them a direction

38:34 and you'd fire off and hope you'd frighten them away a bit. Well I knew I was stuck, I could never get back to the squadron because they were travelling

39:00 at, say, two hundred and fifty miles an hour and I was going at two hundred and fifty miles in the opposite direction, you couldn't catch up. So all we could do was go into a vertical dive and hope that somebody didn't see you. Well, this particularly nasty day, I got these, two one-o-nines

39:30 saw me go into the dive. We were not far inland from Calais and there was a fair amount of smog over Calais, so I thought, 'Well, shit, I'll go for my life for the smog.' There's no cloud cover or anything. We had a special thing,

40:00 we had a special thing we used call "pressing the tit." It could give you extra boost and you could get another twenty or thirty miles an hour. I had everything flat, in a steep dive. I did turn once into them again and give them a bit of a squirt

- 40:31 but they kept on after me. I got over Calais and there was a certain amount of flak and stuff but I wasn't worrying about that at all, I was glad to see the sea. I levelled out, about as high as that, off the sea
- 41:00 and I did a couple of rudder turns, sort of skidding turns so that I could see. And I looked back and my two friends came out of the smog and I saw these two great big splashes and they both went into the drink. You see, the Messerschmitts were not renowned for their ability, their tail planes,
- 41:30 there was something wrong with them. They're not very good at pulling out of a steep dive. So I crossed the Channel in about half a second, I've never been so glad to see the white cliffs. There were so many things, you could poop off at somebody but whether you hit them or not was...

## Tape 6

- 00:33 I had another exciting incident. There had been a bit of a mix-up. We had just got these Spitfires with metal ailerons which were wonderful. Before we had fabric ailerons,
- 01:00 and if you were travelling really fast, you had no, or practically no, lateral control at all. But with these metal ones, you could do a spiral. You could do anything. They were wonderful. We were over France one day on this sweep and there had been a bit of a mix-up and I thought I was right, and all of a sudden I saw these tracer bullets
- 01:30 going past me and my metal aileron, it just blew right open. And I knew I had got a cannon shell in it. I had
- 02:00 to do full opposite aileron. And anyhow, I managed to get down very low and crept along in amongst the trees and got to the coast and flew across the coast, waiting and watching, this wretched thing quivering in the slipstream
- 02:30 and the wind, and waiting to bail out or ditch. We were told never to ditch in the Spitfire, because your engine was so heavy, you used to just go straight to the bottom of the ocean, so I was wondering what was going to happen. However, I managed to flutter
- 03:00 along to the white cliffs of Dover. It was one of the most nasty things I had. There was Manson and a couple of aerodromes on the coast. I said, "Well, I've gone this far, I might as well
- 03:30 get back to Biggin Hill," which was only about five or ten minutes' flying. I got back and I was frightened at what else might have been hit apart from the aileron because I knew I had been hit pretty badly. So I got back to Biggin and I went up to about ten thousand feet,
- 04:01 and did a practise landing. I got my under cart down, that worked all right, and then I let my traps down, they worked all right. So I thought, 'Well, bugger it. I'll go in and land.' I think my ground crew must have seen me because I came in
- 04:31 and did a good landing with this stick over on one side on account of my aileron was out of control. I landed and we had a silly flying officer called Bocock, I think his name was.
- 05:04 One of my ground crew came up. "How are you? All right, sir?" "Oh yes, I'm fine." I said, "I got one, but I'm afraid of our aeroplane," because the ground crew was very proud of the aeroplane. And this Bocock came up and said, "Oh,
- 05:30 Sir Archibald Sinclair's here, you better come and show him your aeroplane." He was Minister for Air at the time. At Biggin Hill, we had the unfortunate thing, we were so close to London we used to get these VIPs who wanted to see an operation from the Operations Room.
- 06:02 We had a lot of Americans because they weren't in the war. And they used to ring up the Biggin Wing and say, "Oh, put on a fighter sweep," and so we were the mugs that had to do it. Anyhow, this Bocock, he had Sir Archibald along and said, "Come and see Falkiner's aeroplane, you've never seen such a mess."
- 06:30 I could have kicked him in the shins, if I had been able to. I said what had happened, that I had seen these tracer bullets going and Sir Archie said, "Oh, you can't see tracer bullets in daylight."
- 07:00 And I didn't say anything. I said "What was it?" He was Minister for Air. But a lot of pilots used to have the last rounds of their ammunition with tracer bullets so if they knew they were nearly out of ammunition they'd see their tracers and that was in daylight, it wasn't at night. That was a lot of bullshit,
- 07:30 excuse my language. Oh my goodness, I could have kicked this fellow through the roof. I was also on an historic escort job, Douglas Bader, you know,

- 08:01 the English pilot with the tin legs. He'd been shot down not long before me and when he bailed out one of his legs, or both of them, got caught in the cockpit and tore, well, messed, they were useless.
- 08:33 So Mr Goering, of course they made an awful fuss when Bader was shot down and the Luftwaffe offered a British RAF plane to fly his leg over to an aerodrome in France and
- 09:00 so the RAF told them to stuff that, that they would drop his legs anyhow. So once we escorted these six Blenheims, I think it was. One had, instead of bombs, it had this big Red Cross box, wooden box,
- 09:30 with his tin legs in it, and we flew over St Amere and they dropped it on the aerodrome at St Amere. And I was on the escorts that day, never dreaming that I was going to end up in the same wretched hospital in about six weeks' time.
- 10:02 **So that was arranged between the Luftwaffe and the RAF? An agreement was made there?**
- No, no. The Luftwaffe offered a free, unescorted.... But the RAF said, "Up you. We'll drop them anyhow. We don't need this privilege. We can do what we want over your sky," and they dropped his legs.
- 10:31 I think the bombers went on and bombed Leore or somewhere but they gradually improved....When the four engine aircraft began flying
- 11:00 instead of twelve Blenheims, which have a miserable little bomb load, these Stirlings, the four engine Stirlings came on and we did quite a lot of escort work, flying
- 11:31 three Stirling escorts. And one Stirling carried a bomb load, as many bombs as twelve Blenheims, they were big old things. I can remember seeing on the escort, one of these unfortunate Stirlings had been hit
- 12:01 in one or two engines I think, and it was trailing, getting further behind. And this was one of our binds because we had to stay with the bombers and protect them. Usually when these 'beehives' were out, there would be a wing station in the south of England. And it was timed that
- 12:32 when we would be on the escort and coming out with the bombers, they'd go in across the Channel and protect us and the stragglers of the bombers. Sometimes the timing didn't work and we'd have to drag behind, waiting with these...
- 13:02 particularly the Blenheims, they were so slow and we were short of petrol if we went as far as Lille. You'd hear people landing out, "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!" and they'd be crash-landing in the Channel. My friend Johnny Rudderford, I know....
- 13:31 he was chased home by a couple of Messerschmitts. Our only real defence was to turn around into them, and try to get a quick shot, then dash for home again. Of course, you lose a lot of petrol doing that.
- 14:03 **Were many of the pilots in your squadron veterans of the Battle of Britain?**
- Yes, a lot of them. When I joined the squadron up north, at Acklington, nearly all of them had been in the Battle of Britain. They were very experienced.
- 14:38 You see, in the battle they were attacking bombers. Wherein, after that, when these sweeps started, we were escorting bombers. It's a great [dis]advantage to be attacking something
- 15:01 then trying to guard it. We lost an awful lot of experienced pilots who were used to the sort of Battle of Britain conditions and their tactics were all wrong.
- 15:30 They used to go chasing Germans and the Germans were cunning. They used to have these decoys to try and attract these fighters and then they used to get them away from the main beehive and they used to attack them. We lost an awful lot of experienced pilots like that. I ended up
- 16:00 one of the most experienced pilots although, as a sergeant pilot, I had been recommended for my commission with another English sergeant pilot. But Australia House, there had been such a turmoil there that my commission never came through and I spent all my
- 16:30 prisoner of life time as a sergeant pilot but when I got back to England, when the Australian Government and the RAF had fixed things up, I found out I was a flight lieutenant but they still gypped [cheated] me of a couple of years pay.
- Other than the sweeps**
- 17:00 **or the beehive flights, were there other kinds of operations or was that the bulk of the work you were doing?**
- Apart from these convoy patrols, and readiness
- 17:31 because the Germans, every now and then, had these sneak raids. We were so close to the Channel and

they had aerodromes all along the coast there. They used to do these sneak raids and we always had to have at least a section on readiness.

18:00 Then occasionally, there was great excitement, you'd get a scramble and it would be a barrage balloon which had lost its moorings and had taken off so you would go and shoot that down. But the Spitfire was a wonderful aeroplane to fly, it was

18:30 a pleasure, it was a delight. The last one that I flew was a Spitfire Mark V B. It had the two cannons and four machine guns and it was a very big hitting power. Occasionally when we were on these convoy patrols,

19:02 we would see these German torpedo boats and things like that and we'd attack them. We'd shoot at the waterline and we could sink one of those, we had armour piercing.

19:34 It was exciting but dangerous fun, I'll put it that way.

**What sort of losses did the squadron suffer during your time there?**

Well, it was when we first went south and these experienced pilots

20:00 first started going. I think we lost about ten pilots in about the first two weeks. I don't know who was to blame for that, we couldn't blame our CO, because he had been in the Battle of Britain himself but used to say,

20:31 "You must stay and keep formation and never fly straight and level, always weave," and we used to do that.

21:00 To start with they used to do these formations of more or less flying in formation. That stopped completely, that's when we started the line of stern, it was loose. You'd be as far away as the lake from your next door thing, and you could weave without having to worry about formatting on somebody.

21:31 You could see these wretched one-o-nines, a couple at three thousand feet up above, stalking along the beehive and anyone who got behind the thing, 'bang', and that was it because they were very good at diving, the one-o-nines.

22:03 We had gravity petrol feed in our carburettors and if we put our stick forward, the engine would cut temporarily. Like anything, if the float goes down, it stops petrol whereas they had a direct fuel injection,

22:30 like a diesel, and they could put their nose down like that and they'd just never lose a beat. So we could never chase a German like that because we would never catch him unless we went ten thousand feet. That was one of the things about a Spit.

23:01 And the other thing was this awful vision they had, they had that little narrow undercart and they were buggers to taxi but once they were in the air they were magnificent.

**You mentioned how, when flying over the naval escorts**

23:30 **you might get fired upon, and you would send messages back with the Morse?**

Yes.

**In plain language, what would you say back to them if they tried to have a shot at you?**

Well, rudely, usually, as soon as they fired, on my dot, I wasn't very good at Morse, I used to dot back, "Balls."

24:04 But I don't know why they continued, they were nearly all colliers coming from Wales up the Channel, why they didn't send them on the railway, there was a perfectly good railway line.

24:31 **What were you told, or briefed, in terms of being shot down and possibly captured? What were you told to do and how were you prepared or supplied for that event?**

We were told that all we could say to the Germans, if we were capable of talking,

25:00 they said, "They will interrogate you at Brunag Luft and all you can say is your number, rank and that's all, you can't say anything else. You can't mention your squadron or where you flew from, or anything like that. You just have to say

25:30 your service number and your rank. Of course, the Germans at the receiving centre, I didn't get there, I was burnt and in hospital but they used to put you in a cell, in solitary confinement, and

26:01 after you'd been there for forty eight hours, feeling pretty miserable for yourself, a very smart Luftwaffe fellow would come in and say, "Lieutenant Falkiner, I've got some forms for you to fill in," and he used to sit opposite the table



- 26:30 and offer you a packet of 'Gold Flake' or 'Player's', English cigarettes, and you'd look at the form and it would have your name and rank and your service number which you'd fill in. Then it would have squadron, aerodrome,
- 27:01 type you were flying, and all these sort of things. Of course, we had all been warned about this, so nobody ever filled it in. Then the German would say, and usually he had been to Oxford or Cambridge, and he would say, "Well now, it's silly not to fill this in, because we won't be able
- 27:31 to inform your relations and close relatives, what's happened to you unless you give us all these details," and you would tell him to go and jump in the lake. And they would try this two or three times and you'd usually be in solitary confinement for about two or three days and from there
- 28:00 you would be posted to one of the main camps, to Stalag Luft Three or one of the other prison camps. But I missed all that because I landed near this town centre, between the coast and Calais. I was
- 28:30 sitting on the ground, with everything burnt off me and looking at my raw legs. The French peasant came up, he must have heard the 'plop' of my parachute...

**Jum, can you maybe take it back a step, and you could tell us about that operation that led to you being shot down?**

- 29:00 It was one of these silly fighter sweeps. It was only the Wing, that somebody, a VIP wanted to see a do from ops room.
- 29:33 We were at Biggin Hill at the time, and this Canuck squadron, the 401, the Canadian Squadron, had just joined the Wing and we had a new pilot in our squadron, who was flying behind me, he was Arse-End Charlie. He was my number two.
- 30:03 And I had Blue One and Blue Two, and I was Blue Three and he was Blue Four. Well, we took off and one of these Canadians, God bless him, it was one of their flight commanders I think, we had strict wireless,
- 30:30 that you don't speak until your controller calls you up. He broke Wireless Control and called up when we were still climbing. I suppose we were at about ten thousand feet.
- 31:00 We continued to climb until we were over the Channel at about twenty thousand feet. Our controller then called up and said, "Don't go far in." Our call sign was 'Knock Out'. "There's fifty plus
- 31:30 waiting for you," which meant there were fifty Germans already taking off after this silence being broken and were up there waiting for us. Anyhow, we crossed at Boulogne and did a right hand turn. Our squadron was on the outside, as we turned parallel with the English Channel here, and
- 32:00 I was on the outside section of our squadron so I was on the real outside. And I told this new boy in the squadron to keep well and truly on my tail and stay really close. Anyhow, I saw
- 32:30 these three or four one-o-nines down below, about two thousand feet below, and I thought, "Ha! Ha! There's money for jam," and I was just calling up on my radio to, I had a very good look. I cocked my wing in the sun and looked around, looked behind, and
- 33:00 saw an aircraft behind. I was just about calling up and saying, "Watch my tail, Blue One. I'm going down..." When, 'bang', the plane blew up. I was just sitting in the middle of a bonfire. In the Spit we had two
- 33:30 petrol tanks between us and the engine, I would have been on one of the empty tanks by this time and I think I must have been hit in the petrol tank. It was just like sitting in a...If you threw a bottle of petrol down there....My hood,
- 34:00 I used to be able to pull it open, I think the heat had jammed it, it wouldn't open the normal way. We had a safety release which had a rubber ball on it, I think the heat had melted the rubber ball and I was with three pairs of gloves on and I was
- 34:30 trying to pull this thing and I think I was just trying to pull a piece of wire. And the last thing I remember, I put the seat down as low as it would go and I put my feet up on the dashboard and tried again to pull this canopy open. I can't remember anything more. But we sat on our parachutes and we had
- 35:03 big cords, that saved my crotch from being burned. As I said, it was October, and the weather was so cold, we had no heaters, and I had
- 35:30 long underpants and trousers and three pairs of gloves, silk, chamois leather, then gauntlets. I have burn scars from them. It was all the clothes that just saved my life, really.
- 36:00 And I don't know what happened then, whether one of these empty petrol tanks, with the heat, exploded and blew me out, or whether I managed to get this wretched canopy open. But I can't remember trying to get out or anything. All I know is I still....I woke up,

- 36:30     outstretched like that, with this funny whistling noise, 'swoosh, swoosh'. I didn't know where I was or what, and all of a sudden it came back. I said, "God, I should be flying," and I realised I was falling. And I had the presence of mind to
- 37:00     put my hand across and pull my ripcord. I then hit the ground with a hard bump. But I think I would have fallen for twenty or twenty five thousand feet and the cold air, and getting oxygen back, would have brought me to.
- 37:32     Our oxygen mask was on automatic, you switched on your oxygen and it was on all the time while you were flying. I was sitting in the field,
- 38:01     looking at my burning clothes. This Frenchman came up and offered me a drink out of a bottle, a peasant. I refused a drink, which was not often. The next thing there were two Germans, Luftwaffe fellows, came across the paddock,
- 38:32     they came from a hut in the corner. Whether they were searchlight or ack-ack battery, I don't know but they came over and picked me up. I put my arms around their neck and staggered over to this hut. They didn't take me inside,
- 39:00     they dumped me on the ground outside. I knew from being a boy scout that if you were burnt, you were meant to keep warm so on my bum, I walked myself into this hut and just sat in the middle of on the floor. I think I passed out then, they got an ambulance
- 39:30     and I woke up in the hospital in Saint Amere. There were two Canadians in there who were off this Canadian Squadron. And they'd been massacred by these one-o-nines, I think they lost about seven pilots.
- 40:01     One had a bullet hole through his thigh and one was burnt a bit around the head. I got to know them pretty well. One of them, this Canadian fellow, was a mining engineer.
- 40:31     Later on, he went to Stalag Luft Three and he was one of the instigators of the big tunnel in the Great Escape.

## Tape 7

- 00:32     I was in a hospital at a town in the north of France called St Moer. It's a lovely town. As I said before, it was the hospital
- 01:00     that Douglas Bader was in when he was waiting for his new legs. I think we were treated most probably as well as the German pilots
- 01:30     that we'd shot down because there was a big Luftwaffe aerodrome at Abbeville, just nearby, but it was pretty primitive. I woke up in this hospital, just woke up in bed and I'd had all my clothes cut off.
- 02:00     The three pairs of gloves, I had gauntlets up here. You can see where the top of the gauntlets came to where those burn scars are. My hands were burnt a bit, but I had these silk gloves and these chamois leather gloves underneath the gauntlets, because we had no heating, and flying at thirty thousand feet
- 02:30     it gets pretty chilly. I was all bound up and I couldn't see at all because the whole of my face was bandaged up, I couldn't see a thing. I did know at that time that I could still see because I could remember
- 03:01     just before I hit the ground, when I heard the 'plop' of the parachute opening, I could look down and see these peasants in the field. I was very low by this time, I think that is why I hit the ground so hard. I did no good to my knees and also to my back.
- 03:34     But the, we had one big German medical orderly who we all disliked, there were these two Canadians boys there, too, in the ward with me,
- 04:00     and he could speak a little bit of English, but he played soccer, football, for Germany and toured England at some stage before the war but he was a big brute. We didn't like him.
- 04:30     But I really can't remember very much about that first month or so in the hospital, because they had paper bandages, the Germans. I said my legs were burnt right down to my feet and right up to here, and my arms and my hands and my face.
- 05:01     And there was one very nice German sister, nurse. She used to feed me out of a thing like a teapot and every now and then she used to bring me in, I couldn't see or anything, she used to feed me grapes, which I could appreciate very much. But she was a dear, Schwester Larisa.

- 05:33 But the worst thing about that was, in typical German fashion, the head German doctor, the Chef Artz, he used to make an inspection every morning,
- 06:00 just come around to all the wards, whether we were English, German, or who we were. And they liked everything to be perfect for him because he was an offizier and he was an important man. I used to suffer agony then because these paper bandages, which I said were from here right down to my feet,
- 06:30 they used to come in with a pair of scissors and just cut them back and fold them off, and I'd be lying in the bed with these bandages folded back and after a bit, five minutes or ten minutes, the air got
- 07:00 at these burns and the pain was absolutely unbelievable. I used to say to the Canadians boys, "For God's sake, I can't stand this. I'm going to scream in a minute." And they'd say, "Scream your head off, Bud," like dear boys that they were. I'll never forget that, such pain in my life,
- 07:31 it was just the air getting at these bones. Once the doctor had done his rounds, he'd just look at them and grunt, they'd come and bandage me up again. But that was something that I will never forget.
- 08:01 I got shot down in October and I was there until Christmas in the hospital and then, I think one of the German doctors wanted to go to Germany for Christmas. I was a bloody nuisance, I think, and they wanted to get me out of the hospital,
- 08:34 this is what I think happened. "I'll take this fellow to Germany with me because he can't just go in a cattle truck, he'll want to be looked after." So I was taken on a stretcher to this station and this German doctor and
- 09:00 myself and these two guards that carried the stretcher, we were put in a first class carriage. There were a whole lot of German soldiers in the corridor outside who were wondering what the hell was going on. So I had a wonderful trip, it took two days to get to Frankfurt.
- 09:30 **How well had your burns healed by Christmas?**
- They were still raw but my hands were just about healed up and my face had sort of healed but my legs were still a mess, you can nearly see the bones, now. At this Stalag Luft,
- 10:02 the hospital there, I went straight into that which was run by the Luftwaffe. And there were English medical orderlies there who had been taken in France when France fell. There were whole British hospitals
- 10:31 that volunteered to stay behind until the Germans, they were meant to be repatriated, until the Germans could take over the hospitals, because they were looking after German wounded as well as Allied wounded. Of course, the poor buggers were still there sixty years afterwards. Thank God they were there, they saved a lot of our lives,
- 11:00 they were wonderful doctors and these medical orderlies were equally good, they were wonderful. And it was good to be in amongst the English speaking.... The doctors were good and I got eye drops. I was there from Christmas Eve. They'd arranged
- 11:30 for some of the school kids to come in and sing carols for us which was rather lovely. But I was there for some time in that hospital, then I was moved to another hospital, these legs were still horrible.
- 12:06 It was very interesting there. There were a whole lot of Australian and New Zealand Army blokes who had been taken in Greece and Crete and had been wounded. They'd been in hospital in Salonika
- 12:32 then they'd been trucked up to this hospital in Germany. It was most interesting talking to them. I heard all about the Greece and Crete campaign. They made this horrible poem up about 'the only time we saw a Spitfire was when it spat the other way.'
- 13:00 There were, no Spitfires were out there, anyhow, it was all in good fun. They were a great lot. There was Jack Hinton, a New Zealander who got a VC [Victoria Cross], and old Andy Foster, who had been in the World War I. I think there were only three of us air force blokes in the hospital.
- 13:32 But there were three English doctors there, army doctors. They were very good to me because it was winter time and they said, "Well, you're nearly all right, but we don't want you to have to
- 14:00 go out and battle in a camp with the cold weather, we'll make you a medical orderly," so I became a medical orderly. I used to carry trays and wash out the lavatories and do things like that. And from there, I was moved to...
- 14:41 Stalag 9 C which was an army camp where these army blokes were being sent. It was a horrible place. We had three decker bunks. They were so crowded, you had to turn sideways to walk between them
- 15:00 but my good friends that I had met in the hospital saved a bunk for me. This New Zealand bloke, we were having a morning parade to be counted, and I was standing alongside Jack

- 15:30 and old Andy Foster, and the commandant turned up on parade on the big platform where they used to stand and count us from. They yelled out that they wanted the interpreter, that they wanted Sergeant Jack Hinton to come forward. I was standing alongside and he said, "God Almighty! What have I done now?"
- 16:02 And so, he marched out and stood in front of the commandant, and the commandant read out this great thing in German, then in English, or the interpreter said in English, that Jack Hinton had been awarded the VC, it had been recommended by the Germans. So, like Jack, we all breathed a sigh of relief.
- 16:34 I spent a bit more time there then they had a bit of a clear-out then. I think I went to another hospital for a little bit, then I was moved to Stalag Luft 3, the big air force camp which had just opened up.
- 17:10 It was quite an experience but the travel was not much fun in Germany in those times. We used to travel mainly in these cattle trucks
- 17:30 or stock trucks, eight horses or thirty men, there were no windows, nothing. Once you'd been in one of those for two days, the smell was pretty grim. But when we got to Luft 3,
- 18:00 it was all brand new and wooden barracks which were raised up about that high off the ground, so that the ferrets, as we used to call them, the German intelligence blokes, could get underneath them to see if we were making tunnels or anything like that.
- 18:33 Conditions were good there, compared with.... and I suppose there would have been over three thousand of us in the camp and then there was a compound alongside with all officers in it, all air force. And
- 19:00 we got permission, through the Red Cross, to build a theatre because you get that many blokes, you've got carpenters and all sorts of trade blokes, very capable fellows, and it would give them something to do. The Germans thought it was a good idea too, to keep them out of trouble. Instead of digging tunnels, they'd build a theatre. So we built a very good theatre there
- 19:31 where we used to have lectures and debates and all sorts of things like that. We had a big area which we made into a sports field. We levelled it, and dug out all the stumps, because this camp was in the middle of a pine forest, so we
- 20:00 thought we were pretty well off there. That was the camp, Luft 3, that the Great Escape happened from. As I said, this Canadian bloke who had been in the hospital with me in France, he was one of the designers of the tunnel etc., having been a mining engineer.
- 20:31 As long as we were getting our Red Cross parcels, which was the main thing, hunger was our main problem because the German transport system had practically broken down with the bombing and one thing or another
- 21:02 and all the Red Cross food parcels had to come through Geneva and it was quite a long way from anywhere. That was our main problem, lack of food. The German ration was usually
- 21:33 a seventh of a loaf of black sawdust bread and hot water from the cookhouse.
- 22:00 At midday, you'd get two potatoes, boiled potatoes, maybe half a cup of swede soup, that was lunch. Then in the
- 22:30 afternoon, they'd come round and give us another seventh of a loaf of black bread and maybe a pat of margarine or a bit of sausage. We always reckoned that we only got the sausage after the big air-raids and it was
- 23:00 horse that had been made into sausages. If you had your Red Cross parcel which you were meant to receive a parcel a week, according to the Geneva Convention, but that was not often and usually the supply got so low that we'd
- 23:30 share a parcel, between, you and I would share a parcel. Or sometimes it would be so bad that four of us would share a parcel, hunger was a great thing.

**And how was your health during this time? Your recovery? Can you give me some idea...?**

- 24:03 Once my legs had healed up, I was fit as a fiddle, really. I used to play football and things. Exercise was walking around the compound.
- 24:30 (BREAK)
- 25:00 These two scars are the recent operation I had. But apparently when I got back to England, to East Grinstead, Archie, the plastic surgeon, said I was lucky that I had very good skin that healed very well.
- 25:40 **That first month in France in hospital when you were recovering and you were bandaged and you couldn't see, can you give me some idea about what you were thinking and how you were**

**feeling about what happened to you? Were you angry?**

- 26:04 Well, I got angry at one stage. A fellow from our squadron was shot down afterwards, and he told me more about when I was shot down.
- 26:37 He said, when this stupid Canadian broke RT silence, that we were attacked by a whole lot of one-o-nines. Whether the ones I saw below were a decoy or not, I don't know. But I said
- 27:00 that I had looked around and seen things and seen one behind me that I thought was my number two, and he said, "Oh no, your number two was a new boy." And he had something wrong with his engine and had gone home. And when I looked around I saw an aeroplane behind me and I thought it was my number two,
- 27:30 where it was probably the German that shot me down. He was a new bloke. I'm not blaming him but he should have known that if RT [Radio Transmission] silence was broken, if you wanted to go home like that, you flew up alongside a bloke and waggled your wings, then I would have gone home with him. I would have escorted him because nobody flew about in the sky on their own.
- 28:00 He didn't know this, he, as we say, 'pissed off' on his own. My number two might have been the German with his canon on me, so that made me a bit cross.

**So this pilot was in the hospital with you, was he?**

Yes, the pilot who told me this. He was on the squadron

- 28:30 and he'd been shot down after me. He gave me news of a lot of the boys and things. You'd whisper so that nobody could hear. They had microphones on, listening.

**29:00 So the hospital was bugged?**

Oh yes. Well, we believed it was and we took precautions not to talk about shop while we were in close confinement.

**29:30 Would your family have been told what had happened to you?**

Yes, I've got telegrams there that were sent to my mother and father in Australia. One from ICO, "I'm happy to report

- 30:00 your son Falkiner has been reported missing and we went searching for him in the Channel, without result. We hope he had a successful landing." Then I've got letters that I received later on, and one there.
- 30:33 I couldn't write with my hands, and this Canadian wrote.... We used to get an issue of two letter cards, then postcards, as our ration for the month.
- 31:00 This Canadian boy, I've sort of got the letter he wrote to Mum saying I was well, and good luck, etc, etc. I think my worst thing really was not being able to see, being
- 31:31 bandaged all the time, and you didn't know who you were talking to. I think that was one of the worst parts of that first spell in hospital but I was happy that I knew that I could see. Apparently, your eyes are wonderful things
- 32:00 when you're being burnt like that, they water so much that it stops them being damaged. It sounds ridiculous, but in my case it must have been true. All my eyelids and eyelashes were burnt right off.
- 32:34 But I must say that I was very glad to have those two Canadian blokes in the ward with me. One of them was taller than I was, he must have been six foot four or so
- 33:02 and he had a bullet hole through his thigh, and he was so long for his iron bed, they had to put a chair down the end of the bed for him to put his feet on and he used to get furious because he was like an exhibit.
- 33:33 The German orderlies and various Luftwaffe fellows used to bring their friends in and say, "Come and see the lange flieger [tall airman] man." He used to get absolutely furious. "These bloody people! They think I'm in the zoo."
- 34:02 He had a very loud good speaking voice, too, he had been a radio announcer in Calgary.
- 34:38 But when we got to Stalag Luft 3, it was the main big air force camp and it was only just starting to fill up and after every big air-raid,
- 35:01 it's horrible to say, but we used to go to the main gate and wait for a new batch of POWs [Prisoners of War] to come in and see if any of our friends were in them which they were, unfortunately, quite often. If there was room in your barrack and there was somebody that you liked and knew, you said, "Okay,

- 35:30 I'll get you a bed in our barrack." There were some wonderful men there. Some of these old kriegers, as we used to call them, these old prisoners who had been shot down,
- 36:00 quite a few of them, dropping leaflets over Belgium and Denmark and France at the beginning of the war. They'd been shot down and it was terrible. They were remarkable, though, they showed
- 36:30 their British spirit in a wonderful way. They made our wireless and were, more or less, responsible for building the theatre. They had been prisoners for so long, a lot of us were shot down and they had already been prisoners for two years.
- 37:03 But they organised classes in practically every subject, you get that many people, you find somebody who is an expert at this. They were wonderful.
- 37:35 **Were you free to mix, people from different countries? Were you free to mix and do things together?**
- No, not really. Some of the big early camps were mixed.
- 38:01 Like Stalag 8 B, was a mixture of English, French Army, you name it, it was there, air force blokes. But then they hadn't built Stalag Luft 3, the big air force camp because they liked to keep
- 38:30 the air force prisoners separate because we were more likely to escape and be a nuisance. That 9 C I was in, was a horrible place, it was a mixed army thing and were all mixed up together, there were Serbs and God knows what.
- 39:08 I said, when the Russians came into the war, and one of the hospitals I was in, I'd never seen anything so awful as these Russian prisoners,
- 39:31 and they weren't army or air force or navy or anything. They were just civilians who had been over-run. The Germans said, "Well, they better go back to Germany and they'll make slave labour." I remember seeing these fellows,
- 40:03 they had a couple of these big forty four gallon drums with a fire underneath them, and there was some sort of Swede soup or potato soup, and these Russians were linking arms and going up. Some of them were so weak they could hardly walk. I watched
- 40:30 three of them, they had a bloke in between them, they carried his mug, or his container and the German dishing out the soup just went slop, slop, slop into three things and they walked about another five yards away and dropped their mate, drunk his soup and left him there.
- 41:03 They were tough, they were very, very tough. In one camp I was in, there were Russians working round about. The Canadian Red Cross was quite amazing because there were a lot of Luftwaffe prisoners in Canada
- 41:32 and they got a bit of preferential treatment from the Red Cross. There was an enormous great pile of broken bricks just outside our wire. Anyhow, the Germans wanted this moved, and they had this old horse-drawn wagon, and a couple of Russians....

## Tape 8

- 00:37 After a spell in Lithuania, I was trying to get home and my means of trying to escape, without digging a tunnel or something,
- 01:00 was to get myself repatriated because my eyes were still very bad and I looked an awful wreck. There was a Red Cross commission came up and I managed to get hold of an onion and I sat up all night with these onions under my eyes. I went in before the Swiss Commission
- 01:30 with my eyes streaming. I thought I had got through, and then this wretched German doctor said, "This English doctor is doing plastic surgery in Frankfurt. This man could go there." So that stopped me, otherwise I would have got home.
- 02:00 Those fellows did get home from there but anyhow, they sent me to this eye hospital. Did I tell you this, about Graham Williams, the cricketer? Yes, well, he was there. He got a cushy job as a medical
- 02:30 orderly teaching the blind blokes Braille and how to weave, whatever you make baskets out of and things. He was a delightful fellow, and we became very good friends. I knew he was a cricketer. He played for South Australia, he was a fast bowler.
- 03:00 When we knew the war had finished, there was General Patton's tank drew up outside the barbed wire around the hospital and the Yanks threw everything, loaves of bread and cigarettes

- 03:30 and all sorts of things, to us and this hospital was run by Catholic nuns and they'd never seen white bread before. They came out with this white bread, "It's as white as snow!" You'd never seen anything so pathetic, these poor old girls.
- 04:01 We were told not to do anything, not to leave the camp, not to leave the hospital but we were put on guard at night. Graham and I were both walking wounded in the hospital, I was a medical orderly by this time, and we used to sit at this open window. And I used to think, 'If the bloody Germans ever counter-attack, this is the first
- 04:30 place they come to, and they'll bang us through the window.' So Graham and I decided, 'This is not for us any longer.' We had arranged with the New Zealand major who was in charge of the British in the hospital, we said, "Can we scam?
- 05:01 We're tired of this." And he said, "If I was in your position, I'd be off, too." So Graham and I took off. We hitch-hiked all the way back to Brussels with the American. It was very interesting. We went through the Ardennes where the Germans had made their last big push towards Paris
- 05:30 and there were still burnt out tanks and piles of ammunition. We were very glad to get, then we got into a Lancaster and we were flown back to England. I'll tell you, there was a lovely Russian pilot, Razamoff,
- 06:00 who had been badly burnt and he'd been picked up. He'd been shot down, and he'd been picked up in the snow. He had his revolver down his flying boot, and his hands were so badly burnt that when he tried to pull it out he dropped it in the snow and he couldn't find it. He was going to shoot himself.
- 06:34 So anyhow, some nice Germans found him, and he ended up in our hospital. Graham and I used to talk to Raz, sign language. We had a bet that we would speak Russian before he could speak English, I'm afraid he won the bet, but when
- 07:00 we got away we got Doctor Lorse, who was in the hospital, Raz, would get into East Grinstead, and have his burns fixed up, and sure enough, he arrived there. Anyhow, I don't know what happened then
- 07:30 but I went back to the guinea pig reunion, the 50th anniversary of the Guinea Pig Club. They had a big reunion there, Prince Philip was there, and a whole lot. I asked the medicos of the hospital
- 08:00 if they could tell me anything of what happened to Razamoff, the Russian we brought back from Germany, nobody knew anything very much. They said one day a big black limousine turned up from London, from the Russian Embassy, and said, "We want Razamoff," and he was due to go in for an operation and they said, "Don't worry about that,
- 08:30 we'll fix him up when he gets home. And nobody has ever heard of Razamoff. I don't know if he was accused of collaborating with the English. The Allies weren't very friendly.
- 09:04 He ended up speaking quite good English but you could never get him to talk about politics or anything like that in Russia.

**So you got yourself to Brussels with the American, then you got to England. Is that right?**

- 09:30 That's right. I can't remember if it was a Lancaster or a Dakota flew us to an aerodrome in the middle of England and we were met by a whole lot of nurses and all sorts of people there. But the Yanks looked after us
- 10:00 beautifully in Brussels. We were the first prisoners at this receiving centre that the Yanks had for POWs. Oh dear, they couldn't do enough. They took us down alongside the river, they had a pump and hot water shower and everything,
- 10:30 they deloused us and gave us a wonderful soaping down. They said, "Throw away all your clothes and everything," and they issued us with brand new GI uniforms. Then they said, "You must be hungry, come on in," and they took us into this dining room and they had this wonderful food spread out.
- 11:02 I think there were the three of us, and there were two doctors there, saying, "Now, don't eat too much, just eat what you want, but not too much," and they were saying, "This is good for you, and that's good for you." You'd think that we were babies. After that, they said, "We'll have to
- 11:30 hand you over to the British authorities in Brussels. So they took us over to the British and honestly, the difference, we got there and we said, "We've been deloused and we've just come from the American thing," and they said, "Don't worry about that," and they had a powder gun and they gave us a squirt down the back side and down the front,
- 12:00 that would delouse you, and under your arms, and on your head. No clothes, no wash, no shower, no nothing. Compared with the Yanks, it was quite amazing. The only thing was, they had the aeroplane there.

**Jum, can you give us an idea of when this was?**

This was in....

12:30 January, February, March, April.... Exactly April the 12th, 1945. Because I got back to England on, I'm sure it was, on April the 13th.

13:02 **So you would have spent about two years in Luft 3, did you?**

Well, Luft 3 and Heydekrug, we were a year up in Heydekrug, in Lithuania, I wouldn't recommend you go for a holiday there except, it used to fascinate me, you would see on the cottages

13:30 the storks nests, built on the roof of the cottages.

**Why did you get moved to Lithuania?**

Well, because Stalag Luft 3 got filled up. When the Americans came into the war,

14:00 they made our compound into an American compound. So we were all put into cattle trucks and spent two and a half, three days, going to Lithuania, which was not a very pleasant trip. It was a terrible trip actually.

**And what were the conditions in the camp like? At Heydekrug?**

14:31 Oh, it was all a bit different because there had been an old military cavalry camp, I think, from the Prussian days. It was old brick buildings, that were the coldest,

15:00 draughtiest places you'd ever been in. And we didn't like it very much, it was not a very good climate up there.

15:41 But we had a great escape from there. POW fellow, Englishman, Grimminson, he made a few escapes and he spoke pretty good German and

16:00 he managed to get out and he got to Riga, on the Baltic, and he was trying to get onto a Swedish ship. But he was quite remarkable because when he was out he went back to Heydekrug

16:30 and managed to get messages back into the camp, having got out of it, of a couple of safe houses in Lithuania or Poland. He was a remarkable fellow.

**You tried to get yourself repatriated**

17:00 **a few times, didn't you?**

Yes, nearly got it. Yes, I thought I was really through this time, when the wretched German doctor said the English doctor was doing plastic surgery, but it was not to be.

17:35 Oh, it was a terrible waste of time, really and truly.

18:04 Some of those bomber boys, they had a terrible time, though, what with all their training that they went through and they were shot down on their first raid and things like that. I did have the chance to fly and shoot at the enemy a bit.

18:38 Some of the escapes were unbelievable. I know one fellow who was a navigator in a Halifax. I don't know where the raid was. They were up pretty high

19:00 and they were hit by night-fire or flak. The aircraft blew up and he had his head in the astrodome, which is halfway along the fuselage, and he was blown out when they were hit.

19:30 He luckily had his parachute on. No, they actually hit the ground and he was catapulted through the astrodome and managed to pull his parachute and survived. I didn't think it was possible.

20:12 It was terrible stories. An English boy that I knew, a tail gunner, this was very early in the war, this was,

20:31 when he was in one of the big flying boats and he was doing one of the patrols in the North Sea, and I don't think they even knew that the war had been declared, he was a tail gunner, with the turret in the tail. And

21:00 all of a sudden, they were attacked by these fighters and shot at and badly shot up and he ran back along the fuselage of this big aeroplane to get into his turret and find his parachute, and anyhow he got back

21:30 into his turret. By this time the aeroplane had broken, and just left the tail with the two tail planes hanging. He couldn't get out, he couldn't do anything. It floated down like a leaf.

22:00 He landed in a lot of snow in Norway. Never believe it, but it was true. He got burnt a bit.

**Jum, do you want to now talk about getting to England? You were in the Queen Victoria Hospital for some time, the burns centre.**



- 22:34 All I can say, that I was very lucky when I got back from Germany that I was shot straight back into the Queen Victoria Hospital. They gave me two new eyelids.
- 23:06 It was frightening to see some of the burns cases there, they were really awful to even look at. I always remember there was a small boy, I suppose he was about four or five years old, he was
- 23:31 sitting up in bed and I think he was a favourite with all the boys and he had wings sewn on his pyjamas and he had air commodore and all the stripes and everyone used to salute him, "Good day, sir." Dear little fellow.
- 24:02 Archie Makedo, he refused to have anything to do with the army, the air force, the navy or anything. He said, "This is my hospital. I'm going to run it the way I want to run it," and he did exactly that.
- 24:31 And with the body burns, they used to put you in a saline bath. When I was there, it was the end, the war was over and (UNCLEAR) lying in bed, reading the paper or something and a bloke would go past. "I'm going down, do you want a beer?"
- 25:00 and I'd say, "Oh yes, that would be nice." "All right," he said, "we had a bit of a party last night." The Canadians, that was it, they had built this wonderful new wing on the hospital, and he said, "There's a bit left over. There's a barrel of beer in the saline bathroom." He said, "If you want a beer, I will bring you a mug."
- 25:34 Archie, of course he knew it was on, but he didn't mind at all. "Go for your life, boy." But that was wonderful. The Canadian government gave this whole new wing to the hospital, brand spanking new.
- 26:03 **How big was the burns centre? How many patients in the burns centre?**
- Oh dear, I really wouldn't know. I was in the Canadian, the new wing, but there were huts here, and huts there. I suppose it would be
- 26:30 a hundred, couple of hundred.
- 27:00 I said they built and paid for this lovely new wing, but they also sent a permanent staff, nurses and doctors. Ross Tilly was one of their main surgeons. They've named the burns unit in Toronto
- 27:30 The Ross Tilly Burns Unit, after Ross Tilly. I'm not sure he didn't do one of my eyes.
- So when you went there, Jum, what did you look like? How bad was the damage?**
- Oh, I suppose I just looked a bit of a mess. Weeping eyes
- 28:00 and a mouth that opened one side, I used to clean my teeth with my finger, but I wasn't even touched. My worst burns had been on my legs. I just had to have a little bit of beauty treatment.
- But you didn't have eyelids?**
- No, I had these
- 28:30 new ones, as I said, from behind my ear. My top lids were all right. Well, they still work all right.
- So were there many air crew....**
- In the hospital. Oh yes, there would have been fifty or sixty
- 29:01 or more. I don't know because I was in the new wing but there were these other huts. A lot of it had been built during the war but altogether it looked like a lot.
- 29:30 I nearly had a nasty accident there. I had had one of my eyes done and I think I had a general anaesthetic and a lot of people, when you come out of a general anaesthetic, you're inclined to wave your arms
- 30:00 and fight a bit. When they wheeled me back to my bed I was on a stretcher on wheels and I had a bloke with a blanket over holding me. Anyhow, he let go of my arm and I went like that
- 30:32 and luckily I hit the eye that hadn't been operated on. That was one of the jobs I had. In Germany, as a medical orderly, with my long arms, when they were operating on various blokes, I had big long arms
- 31:01 and I could lean over where the operating table was, with a blanket, and hold them down. I'll always remember that, I was quite good at it. The first thing, this fellow had
- 31:30 a gallstone operation. I was hanging on, hanging on, hoping that something didn't squirt out all over me. The first time I
- 32:00 saw an operation, which was an emergency one with a fellow who had been working in the salt mines and he had a strangulated hernia. They woke me up and said, "You better come and give us a hand." So

the surgeon put this knife into this....

32:30 I'm afraid I had to turn my back and lean against this wall.

33:10 **Can you tell us now about the Guinea Pig Club?**

Oh yes, well, the Guinea Pig Club was at the Queen Victoria Hospital.

33:32 As he later became, Sir Archibald Makendo, he used to call it the pig-sty and everybody in it were his pigs. So the name, whether this just slipped out

34:00 or how it happened, I really don't know. But everyone decided that it was a good idea to form the Guinea Pig Club which was, I think, in the 1940s, because there were a lot of fellows shot down and burnt in the Battle of Britain

34:31 and the local pub called itself the Guinea Pig. The name stuck, the Guinea Pig Club was formed, and

35:00 anyone who was there and who had operations was entitled to become a Guinea Pig. I think the staff most probably, as well, who were Friends of the Guinea Pig.

35:34 I went back in '90 to attend the Guinea Pig 50 Year Reunion, Archie was no longer alive,

36:00 and we were presented with the gold guinea pig. Before that we just had a metal guinea pig, like a guinea pig with wings on it.

36:51 What a wonderful place it was and how well we were looked after,

37:00 and I think the main thing was, if I can repeat myself, he said, "This is my hospital and I'm going to run it as my hospital and the army, navy and air force can go and jump in the lake." And he did exactly that.

37:33 **So how long were you there for, Jum?**

I wasn't there very long. I think I had about a month to start with, then I went on leave for about ten days, then I went in for another two weeks or three weeks.

38:07 But I got to know this Ross Tilly, this Canadian doctor, and he had married an Australian girl, I don't know when or how, but during the war. He was very nice. Anita and I were going through Canada, we'd been in touch. He said, "If you're in

38:30 Toronto, we're not going to be there but if you want stay in our flat you can use it as your home." They were very, very kind.

**Are you able to recall some of the procedures that Dr Makendo used,**

39:02 **as in skin grafting and...?**

No, I'm afraid I can't. I think he was sort of early days and starting off a lot of new techniques but, gee, there was some terrible, terrible burns there.

39:37 Well, you can't describe them, they were so awful, some of them.

**Did he put skin grafts on your legs?**

No, no. He said, "You'll do very lucky, your

40:00 skin has done a wonderful job. It would be a shame to muck it up." But I do remember some of the fellows who had their noses burnt off. He used to take a big role of skin from inside their thigh there and

40:30 make it into a sausage and then attach it to their stomach, so the blood was running through it all the time. Then from their stomach they would take it up to their chest, still attached at both ends, so the blood was running through it, then up to their chest if it wasn't far enough. Then they would take it onto their cheek,

41:06 still attached at both ends, and then he'd fashion the sausage into a new nose.

**So it was growing during this time?**

Yes, it was alive all this time and it just depended on whether you wanted a big one or a little one. I do remember that.

41:30 **And what was the morale like?**

Oh, it was colossal, colossal. Oh, I suppose there was the odd grizzler [complainer], that you get anywhere....

**INTERVIEW ENDS**