

Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Chester-Master (Chesty) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/676>

Tape 1

00:46 **Robert, just tell us, about your, an overview about your life?**

Oh sure.

Well I was born on the 30th November 1924, which of course as you probably imagine or

01:00 know from the past, that was in the Depression years. I never knew my mother, she died when I was about five or six, and I never knew her, I have never ever seen a photograph of her so I have no recall in that particular department of my life, which is regrettable. I went through, my father was 40 when I was born so we didn't have really a close relationship

01:30 over the years, and subsequently, we, my brother, my younger brother and I were put in care for a while. And then my father took in a housekeeper and we were taken out of care and we always called her Mum, but of course in those days we didn't know what de-facto relationships were all about, they're just a new modern convenience. But I went through various schooling in Brisbane, various schools and at that

02:00 time the state government had a policy that if you passed the Queensland State Scholarship which, enabled you to go onto junior and senior. But if you were thirteen years of age and you passed you were able to leave school. Well the economics of the family in those days I had to leave school and go out to work. After a couple of odd jobs I joined as a shipping clerk a transport agent in Brisbane

02:30 and stayed with them until I joined the air force, in the meantime I also did some work for, an American international pharmaceutical company and got to know the general manager very well indeed. Prior to joining the air force I was a member of the Air Training Core in, 50 Squadron, I think it was at school and I enjoyed the cadets very very much indeed.

03:00 Subsequently I turned 18, in 1942 and unfortunately the army grabbed me first, because you had to register the moment you did turn 18, and although they spent there time fully equipping me despite the fact that I told them I had applied for the air force and was awaiting a call up. I then told the air force what had happened and they immediately squashed it

03:30 and enrolled me straight away although they didn't give me an official number, they said that you are a member of the air force and you are on leave. Subsequently in January 1943 I became a member of the air force with a serial number of 434592 and was sent to the initial training school at Kingaroy. Originally during the first medical I was, categorised by the medical officer as any

04:00 crew member bar a pilot, on the grounds that my legs were too short. During the training at ITS [Initial Training School], about 1 week before category selection board, at which you were told what you were going to be, another 3 cadets and myself were taken away and given a leg test, which I passed and subsequently I was, categorised as being a pilot

04:30 and was sent down to 5EFTS [Elementary Flying Training School] at Narromine training on Tigermoths, I successfully passed through that station and then was sent on to be a bomber pilot, sent up to Bundaberg, on SFTS [Service Flight Training School] on Avro Ansons. Subsequently during my course myself and 3 other, chaps about the same size were called out by the CFI [Chief Flying Instructor] and were told that our flying

05:00 training was abandoned, discontinued, we wanted to know why and they said you're too short to have control of a bomber aircraft which was absolute rot because I hadn't failed, in any of the flying. So eventually my course was scrubbed and, on the grounds of insufficient leg length. They asked me what I wanted to be a navigator or a wireless particularly wireless

05:30 because I had very near 100 or 99% pass in Morse code. And I said no I want to be a straight air gunner or nothing at all, and immediate to muster to ground staff, and that didn't go over very well but I made the point and I think that they finally agreed because they were short of air gunners. So I was sent

- down to Evans Head a bombing and gunnery school, which was
- 06:00 usually a month's course, but I had to do it in 3 weeks and passed out as a Sergeant Air Gunner then waiting to go overseas. After a bit of leave I was sent to Melbourne to embarkation depot to await a ship, actually to do 2 things, 1 to await a ship and 1 to turn 19 because the policy was that nobody left until they were 19, which of course was not always strictly adhered to.
- 06:30 So I left with my group on a ship called the Lurline went across the Pacific to America had a 6 day trip across America to New York, I spent Christmas 1943, in New York, wonderful place. Wonderful time and the people were very very generous to us. Subsequently from there left New York on a in convoy on a very very old
- 07:00 merchant ship called the Sameria. There were troops everywhere, if a ship had been torpedoed I doubt very much too many people would have got out, however we made it safely to England. And we landed at Liverpool and all the air force were then sent down to Brighton which was a holding depot. We were granted leave and 2 other friends, 2 other gunners and I joined together and went up
- 07:30 to join a family up in Leeds, on disembarkation leave. Had a very good time up there, subsequently 1 of the troop was called back urgently to join Coastal Command and the other lad Sam and I decided we would try and stay together and as we were going to go to bombers that we would join a crew together. So we went back to Brighton and subsequently then said to
- 08:00 operational training in and on Wellingtons we joined together and we made up our own crew which consisted of a New Zealand pilot, we had a Scotsman as an engineer we had a Londoner as a bomb aimer and a lad from Birmingham as our wireless operator. Sam elected to be the mid upper gunner and I did the rear turret. Passing out from training there we went to
- 08:30 Sterling's on a heavy conversion unit from there we went onto Lang Finishing School and subsequently to our squadron which was 514 based at Water beach. Only did 12 trips on that particular squadron because returning on our 13th trip we were attacked by German night fighter, twin engine J88. And although
- 09:00 I successfully shot him down he had done a lot of damage to us so on our 13th trip on the 13th August at 13.30 hours, was our fateful day so we were given the order to bail out and, by the time I was able to bail out we were well I was down to under 1000 feet. It was always difficult to get out of the turret
- 09:30 because the procedure was we had to centralise the turret reach behind to unlock the rear doors. Climb out on our bottom collect our parachute. We didn't wear parachutes we only wore a harness. The parachutes were always stowed in the fuselage grabbed my parachute then come back out on my bottom clipping the chute onto the harness and stepping down into the fuselage.
- 10:00 And by the time I got to the fuselage or got to the rear door I saw it open and realised that, everybody who was to go out from that door had already gone. When I looked down I could see the ground coming up fast the, usual procedure was to bail out, was you had to count 7 before you jumped that was to stop the chute catching on the, tail plane. But I knew I didn't have time to do that so it was
- 10:30 just a throw out and pull the chute and about the same time I hit the ground. It had opened partially and when I hit the ground there was a great shot of pain up through my left foot and I realised that I had done some damage but didn't know how much because, it was dark anyway. But when I landed I looked around and realised I had landed in a field of hay stacks. So I crawled over to one of them
- 11:00 and buried myself in the hay stack because there was nothing I was able to do at half past 1 in the morning, not in pain and I just went to sleep, as we had been on the go since about 6 o'clock that morning and flying was always a tiring job particularly from the turrets where you are staring out into the darkness, all the time, very tiring on the eyes. And then I promptly went to sleep.
- 11:30 The next morning I woke up and the sun was coming through the haystacks, so I crawled out and sat down and thought well what am I going to do, so I was in severe pain so I got out our, escape kit which we always carried with us, took out a couple of, analgesics and swallowed those. And then still sat pondering and whilst I was doing that I saw a farmer across
- 12:00 the edge of the field and he was with a dog and the dog saw me and came barking, bounding over and the farmer came over and he spoke as much English as I spoke Flemish, which was absolutely nothing. But by his gesticulations and expressions I realised what he wanted to do was to tell the Germans that I was here so that I could help for my leg. At this stage
- 12:30 I still didn't know what had happened because I wasn't game to take the boot off. By my gesticulations I also expressed the thought that I hadn't come 12 thousand miles just to be taken a prisoner if I could possibly help it, so he got the gist of what I was trying to get to him and he indicated that I should crawl over into nearby woods. And he found
- 13:00 the stick for me and gave it to me so that by crawling and half crouching I got over into the woods. And that started, my way home to freedom, which took a while but still it was a start. I spent about 3 nights in the woods, but I realised after the 1st night that I had been told or someone had told them of my

- 13:30 presence because I could hear a whistle outside of the forest, and when I eventually called out, I found food and water. So I knew that he had told the right people. And after about the 3rd day I heard some crashing through the woods and 2 men came through, and indicated that they were going to take me out of the woods. Well 1 of them was quite a big man and
- 14:00 he hoisted me up on his shoulder and we proceeded out to another part, clearing. There I saw 3 bikes and I thought oh how the heck am I going to ride a bike? But if you remember back in those days the style of bikes, it was a 3 wheel bike, a fixed wheel bike. So what they did was to tie my, right, ankle, or right foot to the pedal
- 14:30 and left my left foot dangling. So then we set off and eventually came to a house where they gave me a shower and a change of clothes. And then we set off again to another safe house where I was just to spend some time. At this house I spent the time up in the loft because you have to realise that nobody could trust anybody in the village
- 15:00 because you never knew who was going to be there, to make money or to get ingratiate themselves in the German's eyes who was going to tell them that those people were hiding, a airman. So it was a question of staying up all day, during the day and then maybe coming down at night time. And I used to come down at night time to pick the plum tree that they had in their garden.
- 15:30 To help give a little bit more nourishment into me. They were very good these people. Because not only were they risking their lives but they were taking part of the rations and helping to feed you. And one day I was called down to the kitchen and found a group of people, and they were the interrogation group from the resistance. And it was their job of course to interrogate
- 16:00 to see that I wasn't a plant by the Germans which normally they did and always had a plant in the resistance groups to try and find out who the leaders were and so on, so a lot of people lost there lives that way, but I obviously passed muster and they asked me for a photograph which we always carried in our escape kit that, photograph taken on the squadron
- 16:30 so that we could give to them to get a false identity card made. So they went off and a few days later they came back with the identity card and I still stayed in the safe house for 2 or 3 weeks. Then one day I was called to the kitchen again and they indicated that I was to be taken away to another safe house so
- 17:00 away we went on the bikes again. At this stage my leg had been looked at and bandaged, but I still didn't know whether it had been a bad fracture or bad break, although they thought it was only a fracture. So just had it bandaged and it seemed to ease a lot. So off we set on the bikes again and we had been going through the countryside for quite a while
- 17:30 and I could see in the distance the rooftops or the buildings of a large city. And as we came down on the outskirts we were travelling in convoy, there was the lead pilot, the leader, myself and the rear guard, and as we were going down this hill I saw the leader do a u-turn and as he came up he indicated we should also do the same thing. So both myself
- 18:00 and the rear guard did that and we got into a side street and he explained that he had seen that the Germans had blocked the bottom of the hill and were doing a document check. So we did various, through various laneways and, parts of the suburbs of a city, which turned out to be Brussels and we came to another
- 18:30 building which was, I was told was going to be the safe house for a while. And when we climbed up the steps into the top floor when the door opened in the lounge room there was my bomb aimer. So I realised that at least he had been saved, and that he had been caught by the same section of the underground that had been in a different area. You could imagine of course when we all
- 19:00 bailed out the parachutes would be drifting away to various areas and at this stage I still didn't know whether anybody else had been saved. But it was good to be able to speak English again so I spent some time there with various adventures in the sense, that we were going to be taken, they decided that we should go down through Belgium to
- 19:30 France and try and join up further down with the line, which was called the comet line. And so we set of with haversacks and by this time my leg had eased enough so that I could walk, not without pain, but could walk. So we set of an we got through to the top of France to a little village there, and we waited and then we
- 20:00 we were told that we were going back to Brussels as the line had been cut further down due to betrayals, so we went back to Belgium to sit it out again. And during this time of course we were listening to clandestine radio which the people had, and we thought we were going to be in for a very short stay because the British army had been advancing. This was post Normandy and
- 20:30 then to our dismay, the Germans counterattacked the famous Battle of the Bulge. And during this counter attach of course we thought well we've got to stay here awhile but, the people decided that we should try and get to Switzerland. So we set off again and Martin and I and the guide we set off again, but again we were sent back because the allies were

- 21:00 strafing anything that was moving on the roads. Because if it was moving it was German, so we were sent back again. And eventually the British Army came through and so, Brussels was liberated, an interesting side light on this was that as the tanks came through we were all out on the streets of course, and the tank commander was standing up in the turret and I said "I'm an Aussie mate
- 21:30 can you throw me a packet of cigarettes?" And he threw down a, packet of wild woodbines, which was the cheapest of the cigarettes but they were nectar in comparison to what I had been smoking. But before I had a chance to pick it up of the ground a Belgium grabbed it and ran for his life. It was quite amusing to see him really go for it and the commander had seen this and threw me down another
- 22:00 packet. So we went back to stay with these people for a few more days until the German army had been pushed right back. Now the Germans had set up a complete PA [Public Announcement] system in the surrounds of Brussels and they put through a broadcast asking any airman, or soldier or sailor in hiding
- 22:30 to report to headquarters at what was then the best hotel in Brussels, which was the Metropol. So Martin and I, no Martin decided not to go down straight away but I went straight away and whilst I was there I met a reporter, he was a war correspondent for the Brisbane Truth and other Australian papers called
- 23:00 Eric Bown, and he was responsible for letting my people know, my parents know first that I was safe. Anyway on that particular day there were over 500 people, personnel and army personnel came to report so you can see how many people were hidden just in Brussels and it was quite amazing and I just want to stress the courage and
- 23:30 bravery of the people of the resistance movement. So eventually I was then flown back to England. So will I continue on.

Yes what happened after England?

Well when I got back, my wireless operator, my navigator, who was an Australian, he went back with me we were flown back to England, and then we were

- 24:00 de-briefed by, air force intelligence and I was the flight sergeant at the time and so was Reg, and they said well what do you want to do now, Reg said that he wanted to go home because he trained in Canada and he had been away a little longer than I was, I said "well I want to go back to the squadron." They said we can't do that. And I said "Why not? I can go back as a spare air gunner and meet up with another crew." "No you are not
- 24:30 going back you've done your share." And I said "well I want to go back as a, I want a Commission." They said "What do you want a Commission for?" I said "Well if you'd come over under the conditions I came over, you would like to go back as a Commissioned officer or little better conditions." "Oh.." they said "rubbish, oh we'll see what we can do." So Reg and I were then sent on leave and I took Reg back with me to the family
- 25:00 just outside Leeds who I'd spent a lot of time with, because they were very friendly and I loved the Yorkshire more because I used to spend a lot of time riding over the Yorkshire with them. Then I was called back, we were both called back and, when I got back to London they said your Commission is through we have got to re-equip you so I was
- 25:30 re-equipped as a Sprog (Junior) pilot officer. I walked, down Kingsway in London and a RAF [Royal Air Force] officer came by and threw a salute, and I thought whose he saluting. Then realised that it was me, so I returned the salute obviously and then it was time to come back. I travelled on the Queen Mary from London
- 26:00 to New York again, and I spent Christmas 1944 in New York. So I had 2 Christmases in New York and that was a wail of a time I can tell you. 8 Christmas parties in a day because they were all so very generous. And another 6 days crossed into San Francisco. Eventually came home co-incidentally on the same ship that I
- 26:30 had gone, that is the Lurline, which incidental became the first bride ship out of Brisbane. So I came home and was on disembarkation leave while the authorities decided what they were going to do with me. And I finished up as 2IC [Second In Command] at the Transport and Movements Office at Rocklea because all troops going North had to overnight in Brisbane all troops coming
- 27:00 south had to overnight in Brisbane because of the rail gauges, so that would have to spend the one night there and on their way the next day. So I spent 9 months at Rocklea in that capacity as 2IC in charge of that unit. And then in November 1945 they said we've had enough of you and I was discharged. I had tried to
- 27:30 become a gunner on liberators, which was really what the air force was using then. But there was no dice so I parted from the air force in 1945. On one of my leaves down in Sydney, I had contacted the General Manager of this American company that I had previously done some work for and they asked me if I would join them, so I joined the Pharmaceutical
- 28:00 Industry in 1945, had 5 years with them. I was approached to join another company, with even better

conditions, you always tend to go for the faster horse and we, I was sent to Townsville and Margaret came up with me but only spent about 18 months there, then I was asked to come back to Brisbane and asked to take over the State and then in 1955,

- 28:30 ironically, I was approached by a German Pharmaceutical company to become there Queensland State Manager. And I did that and I stayed with them for 32 years and retired in 1987. Since then I have been known as a professional volunteer. I spent 12 months with Expo as what
- 29:00 they termed Protocol Hosting Officer and hosting all the different VIP's [Very Important People] that came. Started early because these people also came to see where there pavilions were going to be, and being a Protocol Hosting Officer I escorted a lot of very important people, including the Queen. I was in that hosting party and the King and Queen of Spain who were 2 very wonderful
- 29:30 people. And then after Expo was finished they said well we've got the plans for the re-development of Expo Site and West end will you take the plans around to the suburban shopping centres. So I spent 3 months doing that and just when I finished they said "Well now Robert you will have to do that again because new plans have been drawn up so would you continue on?" I said "Yes I will continue on that."
- 30:00 So in 89 I finished that in 89, I did some TV work as a, TV, well as an extra in TV programmes, then, subsequently I worked, well I did the Olympics, I did the Goodwill Games, and what else did I do, there was something else, I can't remember. For 13 years I
- 30:30 was a volunteer with Brisbane Tourism. I used to start on a Monday morning a 6 o'clock at the international airport until about 2 o'clock in the afternoon because in the those days the international planes only came up in the morning. So I spent 13 years with the people, visitors, and have only just recently moved on to other things. I am with the
- 31:00 National Seniors Association on the committee. I am the Chairman of the Air Force, Aircrew Association and various other things. But post-war it was quite interesting; in 1975 it was my first opportunity of going back overseas. I was still working at the time but I took leave and Margaret and I went across to see our, my saviours for the first time
- 31:30 and I have been back on 10 different occasions to see them. The last trip was finished because my money tree had lost all its leaves, and it's just too costly to go overseas. But they welcomed us with open arms and they were very very good to us and all of our journeys with them, not only the people in Belgium, but in France and of course France and England.
- 32:00 So now here I am, can't go back overseas again. But unless the Federal Government would like to pay my way. As a matter of fact I have applied to join the group going to the unveiling of the monument for World War I and World War II. But I doubt very much if they think a Queenslander is anywhere, probably Canberra and Melbourne they will choose. However be that as it may, I have applied.
- 32:30 That was a long 10 minutes.
- 33:00 **So tell us once again Robert about you childhood?**
- Well I don't suppose I remember much about my childhood, except that I didn't know much about my mother. As I said earlier she died, when I was about 6, and, which is more than a pity and I haven't seen a photograph of her.
- 33:30 I investigated a few years ago to find out where she was buried. She is buried in Toowong Cemetery, but unfortunately there is not headstone, so that she is in an unmarked grave in a group of unmarked graves in Toowong Cemetery. So I'm still am no further advance. But I went through primary education and various schools in Brisbane, Fortitude Valley, East Brisbane,
- 34:00 Central Practising School at Leichhardt Street, and I wasn't the most brilliant scholar in the world. And I felt that I wouldn't be able to go on further in education because I didn't think I was, would be qualified enough. But when it came to doing grade 7, which was then known as the Queensland Scholarship, the policy was
- 34:30 that if you passed that you could leave school at 13 or go onto junior. But the economics of the family, my father was just a, I don't like to say that word, just a Tram Conductor, its demeaning. He was a Tram Conductor, and of course the salary in those days, the pay in those days
- 35:00 was very very small indeed so economically I couldn't go on to do junior. So I did a few jobs, as I said at 13 did a few little jobs, and if I go back a little bit in time I was learning to play the piano. And apparently I was pretty good at it but in the year of turning 13 which was the scholarship year.
- 35:30 I had to really concentrate on homework and study, and I defaulted on playing the piano and was I was given the ultimatum either practice or we sell the piano. Well unfortunately the piano was sold so my career of being a pianist of any description went by the board. But the study got me through and
- 36:00 Margaret keeps telling me I got 88%. I don't remember what I got because it wasn't a consideration to me in those days, I just had to go out to work. And a couple of meaningless, jobs really before I joined a transport company and became a shipping clerk with them.

What jobs were they?

Oh selling sandwiches, I was stripping motor cars that I repair

36:30 or spare parts department. I worked for a butcher for a while, that was probably the, end of that, oh no sorry I worked in pharmacy a pharmacy on Lincoln Terrace a dispensing chemist and I worked there for, oh, a couple of years 2 or 3 years and I thought I may be able to then do further study

37:00 and become a pharmacy become a pharmacists, but that wasn't to be, and so I joined this shipping company, transport shipping company and became a Shipping Clerk with them until I joined the air force. And amongst my duties, as I said before was also looking after the stocks of the American Pharmaceutical Company and I became very very friendly with the General Manager and the 2 representatives here.

37:30 So then I, at 18, I had joined the air cadets.

What started your interest in joining the air cadets?

I think, well it was the thing to do too, the same as a lot of people joined up because it was the thing to do and I thought it can't do me any harm, and would, probably, possibly do me the world of good because at that stage nobody thought the war was going to last 6 years

38:00 and I was too young to join the Air Training Corp so there was a private organisation called the Queensland Air Cadet Corp and I joined up with them. We had to supply our own uniform but, that was part of the fun of it and subsequently I became old enough to join the Air Training Corp and I must have spent 18 months with them until I turned 18 and went immediately into the air force.

38:30 Was it almost like a fashionable thing?

Yes in a way, I, no I wouldn't say it was a fashionable thing I think everybody who joined the Air Training Corp had the propensity to become a member of the air force and I think in the back of their mind all the time was that the war wouldn't finish or hope the war wouldn't finish until they had joined up into the proper air force.

I think I should re-phrase that, what I

39:00 **meant was what was the big attraction about the air force as opposed to the other services for you?**

Well for me I always had a yearning to fly and I also thought that the air force was the better, or the best of the 3 services. I didn't feel like walking everywhere and I didn't feel like sailing everywhere not that I knew that I would be prone to sea sickness at all but the

39:30 attraction was the air force. And the attraction also of being in charge of a plane. I guess that was probably, at the back of my mind all the time.

Tape 2

00:14 But I have always said to people and even when I, talk about, when I talk about this to groups that it is history but it is important because without history we have no past, we have no presence and we have no future.

00:30 You are, a little background here on this in that I am a member of a committee of the Australian branch of the Air Force Escaping Society. Now when I took over as, I'm the National Treasurer now, the Executive used to always be in Sydney but the Secretary decided, he saw the light and came to live in Queensland. He lives up at Tamborine.

01:00 And then the people in Sydney decided that as our Secretary was up here then the rest of the Executives should be up here so, I joined, well I was a member anyway, and I was elected to be the National Treasurer. Well I took over in 1991, we had over 100 members. Subsequently we decided we would try and

01:30 put together a book of escape stories. And we advertised to our members that we wanted them to write their story in their own writings, their own language, their own way, and then we would edit certain things, like taking out he said, she said, I said, we said and so on and so forth. And put them in a book. Well over 5 years we only got 31 stories. And we decided

02:00 we didn't, couldn't wait an longer for anymore we knew we weren't going to get anymore. So we did, went ahead and published a book called "Against the Odds" and it was, we only sold it amongst our own personnel or their friends we weren't putting it onto the market at all, because we just wanted to make a little, we only charged \$15 we only made about \$3, but that all went into our benevolent

02:30 fund and we still send each year to surviving, there is only 3 surviving French ladies, we still send a Christmas present every year, and that's all we wanted to make the money for. We have been trying to get the book re-published but we need about \$7,000 to get it done. We only wanted a loan, but do you think we could get one. Not interest free, interest free because we didn't want to be paying interest and subsequently not making anything. But however

03:00 that we had to let that go.

That's a shame

So that's one of those things. Am I still talking on the same thing. Are you still recording?

Oh you're rolling sorry.

Oh I am taking up a lot on something that is out of sequence.

No its okay we have plenty of tape and it's all interesting so its good. As I said I will take you back to your young life. I can't imagine, growing up without a mother, can you describe to me what that was like?

Well the most

03:30 I can remember back is that obviously when my mother died, and I have a younger brother and it was obvious, well its obvious now that Dad couldn't cope with the situation so, we were put into care. And all I can remember is that 2 dear old ladies living in New Farm in their home with them. I don't think

04:00 that there were any other children there, I think it was just my brother and I, and I can't for the life of me remember how long we were in that care. But subsequently we were taken out and, rejoined Dad, and he had taken in a housekeeper to, to assist, and we again because my

04:30 my memory even at that age I still didn't know that I had lost my mother. I couldn't sort of think in those terms and what I knew was this kind lady and we always called her Mum. And, it wasn't until many, many years later that I, thought, realised that I could never understand why she was always called Mrs, she was also called Mrs Low instead of Mrs Chester-Master. And later

05:00 years I realised that it was a de-facto relationship, but nevertheless we, treated her as our mother, oh we had some fun times but, things were tight, money was very tight, because as our said Dad was a tram conductor and the pay in those days, after all it was still the depression years, and life wasn't easy for anybody. So you know, when they talk about life wasn't meant to be easy

05:30 that goes back a long way, a long time, but we obviously survived, and I went through my schooling, but I still as I said, I still didn't know my mother, and couldn't, I guess, I couldn't, I didn't even dawn on me in those days to try and find out anything about her because I didn't sort of realise and nothing was ever said so I

06:00 didn't. I can think back very vaguely of uncles and aunties, as it turned out my father had 3 sisters and 3 brothers as well so I guess they were the uncles and aunties that I can vaguely, vaguely remember.

But, things were kind of not talked about?

Things weren't talked about and whether, well they

06:30 weren't talked about in my knowledgeable presence. They may have been talked about but I was still too young and, lack of knowledge of those things anyway, and I only really, I suppose, I only started thinking about my mother post war when I started to delve into family history a little bit. And of course that's when I found, it was an interesting thing that.

07:00 nothing was talked about because when I came back from the war, back from Europe and my father said "Where have you been?" And I said "I have been in England fighting with the RAF." "You've been in England?" I said "Well where did you think the letters came from?" He said "Oh, if I'd have know I would have told you about our family and our family history in England." I said "Well now you tell me. Its too late now I'm here." So that's, things weren't talked about

07:30 and certainly not in our family circle.

Now back to training for the RAF. Ok Yeah tell us about that Medical Officer?

Yes that's a man I will never forget. He was, his name was Squadron leader Khan, K-H-A- N

08:00 and he said "No you would not ever be a pilot, you can be any other member of air crew, you won't be a pilot because your legs are too short". Well I had become reconciled to this obviously but during the intimal training period where at the end of it you went before a category selection board and they decided your fate. Well, myself and 3 others

08:30 were called out to Wirraway and given a leg length test at Wirraway which I passed. And it strangely enough, that Wirraway required a greater leg length than most other aircraft in those days. And I thought 'oh beauty,' because when they, then said "Well you're going to pilot training" I said "Wonderful I am back on track again." And so I did

09:00 go, I went through, flying Tigermoths at Narromine. A wonderful time a wonderful adventure I had a couple of funny incidents I was sent up one day towards the end of my solo training was sent up to do what was called step turns. Because I had about an hour and a half to fill in so the, our usual

09:30 procedure with step turns, was that you would do a steep turn 2 or 3 times to start to centralise so you checked your position go to port and do a few that way, then centralise again check your position. But oh no, not just a Master, he was a smart a-,so I just do, starboard and I would do a lot of those and swing straight over to port and do a lot of those. When I finally decided to centralise I was completely and utterly lost. I did not know where

10:00 I was. So we used to, be told that if you were lost you would take your bearing on a certain set of mountains, so I thought these were the right mountains I saw, so I took my bearing on there, I was only get more and more lost I didn't have a clue where I was. I saw a farmhouse and, I did something which was strictly against the rules I landed to find out where I was. A lady

10:30 came out from the farmhouse, I had a safe landing of course. And I said could you tell me where Narromine is please. She said I haven't a clue I have never heard of it, she said I will go and ring up the nearest city. So she went into the farmhouse and she came out with a jug of fresh milk and some fruit-cake, as she said, "Well now if you go over to this city and take this bearing it will get you to Narromine."

11:00 I said "Thank you very much" and I, strictly illegal, against regulations, took off again. And then I found this city, this town which turned out to be Parkes, I think it was. So I took my bearing again, but again I was helplessly lost at this stage in the Tigermoth the petrol tank had, petrol tank was over your head in the wing and it had a bobbin

11:30 and when that bobbin was going down you knew your petrol was going down, and it was starting to get dark and twilight was setting in and so I thought, well I've got to find somewhere to land as I am going to run out of petrol. Anyway I've got to find somewhere so I saw the lights of a town and I headed for that in that direction and as I flew over the town I throttled off and throttled on, off and on so that people would

12:00 realise that, that I was probably in a bit of trouble so I thought I had given them a bit of warning and that I was looking for a paddock to land in and I saw one which I thought was a good one and as I got close to the ground I saw a big gully right across the middle and I thought, up again. Then I thought I saw another one and I decided, started to go

12:30 into a landing pattern and then I saw that it was a graveyard, and I said I'm too young for that yet, so again throttle on and off and in the meantime I had seen some cars heading out, the lights heading out, out of town, and I wondered if peak hour of the traffic out of town. And then I saw another likely landing spot and it had a tree right in the corner, so I was able to side slip over that and straighten up

13:00 and cut the motor and as, but then, missed the trees at the end and did a u-turn and came back to the roadway because I saw that road near that tree. And by this time cars had pulled up and a farmer came, one of the fellows came out and, I, well I didn't have to explain anything as they knew straight away, cause something, that I was in trouble

13:30 So this particular fellow took me into town, I said I need to ring Narromine, where's Narromine he said, oh I don't know. So I go onto the telephone and asked to be put through to the Narromine station, which they did and I got onto, through to my instructor. He said "Chester-Master you basket you have taken 10 years growth out of me. Where are you" I said "Where am I?"

14:00 to the fellow. He said "Its Gilgandra" which is 60 miles away, so he said "You stay put and we'll come over the in morning." And so the fellow was kind enough to let me stay with him and took me out to dinner and spent the night there. And the next morning he took me straight to the aircraft and 2 instructors flew out in one plane with petrol and when they came

14:30 over to see me and got mid-plane, they said "How did you land in here Chester-Master." I said "Oh, I slip tailed and straightened it" and of course it was a very small paddock. To cut a long story short after they had filled the tank with petrol one instructor got into the cockpit, one instructor got on the wing and I got on the other wing and we had to brace and hold back the plane until the instructor had got up enough revs because then he had to

15:00 take off without a steep climb to get over the trees at the bottom. And they said "I don't know how you got in there" and I said "Well you got out anyway." Well what had been the stream of traffic had been going down to light up a bigger paddock? But I didn't know that of course. So I knew that I had to land because the bobbin had disappeared and I didn't realise, I didn't have too much petrol. So then we took off and as a sideline to that when I got back to the drone, back to my hut, in those

15:30 days we slept on palliasses full of straw, and my colleagues in the hut had folded, well the blankets were still folded because I hadn't used them. And across the top they had turned my nametag back to front and written on it wrong way Corrigan. Wrong way Corrigan was a reputable pilot, who was noted the, found himself in Ireland when he was suppose to be in

16:00 somewhere else, or anyway he was called wrong way Corrigan, so they had branded me that. But successfully I passed out from Narromine as a pilot with 60 hours flying on Tiger Moths and then I was to be sent to Bundaberg.

Just describe your very 1st flight for me?

Well I, I

16:30 don't know, it's a bit hard to, to describe I suppose, my feelings were probably, simply that I was on the way to an adventure, on the way to being a pilot which was something I had craved, something that I had lost and then recovered and that I was going to hopefully be the best pilot I possibly could be. Maybe not the crash-hot pilot

17:00 that some would be, but at least a very good pilot so I guess that the 1st flight of was of course was dual, we did I think somewhere around 10 hours of dual, then one day we went up on dual flights and we'd done circuits and bumps, as it was called, takes of and landings. Other preparatory work like turns and

17:30 dives and climbs and so on. And then this particular day the instructor, when we landed he, saw him throw the, his joystick out, from the aircraft and got out and said "It's yours Chester-Master, take off and do some circuits and bumps" and so on and that started my solo training.

And then in coming back to

18:00 **the medical officer you ran into?**

Yes well, when I went into Bundaberg to the air force training and the CFI has put forward this argument of insufficient length, he said you are, the 4 of you are going back to Brisbane for a new medical. So we went back to, came back to Brisbane and as my bad

18:30 luck would have it the, exactly the same fellow who had said originally that you will not be a pilot, and he was really angry that his directions had been countermanded. Didn't even give me a chance of anything at all. I was hoping that I might be transferred to the South on ESP Doxfords which had adjustable seats and adjustable rudders

19:00 and he said "No Chester-Master you a finished as a pilot, end of story." So that's when I had to go back to Bundaberg and the saga of the pilot Chester-Master was over.

What was he like in your view?

Beg you pardon.

What was he like as a man?

Well he went down very much in my view the way he reacted to the fact

19:30 that, to the fact that I had been categorised as a pilot against what he determined. And it was just his reaction, of course I was only a sprog, and only an AC2 [Aircraftman Class 2] so I couldn't argue, he was authority as Squadron leader, oh boy, so it was just one of those things that I had to sit and take it because you had no redress whatsoever.

20:00 **You must have had a feeling when he walked in the room?**

As soon as he walked into the room I thought oh my god the same fellow, that was my immediate reaction and it proved to be right, unfortunately it proved to be true.

Yeah. So what, you were then taken to be part of a crew?

No, No I then had to go to gunner school to learn to be an air gunner

20:30 and that was an experience in its own. Because down at Evans Head the aircraft they used to train, gunners were very battle, they were very battle weary actually as they were the front line British aircraft at the beginning of the war, but it was a good but bad aircraft. It might be 3 or 4 of us going out on this training flight, it was an open cockpit at the end with a

21:00 pardon me, with a machine gun and from there we would do air to air flying, firing or air to sea firing at a target, and the rest, while the gunner was up training there the rest of us were lying in the fuselage of the aircraft and this, very battle had a tendency to, for fumes of glycon coming right back through the fuselage and we used to get sicking glycon. Its

21:30 a wonder we weren't all sick. But we all managed to overcome that. The only respite you had was when you were up actually in the cockpit firing the gun. But that was only 3 weeks training because it was a 4 week course but I was a week late so I only had 3 weeks of it anyway. And then I suppose I only fired about 1000 rounds, and I was a fully qualified air gunner. Got my Sergeants wings and

22:00 then came back to, back to Brisbane on leave, we didn't make a crew up until, until in England.

Describe why you chose to be a gunner?

Well I didn't, well as I said to the CFI at the time when they wanted me to take on navigation or radio as they said I was pretty good a Morse code, and must have been pretty good at navigation, not thinking, not

22:30 remembering, how bad I was down at Narromine. And I said look no I don't I spent 6 months training and I got no where. I want to be a straight gunner or I want to go be mustered to ground staff because, I'm not going to spend another 6 months training, I want to get into it. I either get into it or out. And they didn't, I though they didn't take to kindly to it but they did take kindly to

23:00 it in the end, so he recommended that I go to gunner school as with the other 3 fellows, but I think the only reason he took kindly to it was because they were getting short of air gunners. And they needed recruits for that position. So that's my feeling anyway. Still sticks over all this time.

And how did you feel when they announced that it was,

23:30 **oh no, first we'll cover Melbourne actually, then you went down to Melbourne?**

I went down to Melbourne and that couldn't, the rule in those day was that you couldn't go overseas until you were 19, so I had a few weeks to fill in, but we filled it in pretty well. I was at Ascot Vale, it was the depot at Ascot Vale and, those of us who were waiting we went on commando

24:00 courses up in the Warrandyte Mountains which were quite interesting, we learnt how to kill. In case we ever needed to, so time went fairly quickly until there was a ship, the main thing that they were waiting for was a ship us out to, to, well we didn't know which was we were going all we knew was that we were going to go, we didn't even know whether we were

24:30 going to the UK whether we were going to Africa, whether we were going to the Middle East or what was happening. And we didn't know really that until we were well on our way.

How did you feel about not knowing where you were going?

Well, there was nothing much you could do, nothing at all you could do about it because you were under orders and you have to obey orders anyway, and the authorities dictated to where, to where you were going to go, some went to Canada to,

25:00 to do, continue their training, some went to South Africa to continue their training. We were in a situation where we were trained and knew we were going to go to a war zone. But whether it was the Middle East or whether it was the UK at that stage we didn't know. Just come what may.

What expectations did you have?

I don't know, I don't think I had any expectations, I though well I'm on my way to

25:30 war anyway that's a simple as that, but whatever it might be it was still going to be in action. And I think we all craved to be in action.

Did you have any idea about what war would be like?

Oh no, basically I suppose we had seen some training films, war films, not Hollywood style of course, but genuine films on

26:00 operations from the UK, operations from the Middle East so we had a basic idea of what it was going to be like.

Did they live to be true at all?

Ah yes and no, some of the, I mean the training films were down to earth. Some of the films that they made, British films that they made

26:30 I remember one very much so. It was called "One of our Aircraft is Missing", and it was about a Wellington crew who had been shot down and how they had been saved by the underground, and the interesting thing was, you know, it never dawned on me at that stage that it was going to be a bit like me. I can remember one part in the film where they were in a church, the

27:00 resistance workers, and the, couple fellows of the crew and one of the ladies petticoats was showing and they quickly hid it because of , it had been made out of, parachute silk, and not realising, not even thinking that subsequently I would be told by the woman of the man who, directed me to the woods that his wife, that she had made 4 blouses out of

27:30 my parachute. So never ever linking the 2, the 2 things as a possibility because 1 was still to happen. So. But generally speaking the expectations of being in action were paramount, I think in our minds.

And what was life like in Melbourne, while you were waiting to turn 19?

Oh,

28:00 interesting, full of interesting things. Actually one of the things that was most interesting from, for us because we were, I think, there were only about 3 of us from Queensland so we were in an area where

we didn't know. We didn't know anybody but we were in a group of aircrew. And the Myer company in Melbourne had a place called The Dug Out. It was

28:30 down in their basement, where anybody from aircrew could go in and buy or anybody, any servicemen, I should say, could go in and buy a low cost meal. And the, the staff, the counter hands, sales girls at the end of the day when the shop was closed would all come down to the dugout and we would have a great of time dancing and

29:00 so on , and so forth. And that's where is learnt to dance. I learnt other things too, like how to smoke and how to drink. We used to have a hilarious time coming back from town to our, to the station, back on the tram and we'd start up "You are My Sunshine" and we'd sing that the whole of the journey, getting all the passengers. Passengers

29:30 singing it as well, you know just a lot, a bit of fun time. So had happy memories of the Myer Dug Out and the Myer, the Melbourne tram.

How did the song go?

You are my sunshine, my only sunshine you make me happy when days, days are grey. And it goes on like that. I'm not going to sing the whole lot.

Did you meet any, girls when you were?

30:00 Yes I did, I met, one girl, particularly. I'm not sure how, we used to get invited out to various colleges. And to families, you know to, introduce us a little bit to other people and not be stuck in our own circle all the time. And I did met a very nice girl,

30:30 and her family by the name of Peach, and I wrote to her quite, because I wrote to a few people, although I didn't have any regular girlfriends in Brisbane at all. And, she, when I, wrote all the way through, and various times, although when I was missing, obviously I didn't write, and, when I came back

31:00 I, went, did a trip down to Melbourne, and of course by this time the girl had found a friend. So I bought her a piece of music, and, I gave, presented it to her, it was called "You, She broke my heart in 3 places", and, whether you remember that at all, but, and she took it in fun and so on and so forth. And at Melbourne also I

31:30 met, a, my greater friend, was, it was a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] she was a Taswegian. And ironically when I came back she sent me an invitation to her wedding, and, I, how am I going to get to Tasmania, because at that time there was, in Queensland there was a coal strike. All the mines, and had closed down, the miners had gone out, and transportation was, actually

32:00 movement was banned. But I went to, well this was actually, in 1946 I had been, I think it 46, and I'd been discharged, but I was still able, allowed to wear uniform and I, went to the air force to see whether I could, the flight, and air force plane going to Melbourne, which there was, and they got me on that, and then I

32:30 went across on the boat. The name of which I can't think at the moment. But when I came down for breakfast I was the only one at breakfast. It had been a rough crossing, in that, in the rip, what they called the rip, from, from Melbourne to Hobart. And when I got down to Hobart I stayed at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and I sent a telegram to the family to say that I would

33:00 be there and I'd come up on the, it was the Friday and I'd come up on the Saturday morning to see them, let them know before going to the church. And when I got to the house they were in great panic. And I said what you panicking about. They said we'd been looking all over for you. I said well I sent you a telegram that I'd see you at the wedding, but you're the best man. Because the best man, she was marrying a solidier,

33:30 and, whose mate had taken sick, so we, so thinking I'm going as a guest to a wedding I finish up as best man. So anyway the wedding went pretty well, but the next day was interesting because we decided to, the whole of the bridal party, and a couple of other, except the bride and groom of course, decided to go up to Mount Wellington to have a picnic up there. Well if you've ever sat on the top of Mount Wellington eating

34:00 cold scallop pies, with snow, bellowing around you ears, but it was fun. It was quite enjoyable. So that was a nice good stay. But I didn't have any serious girlfriends at all.

In Melbourne?

No. Well I fell in love with an English girl and the family that I was, staying with, in this village near Leeds and her name was Margaret. And then I

34:30 fell in love with a Scottish girl, whose name was Margaret. And who do I marry a Margaret. These are side issues of course.

How did you meet Margaret?

Well Margaret's father and my father were both tram conductors, and, they were great friends, and I vaguely had met the family, I hadn't met the family really before. I came back

35:00 from the war, and of course, her brother was in the navy. A navy fellow, and, I subsequently found out, found out that I was Margaret's pin up boy. Don't say anything. Cause in uniform and, an officer in a uniform, you know. But, it was my parents, when Dad turn 60, I was 20, he retired, because he could get the

35:30 burnt out, diggers pension, and we lived down the valley at that, at that stage but we also had a house, holiday house as Crib Island. Well Crib Island no longer exists, of course it has been taken over as part of the aerodrome. Great fishing spot though, wonderful fishing. But they retired down there, and I didn't, certainly wasn't going to live down there. So it went into boarding

36:00 houses, and, subsequently a couple of these places closed up and then I went to board with Margaret's family. Well I was her leaning shoulder, as she went through boyfriend. Or they went through her, I don't know, but the last one. That she had they broke up and of course she was very distraught, and, I said well, we'll go out to the pictures, take you out to the

36:30 pictures and, gradually things went from there. So there. And we've been married 55 years, coming up to 55 years this year, so we saddled up, saddled up pretty well.

Excellent. Ok back to Melbourne. What would you describe the atmosphere at the place in the war years?

I think a great deal of

37:00 expectancy, in that, I think that everybody expected the war to finish tomorrow, Nobody dreamed of 6 years. Rationing was there, everything, you know we were on a wartime footing, although, there was no danger as far as Australians were concerned. Even though Darwin had been bombed and Townsville, had had a

37:30 stray bomb. And the subs, mini subs in Sydney Harbour, but nobody felt that we were in great danger. Although one might admit that as the Japs were.

Tape 3

00:30 and that improved my knowledge completely but the Air Cadet Corp, were formed for those who, although as I said was private organisation, for those who were a bit young to join the ATC [Air Training Corps] because the force had put an age group on that. And I suppose only we had to buy our uniform

01:00 and which I did out of pocket money, or savings. And but they were good and there was big discipline as well. So getting, although it was private, getting trained ready for joining the ATC.

How old were you when you joined the ATC?

I'd have been 16. Yeah.

01:30 No, yes I'd probably in the 17th year getting closer to getting 17 and 16, because I was in the ATC over 12 months, 15 or 18 months in the ATC in the Air Training Corp which was the official junior air force.

02:00 **And then having been in the air cadets did you feel that that was genuine good stead and stuff you were learning?**

Oh yes, because when I went into the ATC. Which was the junior air force, the discipline that I learnt and the Morse code that I learnt.

02:30 The different maths that I had learnt in the, in the cadet corps, all stood me in good stead. Because all sorts of training stand you in good stead, no matter what you learnt to do. And particularly in, the fact that given my education had finished, by age 13 and, no further formal education so it was very good.

03:00 **And the time when you were in ATC, what sort of stories were you hearing coming in about the war?**

Well really I suppose it was only what we heard on radio and what we read in the newspapers, in those days and of course some time the headlines were quite horrific,

03:30 particularly from New Guinea, the Western, most of our troops had been bought back from the Western Front so although there was still a lot of, newsprint and news from there and from Europe. And they were pretty horrendous because really, you could, all we could see was that defeat was staring, no matter where, which area you looked at

04:00 we weren't doing too well. So I guess that, it was always, the fear that, the worry that they were going

to win. So I think that was always in the back of peoples minds because they, newspapers I think always, prepared for the worst or make the worst out of the best anyway.

How did this affect your training? Did you sort of want to get into it a bit more?

Well

04:30 we all knew that we couldn't get, get into it any quicker than we were, because of the regulations on age group, and I guess that if things were really taken a bad, turn, that, that the fact of not leaving for overseas until we were 19 would have, would have gone by the board. But we didn't dwell on that sort of business, we just took things as they came and, continued on with, with what we were doing

05:00 at the time until we could go.

What did you do on your 18th birthday?

Well actually what I had to do on my 18th birthday, was I had to register

05:30 for service, because that was the rule of the day. The moment you turned 18, not the day after, or 2 days later, or 1 week later, you had to register immediately you turned 18. So I filled in my registration forms and sent them off and unfortunately they were too quick of the mark because I knew that I had already applied for the air force of course and I knew that I was

06:00 pending called up there. But unfortunately the army grabbed me and strangely enough, of course where I lived at the time in Fortitude Valley the Army Reserve Training Unit was just there. Next door virtually, and, so I was called up and I walked next door into the, to be kitted out and I said this is a waste of time I am going to be in the air force in the next week or so, and they said

06:30 regulations are regulation, so they, I was kitted out, and bought home, bought home my only uniform and I immediately contact the, contacted the air force and told them. They said we will get, that countermanded, which they did. So I went back next door and took the uniform back. And then the air force called me in and said that, I had my medical. And they said that, they would not be giving me a

07:00 service number until the due year, because the. When you went to initial training school, there were, 3 different, 3 courses at any one time. So they had to wait for the, 1 course to go out before the next course, joined the other, pardon me. The other 2. And they said you will be called up in the New Year and at the moment you are on unpaid leave. So I, had a uniform, was on,

07:30 and was just on unpaid leave until they called me up again in January, and said right your up, going up to Kingaroy to the initial training school.

Did you mentioned earlier that you father was in the First World War?

Yes, I. In the initially he was, a sergeant in the Home Guard, or not Home Guard, but, the, one of the concentrate camps, down in

08:00 Victoria. And subsequently to that he was able to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] and was sent to France. I think probably his, his, age, precluded him from the AIF originally. But being an ex digger they grabbed him for the concentration camp guards anyway, and he was a sergeant in that. But then he, as I said, he joined the AIF and

08:30 was sent over to France.

Did he talk to you much about?

No, no, no vaguely I remember him talking about, mustard gas, that he had been in a mustard gas attack. But he didn't talk much of it, he was fairly tight lipped, not so much, not just only about the war, but also I think from a, from a family point of what

09:00 had happened, who I was and so on and so forth. So he was fairly tight lipped.

When did you ever talk to him at all about joining up. Did he have any opinion of you joining up?

Oh I had to sign the, he had to sign the papers. I don't, don't recall any problems at, I just got the papers and said well here you are sign these. So that's, that really, that all the discussion we had. He said "What are you going to do?" I said

09:30 well these are air force papers, this is what I want to do. So there it was.

Getting your service number that you were talking about. Can you walk me through, like explain that process and what it meant to you?

Well, the, the. Now there, in the air force anyway, quote my number, for example my number was 434592. Which meant that I

10:00 joined in 43. 4 was for Queensland and I was 592nd recruit in that particular period of time. Any air force number that starts with 41, 40, 41, 42, 44 they were the years in which they joined, so that's how

- they did the service number. Actually I had a subsequent service number as well, which was 018009,
- 10:30 that 0 was Officer and 1 was Queensland, and 8009. Now this was, I had to go back into the air force in 1948 during the time of the Berlin Air Lift, the Cold War. And they called a lot of us back for, reserve training, so that we could be re-trained on Lincolns, which was
- 11:00 the, Post Lancaster. And be ready to go if the balloon went up in Berlin, we, we were the nucleus of crews ready to leave straight away. We still had our civilian jobs, but we, had to go to, training, in my case started off in Amberley and then when I went to Townsville, then RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Townsville and then back to Amberley when I came.
- 11:30 This went on for about 10 years, and then finally, the Active Reserves, as they called it was dissolved. So I have 2 air force numbers.

And what was this number used for, was it an identification?

Well it was an identification, because we, we all wore identity discs around our neck, with our service number, our name and our blood group.

- 12:00 So that was the army, navy air force, doesn't matter who you were you had your number, name and blood group, on these little pieces of metal.

And just when, you said they. You had been to the army. The Army had called you up. You'd gone back and the RAF had claimed you and then they sent you to where to begin with.

Kingaroy.

To Kingaroy

Initial training school.

And what can you tell me about your

- 12:30 **first couple of days there?**

Oh, well that was just sorting yourself out. Well letting them sort you out. Because we were, they, basically we were all brand new recruits and we had to go, had to go recruit training, which, not only was marching, saluting, discipline generally speaking. But training for whatever we were going to be.

- 13:00 Everybody did the same initial training from mathematics, anti gas drill, Morse code, navigation, weather, all types of thing, whenever we were then, put into a little slot in the army, navy or the air force. We had some basic training of whatever we were going to be.

What was the anti-gas

- 13:30 **drill?**

I always learnt it, because there was always the fear, in, during the war that the, that the Germans would use gas, and so we were all fitted out with gas masks, and we had to know how to use them and what to do, you know, in a gas attack. So it was, I got 99% in my gas, and I said to, "Smart ass," smart a that I was, I said

- 14:00 to the instructor. Where did I miss one point. He said "If you don't watch your tongue Chester-Master I'll find some more that you didn't do." So, no, but that was all part of basic training.

How many, sort of new people like you were there?

Oh they were all new, they were all new, all brand new recruits, different ages, some were older than I was but we were mostly the 19 year group.

- 14:30 Just, we just in the, had just been called up, really, to start our basic training. So we were all the kinfolk.

What sort of relationships did you form while you were there?

Oh funny relationships, I don't think, I don't, think I, really, formed any firm relationship because you never, you didn't know where you were going to go. And you didn't know what you were going to do, not,

- 15:00 question of not forming a relationship because, you were frightened, that, the other fellow was going to get killed and you didn't want to get too close. You, just didn't know where, where we were going to go, what was going to happen so. It wasn't the time, after all, it was only 3 months and. We had some fun times in that 3 months as well, but there was, I didn't form any firm relationships and I doubt very much anybody else did.

- 15:30 Maybe 1 or 2 people did.

What sort of things did you do, apart from your basic training? When you had time off. Did you have weekends off and that sort of thing?

Well we didn't have much time off. Kingaroy was only a very small town at that stage, we had movies on the, on the station, and that basically, was what it was, because we would spend all day, all day training then get ready for mess.

16:00 And, if the pickies were on, I think they, pretty well on most nights. I don't know that, I must have gone into town thought, because I did met, or friends of mine, well it was not a firm relationship, but it was a good relationship. Well we'd been into Kingaroy or they had come out to a dance, these 2 girls, they were friends and we were friends. We had a friendship,

16:30 and when it came time to be leaving Kingaroy, because I was very naive, I hadn't had any, and my mate was kissing his girlfriend goodbye on the railway station, and I didn't know what to do, whether to, whether to embarrass her, or what. So anyway we just said goodbye and the end, and that was the last I saw of her. And I didn't see much of my friends from there. I think, that's right he came down to Narromine,

17:00 on, EFTS. And, I didn't meet him again to post war, he was a Brisbane lad, and I didn't met him again to post war. And I went o his wedding down in Adelaide. He married in Adelaide girl, and I went down to Adelaide to their wedding, that right. So there you are.

And the time when you were at Kingaroy, was that, your first time moving away from home?

17:30 Yes, yes. I

How was that experience?

Well, I don't know I suppose it was just a new adventure, I hadn't been away from home before, life hadn't been all that bad, but it, I don't have any great moments at home life. We used to go occasionally, down to, hop in the car and go, picnic down at Sandgate,

18:00 which was the seaside resort at the time. And, so we had a comfortable, life without being too close, or, at arms length in those days. We didn't have a lot of, had enough food, but certainly no glamorous food. Although I must admit that one of my favourite, foods, was a dripping sandwich.

18:30 But you've got to think back to those days when the dripping was, wonderful good things from the roast dinner. Not the stuff that you get today, and, smear it on bread and put salt and pepper on it, it was wonderful.

What was your relationship like with your brother. Was he older?

No he was younger. I had a stepbrother, he, was about 18 months older.

19:00 Just comfortable I suppose I don't think we were in each others pockets at all. The brother was a bit younger and he was still at school when I left. Yes he was still at school when I left, left home anyway so, no, a comfortable without a loving relationship.

So you didn't when you were starting your training

19:30 **and stuff, you weren't missing family?**

No, no not at all. Not at all in the sense I suppose deep down but not, not on the surface that I was craving to be home at all. No not at all.

Do you want to skip forward a little bit. Because we covered so much stuff. Getting your wings, what

20:00 **was the process that you went through. Was there a ceremony?**

Oh yes, well, at the end of the course at Evans Head, we were all paraded and, presented with, our half wing, and, the only full wings were a pilot, everybody else had a half wing, and we were presented with our AG [Air Gunner] wing, and, our sergeant stripes. And, I managed to get somebody on,

20:30 one of the mothers or somebody on, down at Evans Head to sew them on the, my uniform so that by the time I got home I was, I was fully kitted out. I surprised them, I surprised the family that I was a sergeant air gunner, so, didn't have too much time at home before I was back on, on my way to go to Melbourne. But

21:00 yes there was a full ceremony or parade. Passing out parade as it was known.

Were you proud?

Oh yes, oh yes, I was proud that id at least proven that I could be a member of the aircrew. Rank didn't matter all that much, but of course that was minimum rank that they had for aircrew anyway. In the early days, in the RAF, for example, everybody but a pilot was only a LAC [Leading Aircraftsman],

21:30 leading aircraft. And only the pilot got sergeant's wings, no only the pilot got officer's wings, because they all went to Officer Training School. But subsequent to that they, they bought in the sergeant's wings and even pilots became sergeants because, that was, sort of ranking with, if you were in enemy hands, ranking was all important. Some

22:00 people of course were commissioned off course, particularly pilots and more so than anybody else. So that, that, I made some of the grade anyway.

Just like generally around that time, did you have a fair idea that you were going to be sent o Europe or to the UK?

No, no I had a fair idea that I was going to be sent overseas,

22:30 simple as that, because there was no where else for me to go in Australia. I completed training, and at that stage of course we didn't have any, bomber aircraft for gunners, we had a few, single engine planes. And it wasn't really until later that the air force got liberated, but there was no scope for gunners in Australian air force. So I had to go overseas somewhere.

Did you feel,

23:00 **like the process of war was going on at the time and how aware were you of that . Were you worried about heading overseas while there was a war?**

No, not really, I mean there was talk about people being sent out of Australia, when we could, could do with them here. But you've got to think of what was happening and that was there were no, in my case there were no planes for

23:30 Air Gunners anyway, and the European war was raging as well as, the Pacific war, and once, very simple that you did as you were told. You had no choice to where you were going to go. So I had no qualms, it was still the war, whether I fought a war over there or whether I fought the war in the Middle East.

24:00 I could have gone to the Middle East perhaps, and join and attachment with the RAF, which I subsequently finished up as, anyway. Because I was with a RAF Squadron in Europe. But again as I said you did, you were sent where you were told to go.

No questions asked?

No questions, no questions asked and none answered.

When you were in Melbourne

24:30 **you mentioned that you did commando training?**

Yes, yes.

How did you do that with?

Well I think they had army instructors, or air? They may have been air force instructors or they may have been civilian instructors, I'm not to sure, but we were into the whacking tents and antiquated, toiletry systems, you know a big trench and a couple of cross bars across the top of them. But, we, we

25:00 did a lot of commando training, learning skills that again, it could have been that we were going to be sent up north. At that stage there was still no certainty, and always could be countermanded at any time, and, but in any case to we were taught to self defence and how to silently kill, so that if we were behind the lines in Germany, for example

25:30 that we could kill if necessary. I could kill you in 5 seconds, but I wouldn't want to. Just by putting, just putting that around there, just you couldn't get out of that. Clamp that around your neck, clamp there and put this behind your head and could choke you and break your neck very quickly. I wouldn't want to do that.

26:00 **Was this a different, when you were in the planes did you feel a bit more removed when you were learning the hand to hand stuff. Did you see a difference?**

Well it was all part, it was claimed as all part of training, all part of training, training for what we weren't too sure, but at least training to be able to protect ourselves if necessary. And, but it was all in the scope of things, also it was a way to fill in time. Which, is just another thing they wanted to get

26:30 us out of our hair, out of their hair out of town. At the same time, but it was, it was part of training.

When you were shot down, or when you crashed out of the plane. Did any of this training come back to you and you used that sort of survival skills?

Oh yes, well, it came back in the sense of what to do if necessary, because we had our revolvers, I had a Smith and Western,

27:00 all air crew were given one, but some didn't bother taking them, on a trip. I did just to be a mug lair. I got me a revolver. But, I doubt, I don't know whether, we would have, would have used it, it depends on circumstance, you don't know what you have to do, you do what you have to do at a given

27:30 moment in time. But it was always there, the possibility of having to use it but no necessarily. So the training was there if I had to do it I was prepared to do it.

The time that you spent in Melbourne did you, and also that's the time you spent in Brisbane on leave where there lots of Americans officers?

Oh yes, oh yes of course in Brisbane, particularly

- 28:00 of course, was that, Cola mados, Adelaide Street Battle, Queen Street Battle, between the Americans and the, and the Aussie troops. Unfortunately, of course with the Americans, they have a lot more money, they had a lot more opportunity of wooing the girls should we say, which riled with the
- 28:30 Aussie troops, and of course you can't blame the girls, at all cause things were scarce, silk stockings for example. That, that was good bait. Or so the Americans said. But, most of us learnt to live with them, we knew that they were necessary to be here and, but of course with, something they would get a bit hot headed and a few,
- 29:00 grogs under the tail and people get a bit hot headed, and, sometimes, well even today you only have to side glance at somebody in the thing, wants to attack you, attack you. But generally speaking, although with the American troops, the, the American Negroes were not allowed, this side of Victoria Bridge. Any American Negro found on,
- 29:30 this side of Victoria Bridge, they would, they were only had to be on the South side of the bridge. If they were found anywhere else they were in trouble. But the Americans did that, not the Aussies, not the Australian authorities, that was the American authorities, because they really treated them like dirt. But that's them, not us, you know can't say anything, if it was right or wrong.
- 30:00 But generally speaking, cause they had the better camp too, than Australian's had, and I must admit that when I came back from overseas I used the American, PX's [American Canteen Store] and the Officer's Club which was in Lennons at the time, because it was much cheaper.

Did you have any personal, you know interaction, friendship with any Americans?

No not in Australia.

- 30:30 When I got to American on the way over, that was wonderful, I had a wonderful time in San Francisco, had a wonderful time in New York. And, we could never buy a beer, we'd just walk into a bar, oh Aussies, here have a beer, have a beer. And you know that was a wonderful time. As I said Christmas in New York, 8 Christmas parties. I was staying
- 31:00 at a, there was a, I can't recall her name, but she, owned the Singer Sewing Machine Company and she had this beautiful mansion in New York. And any overseas troop, could, if there was room stay at this mansion. And 2 or 3 of my colleges were fortunate enough to be able to stay there and we'd wake up in the morning, and come down and the butler and the maid would have breakfast
- 31:30 all ready. Then if we came, been out all night long and didn't get down until 10am in the morning. It was marvellous. There, and there hospitality was quite staggering and of course, a lot of people would come home and say do you know why somebody is in Australia. Either, had a lot of people in Australia, don't forget Australia is a big, people had no and still have no idea of Australia,
- 32:00 I can assure you of that. Its quite, even today in the knowledge they don't know, the point, a hop step and a jump to when I was working with Brisbane Tourism and when the international aircraft came in I was in the information, the big "I" and the people would come out, good morning how are you did you have a good trip. Well I'm pretty tired, yes I can understand.
- 32:30 Now how can I help you, do you have accommodation, no, well yes, no, I'd say what type of accommodation would you like, and arrange that. Now what would you like to do while you're here. Well I'd like to go to the Gold Coast, I like to see the Barrier Reef and I want to go to Ayres Rock. Good fine, now how long have you got. 3 days. And you want to see what.
- 33:00 And they say Gold Coast, Barrier Reef, I said well unless you have your own jet plane, and I would put up a big map of Queensland, I said you're here, down here, the Barrier is in you know Cairns, is 2,000km away, Ayers Rock is a couple of thousand kilometres out there. Now I'm sorry but you can't possibly do that in 3 days, so, you have, to take up
- 33:30 your mind what you want to do. So I'd then continue on from there. So that the lividity of people whether they are from Europe or American, no idea at all.

Just stepping back.

Yes I'm sorry, I'm sorry

No that's fine.

Well I said I was doing a hop step and a jump.

Yes it was very good. To get to the time when you were actually leaving Australian.

- 34:00 **Where were you when you got the news?**

Actually what happened there was, that, it was quite funny, they told us in the morning at breakfast, that camp will be closed for the night. You will not be able to go out tonight, so we put 2 and 5 together and got 6 you know, so we obviously thought were leaving in the next day or 2. Then, and I hadn't, this WAF from Tasmania, and

34:30 we had been going to go out that night. So I raced around, because she was in radio unit, I raced around to tell her it was going to be closed camp, but the, the whole thing would be off so I don't know what's going to happen as we aren't allowed out. Then a 5 o'clock they made the announcement that we could go out but we had to be home by 12 o'clock. So I went back to her unit, because she lived off station, she was boarding, with,

35:00 a family in Melbourne. So I went back and said we can go out tonight, and I said what time are you finishing, and she said not until 6, so I said I'll have dinner in the mess and, we, I'll take you home while you have your dinner. So we did that, hoped on the tram and took her to her place, while she had dinner. Then I said, well we might as well go to the pictures,

35:30 so we went to the pickies. Don't ask me what was on wouldn't have a clue, and we were saying goodnight, no we had to be back by 11am. I looked my watch and said, god I'm suppose to be back in camp by now, its 11 o'clock. She said oh well, well take a short cut to the tram. I said but can you lend me 4 pence because I changed all my money into American

36:00 dollars. We had, we had changed all our money and I had no further use for Australian money so she lent me 4 pence to get the tram back to Ascot Vale and on the tram I looked, I looked at my watch again and said to the conductor I said what's the time he said 10 past 10. I though it was 11 o'clock at 10 o'clock, so not only did I leave her lamenting I left her, took, left her 4 pence short. But I made up by being best man at the wedding.

36:30 **You said that you changed your money to US, so you had a pretty good idea?**

Yes we had a pretty good idea we were going via America. Because I couldn't think of any other country that was using dollars at that stage. So we all thought that's it were going to the States.

So you changed your money,

37:00 **or they'd changed your money for you or, how did?**

Oh, well, on the station, on the site, they had a bank on the station and we had to take, if we wanted to take some dollars we had to change our Australian money into dollars, through, them, which was, brilliant we didn't have to go off station, or they wouldn't let us anyway. So we did it on the station, so that's why I had no Australian money left.

So they had given you a fair amount of warning?

Well in the morning

37:30 they said, you know, that we've got to line up and get your pay, and, because we were paid, getting paid and that we were going to get paid in Australian, and any Australian money we had we were to exchange.

How was the exchange rate?

Oh better, oh good, oh good, wonderful, wonderful, even the exchange rate, when we got to England, again, the exchange rate was tremendous.

38:00 In fact in coming back, I had a couple of hundred dollars in the post office, a couple of hundred English pounds, in a post office bank account and, when I, changed it, well set in back into Australian money I got \$300 odd dollars. 300 odd pounds, Australian pounds. Oh yes even I mean even when I went over in 1975 the exchange rate was fabulous. Not like today.

Tape 4

00:30 **Okay so let's go back, and can you walk me through that 1st morning of when you got called?**

When we, after my episode the night before, the, with the having to borrow my tram fare back to base.

01:00 The, we were then locked down and, then in the morning we had breakfast, we said, right you've got to prepare yourself now, we will be leaving camp this afternoon, so pack all the gear and be ready to go. Which everybody did of course, went back to the ballarts, or huts, and, got all their possessions in their kit bags. We

01:30 weren't allowed to take a lot of material, we had one, really one sea bag and one small, bag, in fact it may have only been a kit bag from memory. And that was our luggage that we were then, transported in the RAF trucks down to the wharf somewhere in Melbourne. Remembering this was wartime so that there weren't any people about, to farewell us. It was just a

- 02:00 tight secure wharf and the there, the ship was lying on side. And, we then paraded, and marched onto the ship. We received our, we paraded again on the deck to get, get the cabins that we were allotted to. And, off we trotted to our cabins, and, or
- 02:30 mostly cabins with 8 bunks in them, and this was the cruise ship the Lurline, SS Lurline. It was, it was an ex American Cruise Ship. But off course had been rendered warlike and we had 8 to our cabin. And most of our, the NCO's [Non Commissioned Officers] did the same. The officers
- 03:00 I think were, might have had 3 or 4, same as the first class, and tourist class ship. So off we set and it was, by the time we set off it was, it was dark and, then when we woke up the next morning we weren't in sight of any land. But we were then also spread into groups for submarine watch. We had to do
- 03:30 4 hours on and 4 hours off, because of the shortage, short, shortage of the crew, they couldn't do submarine watch and go about their general duties as well. So we were allocated the NCO, not the officers of course. They were 1st class, and 1st class didn't sub watch. So we had 4 hours on and 4 hours off. We had 2 meals a day and because it was just, not enough time to
- 04:00 to be able to put 3 meals a day into it. We did have, while crossing the equator a ceremony, when we came to the equator and crossed and. We were all made servants of King Neptune, in fact I still have my membership card of King Neptune's court. And that, that was a bit of fun. But it was pretty boring, naturally enough it
- 04:30 took us a week to get there. We weren't in convoy but we were zig zagging all the time and of course the ships were a bit slower then than they were today. And eventually we got to San Francisco. But life on board was a bit monotonous, although, the fact that we were on submarine watch, at least broke, broke the day up. But it was a strain because didn't have binoculars
- 05:00 we were just staring out to sea all the time, hoping like heck we wouldn't see a periscope. Because if we saw one of those it would be made panic. But, so we had and uneventful trip across the Pacific to San Francisco. We also had a lot of Americans on board returning home, from, there strip of duty, some, a number of them were wounded of course. And, then we
- 05:30 eventually got to San Francisco. After that we were unloaded and we, were billeted, in an American army camp. We had to all undergo a medical examination. That nothing untoward had happened on the ship, and, we had a few days leave. It's hard to remember
- 06:00 much about that, I, remember I tried to get down to the Hollywood Canteen of course, that had been, a big thing on the movies, the Hollywood Canteen, but unfortunately, there wasn't enough time to get to Hollywood to, from San Francisco. Transportation was a bit of a problem. So we missed out on that, but I can't remember. I know that I met an American family somehow
- 06:30 or rather, and, we went with them, an a couple of us went with them, and their daughters, who had, to a high school Gridiron game. Which we knew nothing of Gridiron. It was a most peculiar game. Still is a peculiar game to most Australians. But it was a enjoyable day, and, we were, then went back to camp. We didn't have a lot of
- 07:00 freedom, then we just had to wait for a train, which we then all boarded, and we spent, 6 days and 7 nights, or 7 days and 6 nights on the train crossing from San Francisco to New York. It was a restricted train, we were shunted all over the place, because I think they didn't, want anybody to know of troop
- 07:30 trains, which would be pretty hard to disguise. But of course also the normal transportation, so we were shunted on different lines. America has a lot of different companies owning different lines. But, that time went by fairly quickly, cause, don't forget we were young and full of spirit anyway. Not the sprits you drink but, just spirit from within yourself. And finally arrived in
- 08:00 New York. Again we were then put into an army camp and from that really, I think it's the camp that the Presidents go to today, Camp David. It was a big American army camp. Again strangely enough we had to have another medical examination, physical as they say and some of that was quite righteous, I won't go into describing details of it. But, then we were
- 08:30 again were given leave. Now leave in New York was, even better than leave in San Francisco, in San Francisco as I said earlier we didn't have to buy a beer. Any time we walked into a bar they just came from left right and centre. Have a beer Aussie and, we had more than we could cope with a times. Now that unusual for an Aussie to say that but still but in New York it was even better,
- 09:00 because I was lucky enough to get into the home of, this lady, who owned Singer Sewing Machine. Fabulous home, and, no matter what time we came down in the morning for breakfast, breakfast was always ready whenever we wanted to have. If we then went out and came, wanted to come back for lunch, we never, I think we might had done on 1 or 2 occasions, but always came back for dinner.
- 09:30 Always a sumptuous meal, and I was lucky enough to spend Christmas night in 43 at this home, and we started off very early with Christmas party and she had put, a, quite a big tree in the lounge room and everybody received a present. You just picked a present, present from the tree whatever wrapping took

your fancy. Nobody knew what was in it

10:00 but. Some were watches, some were different things and, I scored a lovely belt, but I couldn't wear a belt because I was in uniform anyway. But that was the first of my egg nogs for the day, and. But we had so many invitations to go to Christmas functions that we thought, well lets spend the day going from one to the other, to show

10:30 our thanks, for inviting us lets be as polite as we can, but no stay too long at each one. And between that morning, and, late evening, well I'd been to 8 and had a lot of egg nog that day, had a lot of food that day too. Because the Americans didn't have food rationing, in that, in fact I don't think they ever had food

11:00 rationing, it was plentiful.

How did you meet the people who invited to you all of these functions. What was?

I think that the air force, we were given invitations and names and address, and given invitations before we left camp. Also this lady who, where we were staying she had a list of people who had issued

11:30 invitation to go to their home to join them in the Christmas spirit. So we had plenty of choices. But obviously some would go to some and some would go to others. So there was always somebody going to met an, American family over Christmas.

And when you say we, who were you with, who were you staying with?

Oh with a couple of fellows. Well I was staying with this

12:00 Sewing, Singer Sewing Machine owner, whose name I completely forgotten. But it was a mansion, it was a huge, huge house.

And who were the guys?

A couple of my, my mates on the ship, a couple fellow, you know sort of oh lets go together, you know instead of just going on our own way, let go together. So there were,

12:30 you know, different groups at different times.

And what like spending time in America just with families and things like that. Did you see much of a difference in the way the war was affecting America to how it had affected Australia?

Yes, well, I don't think America, the only way that I thought that the American's felt the war was with their own boys being overseas. They certainly were not

13:00 feeling the war through shortage of supplies of any description at all, but certainly from the emotional side they were feeling it because a lot of them had sons overseas, some in Australia and some in Europe. So in that respect they still knew the war was going on.

Was there any difference to the fact that Australia was,

13:30 **you know a bit under threat, that the war was closer?**

No they, they knew nothing about Australia. They expected us to be black, white Australians, but I thought you were all black fellows. And I must admit we played them like a piece of string, played them about how we owned the kangaroo farms and the emu farms and

14:00 sheep farms, which of course were true, but the other two weren't. Kangaroos were always in the main street of the town, and, you know we played them along because their naivety they, well I'll go back they didn't even know we were white. And outside of America they weren't interested in the rest of the world really. Pre-war days and the early part of the, the only thing they knew about other

14:30 countries was because of the war and their people were out fighting in those countries. So we had a lot of fun, a lot of fun.

And, how much did you see of New York city, Did you?

I have climbed, at that stage, right up into the arm of the Statue of Liberty. And we all did, we all did, everybody that went to New York you had to climb up to, to the

15:00 Statute of Liberty. And, boy oh boy it was a steep narrow climb, particularly when you are getting into the arm out to, out to the light. They don't do that, they don't allow that these days. Oh they didn't allow it for a long time ago. But in those days it was perfectly okay. So, it was a long climb and, but it was an experience, a wonderful experience. We didn't see much of

15:30 the night life, of New York because we weren't really, I suppose weren't really interested in night clubs, but, bars and clubs, they run their bars differently to us. I mean they don't know a pub as, we have a pub, going into a public bar. They were just bars not attached to accommodation, they were just bars. And, to our way of thinking

16:00 pretty expensive, because we were on 6 bob a day, or 5 and 6 pence a day. Everything was expensive. But as I said most of the drinking as I said was on our very kind hosts. So we didn't really spend much money.

So you didn't really hit the town with your mates and get a bit rowdy?

No, no we were, we were, the best of protocol, we were representing Australia. I mean that sounds a bit

16:30 exaggerated but there was no need to, get into riots or situations, because after all we were going to war, we were, a certain degree of. I suppose also a certain degree of backwardness about us in comparison to the mere sophistication of New York, which always considers, itself, the sophistication or the,

17:00 personification of the world. But we just went along, enjoying ourselves, but not getting into stifle, or trying to cause strife.

Did you feel that, sort a bit of sense of patriotism. You said you were representing Australia. Did you feel, I know that?

I don't think Australians ever had much patriotism as such, and even today we don't, we don't exhibit what we should be doing. I

17:30 always respected, and still do respect the Americans, and the Canadians particularly in the way, they respect their flag and the way they respect their nation. And they, the way they always know the words of their National Anthems, it makes me made to see our footballers lining up there, I'm going way ahead of myself. But I always respected the

18:00 Americans and grew to respect the Canadians very much on subsequent trips, post war to Canada. Who I have a great deal of respect for.

And were you feeling a bit, like you had set of on your journey, you had left the country where you, but you still weren't at the war yet?

Well I guess yes and no. We were having

18:30 too good a time to worry about what tomorrow was going to bring and there was nothing we could do we still had to await orders, and, if they wanted us to, be on leave, whilst waiting the orders and having fun well we there to take it. And loved every moment of it. And not thinking that this, we've got to have as much fun as we can now because tomorrow we might be dead. That didn't even enter any of our minds we weren't even thinking along those lines. We knew that we

19:00 were waiting for a ship in the convoy and that was it.

Had you heard any stories, right back at the beginning you were talking about how statistically so many members of the bombing command were killed. At any stage did any stories start to seep through to you?

No, no, not really, not at that stage. We knew that, a lot of aircraft were being lost a different times, different raids and so on,

19:30 but, then we were starved for information because the Americans didn't, well we never got around to reading the newspaper let put it that way. We were having too much fun. And, it didn't really enter our mind because we had been told, we didn't have lectures or anything of that nature, and whilst we were on route to where, whatever was going to happen to

20:00 us on the other side. So it wasn't a thing to be causing any concern.

And so when you were told that you were leaving America were you sad that time was ending?

Oh, yes and no, again yes and no. I know its silly answer but, we knew untimely that our fun, would stop and we would have to move on, and we were getting to the stage where we were getting closer and how far

20:30 around the corner it is. So let's get there. So we weren't sad about leaving in that respect. Sad about all the freebies.

Where did your ship leave from?

From New York city. I can't remember much about that except that I think it must have been, again, no, cheering crowds and things like that because we were, we were

21:00 going to join a convoy, but when we got on that particular ship, our, feet sank to the bottom of the ground because, it had about. Anything up to 5, 6 thousand troops, too many, there were Americans going to the war as well. It was an old English Merchant Ship called the Aramis Samaria and it was a shocker. And

21:30 we were, people were sleeping everywhere, on the floors, on the decks, on the stairwells, wherever they

could find somewhere to put their body. That was where we slept. And we had 2 meals a day, sauerkraut basically, breakfast and dinner. Because it was impossible, to feed the number of people of board to, you know to go into a mess hall 3 times a day.

22:00 So, we only had 2 meals a day. We didn't want 3 meal of sauerkraut anyway.

Where did you sleep, where did you manage to find a bed?

Well I was in a bunk in one of the cabins, we had to 8 to 12 in a cabin there. I don't know whether we had a couple of hammocks, the Americans were really, were more put out than we were,

22:30 the American troops.

Why?

I don't know, I don't know why, whether, we were being treated as the elite, and, the American troops. Because they were going home from war, we were going to war. No, I sorry they were on the way to England to war, we were all going to war. But the Americans sometimes had a different attitude to their troops, than what we did.

23:00 **In what sort of a way?**

That they, that they were not as important. I don't know, I don't know, certainly I don't think they had any sort of inferior complex because they were the best in the world. The best country in the world and so on. And still consider they are. We leave that with the eyebrows. But they, that's just the way of the things, the way that I felt at the time.

23:30 But we were just anxious to get going and.

Was there any sort of, a stigma attached to travelling across the Atlantic? Were you aware of the U-boats?

Oh we were aware of them, but aware that they had been playing havoc in them, but we were in a big convoy and the old fate listed thing that it will happened to somebody else not happen to us. And, that was, again nothing we could about it. I was

24:00 part of the distance travelled. Long distance travelled.

And did you have any duties that you had to do on this boat?

No.

So how did you entertain yourselves?

By ribbing each other I suppose. I know we had a lad from Western Australia in our cabin and, we stripped him got some boot polish and put 'WA' [Western Australia] on his buttock. But, you know a bit of fun, you know

24:30 in between each other that's all.

What other sort of things?

Well I can't really remember but we must have done something, something stupid.

Was there any sort of, like typical, did you all play card a lot or was there any sort of particular?

No, I don't think any of us were card players, and certainly no one carried packs of cards with them. We didn't have access to the Red Cross parcels, with cards, cards in them, on the ship. It was just a question of

25:00 sleeping, eating and going about your usual abolitions and making the best of our bad trot, and hoping it didn't take too long to get over and done with.

How long did it take?

I think it took us about 5 days to cross over, 5 or 6 day, because we were in convoy and I think that they were, and a convoy is only as fast as the slowest ship. We were somewhere in the middle of it. I can't, I can't really,

25:30 I've got a feeling in the back of my brain that we did see a ship, in the distance that had been blown up. But I can't be absolutely sure, it might have been a sort of film we saw. But we didn't see any films on this ship.

What, how much freedom did you have on the ship. Were you allow to wander wherever or?

Yes, yes but there was really

26:00 no room to go too far because troops were still, there were a lot of troops on board and it was more of a hassle to get out of your cabin and try going for a walk, although we did try and do that. Because you

had to get, try and get a little bit of exercise. You would go up on deck and, there were people still lowering over the deck anyway so, but we must have had enough exercise to, keep our, joints moving. Because I think when we got off, everybody got off with

26:30 laudatory. A great sign of, we were good exercise. I wanted to get off that ship quick time.

And where did you, drop in the UK [United Kingdom]?

In Liverpool. Dropped in Liverpool and when, we all, disembarked, disembarked, we were all then loaded onto trains and we went down to Brighton, which was the,

27:00 depot for, that was the holding depot for the RAF before they farmed you out.

And what did you do once you first arrived there. Once, how long did you spend there?

Oh well, well we spent a few days there. We were billeted , being NCO's we were billeted, in the Metropol Hotel, and officers

27:30 were in the Grand Hotel, and, we were just there for a few days and what they had there, and we knew that we were going to be sent on leave. And what they had there were names and addresses of English family who were only too happy to take in a stranger who was on leave when they first arrived. There was 3 of us had joined forces, 3

28:00 gunners, Sammy, Bluey and myself and we decided we wanted to go on leave together. This particular family we chose had nominated for 2 so we put in a request that they ask the family if they would mind taking the 3. That we didn't want to split up, if we could help it. They sent back a yes that they would. So

28:30 the only address we had was the address of the, person who organised these families in that particular area. It was in a village called Eden, which was just outside Leeds. So we all hoped on the train, the 3 of us hoped on the train to go up to Leeds, when we got to the station, we could not find

29:00 anybody waiting for us. So we waited for about 1 hour and I said well this is silly. Well ring this organiser, so we rang the organiser and said were here but we can't find them, anybody. He said well look I'll come and pick you up and you can stay overnight at my place. So the 3 of us went, and I can't remember what happened, why the

29:30 family hadn't turned up, whether we come a day early or a day later or something like that. Anyway the next day they took us under their wing and, we went to their home. Now he was a sub-editor with the, local newspaper, the Yorkshire Evening News. And I remember at our first meal with them, supper, they had, they ate differently to

30:00 us. There around about the 5 o'clock they would have a light supper, then dinner much later. And they, served us up some apple pie, and there was cheese on the side. And I said "What's this cheese with apple pie?" And that's it headlines the next day. Had a photograph of me staring at this apple pie and the cheese. Headline "Cheese

30:30 with apple pie mystifies Leeds visitors". So anyway, that's what they did, how they ate apple pie. Well, we had

Good?

Yes interesting, yes it was good. So they had two spare bedrooms and, Bluey was in one and Sam and I was in other room. We had only been there a few days

31:00 when Bluey got a signal from headquarters, to report back straight away because he was going over to coastal command and that left the 2 of us there. So we sort of split the room. They had one daughter, Margaret, and I spent a lot of time with her and I used to, as I said loved cycling over the Yorkshire moors.

31:30 The 3 of us would go together and, but I spent a lot of time over the moors with Margaret. We were caught in a hay storm, oh hay storm? Snowstorm at one stage and it was so bad we had to shelter in the barn until the snow broke. But it was a lot of fun and the Yorkshire moors still have beautiful memories for me.

Did Margaret share the sentiment?

32:00 But of course, but of course. Yes, and I nominated them, as well as the family in Brisbane to be first notified if anything happened to me. They were on the rollcall to be notified. And, we spoke subsequently, because I spent a few times back with them before, before I shot down

32:30 so. And I spent a lot of time in London, in fact, at one stay my navigator and I were late reporting back, to one of our stations, because we, a pub we had been drinking at we found had been bombed out so we went to try and help. And, my stepmother had relatives, she was English,

33:00 she had relatives in England and I, we stayed with them so they had been a bit devastated, so we helped. So we got 5 days detention of pay. Because we were late, why didn't you send us a telegram. We

didn't even think, we were too busy helping out, anyway. It was another part.

Just backing up a little bit first of all you and Sammy and Bluey, how did you guys meet and why?

We

33:30 were all on the same ship, we were in Melbourne together and I think we had intersperse with each other at different time and then we were on the ship together, we were in the same cabin. We were all air gunners, we had an infinity for each other. And the, we wanted to stay on leave together, we wanted to have a bit of fun together. Then when Bluey left,

34:00 so Sam and I decided that if it was possible we would crew together.

And you said Bluey got a signal, what's that?

It was a telegram to report back to headquarter for posting. To Coastal Command.

Why did they send one to Bluey particularly?

Well they must have been, in urgent need of an air gunner in Coastal Command, so the first cab of the rank, it could have been me or it could have been

34:30 Sam. But Bluey go the Guernsey and, so off he went and we never saw him again of course.

Do you know what happened to him?

No idea at all, no idea at all.

Did you ever think about.

Ah just, we wondered at time I wonder how Blueys going in Coastal Command. But, you didn't sort of worry too much, it was a sort of fleeting question

35:00 mark in your mind. What happened with Bluey is he still alive, is he dead or, but we had our own crew to worry about.

And so the rest of your time, with the family, were they a well off sort of family?

Oh middle class, middle class, in England the class society was very very strong, upper class, middle class and very much a

35:30 lower class, and still exists, in fact unfortunately I think were getting to that stage to. But, no they were middle class, cause there was some advantages working for a promontory newspaper.

Were you seeing much of a difference in the life between the time you had just spent in the US [United States] and then in the UK which had really been under attack.

Oh yes, yes, because, England,

36:00 was being heavily attacked, heavily bombed, and it didn't matter whether it was city or country. Although they were trying to bomb London completely, out of existence. Also the food rationing of course and the general rationing of such, and the black outs, which you never had in America. And black outs were in existence all the time in the UK.

What can you tell me about that?

Well you

36:30 weren't allowed, if you allowed a light to escape from your home you could be charged very strongly. Because although the, air raid wardens would be right onto, onto you straight away, because there was low lighting in the house and you weren't allowed to have light shining outside. Headlight of cars were dimmed, they had a special, contraption over

37:00 the headlights, so the light only shone down on the ground but only through slits. And not sort of like a steady beam, just through slits. And the street lights were doused, or on a very low voltage so that there clearly was a proper blackout time.

How did the houses stop the light from going out?

Well heavy

37:30 curtains, heavy curtains. And you weren't allowed to pull the curtain aside. So you didn't want to look out in the darkness anyway. If you had to go out you snuck out of the door and shut it very quickly. That type of situation.

What sort of food rations were you noticing? Did it affect you much?

No I suppose it didn't really, only there was

- 38:00 always bread, there was always a little bit of meat, there was always a little bit of, there was always something there, but we never starved. But it was just, there wasn't what you say a gargantuan feed, at the end of the day or anything like that. But people survived alright. Clothing rations, well we didn't have to buy clothing anyway. Petrol rationing was very very strict indeed.
- 38:30 So that basically how the difference from a land of plenty we came even from Australia to a land of bountiful plenty to a land with the belt being tightened all the time.
- And the family in Leeds did they have, were there any sons in the family?**
- No, no
- 39:00 they only had the 1 daughter.
- And did you ever ask them why they opted to billet?**
- Oh no not really, I think that what we did before we left was to try and thank them very much for their hospitality and for what they were doing, because they had been doing it for some time and
- 39:30 incorporating us strangers into their family and allowing us to see there part of life, which they couldn't see our part of life really. But to see how they lived and sharing there, there food and there breads and just, their friendliness.
- And when you were called away was the, back for training, was there a tearful goodbye with Margaret, or**
- 40:00 **how did you sort of leave things?**
- Up in the air. But I knew that I would be back on leave anyway. I had already made that perfectly clear to the family but, when I do get leave and I get the opportunity I would like to come back if that's okay. And they said of course its okay. So I didn't feel that I was not welcome at any time I went back. And I did go back several times.

Tape 5

- 00:35 **Robert, now**
- 01:00 **so your in Leeds then you back to Brighton, now you were waiting being called up. Had you chosen your crew by this stage?**
- No, no Sam and I were on leave and then we were called back to Brighton to get our next posting. Because every posting was done, was done from Brighton, and, we found that we were going, we were posted to 17 OTU [Operational Training Unit], which was an
- 01:30 Operational Training Unit, which was stationed up at Silverstone. And to which we, eventually repaired by train up to, train on Wellingtons. Now Wellingtons only had, one turret. So Sam and I were still not part of a crew. When we trained in the Wellingtons, we took several guns up together, and
- 02:00 we did air to drogue firing, in other words there was another Wellington which was towing a crop plane, and we would, fire at that. All of our bullets were colour coded, so that I had a certain number of rounds to fire, with a certain colour. The next gunner would come into the turret and he had a certain number, the same number of rounds to fire, with a different colour. And, 4 or 5
- 02:30 of us did that in each aircraft. Then it would be the turn of the other Wellington, we would tow a, let a drogue out and they would fire at our drogue. There were other guns in that particular aircraft.
- What is a drogue?**
- Well a drogue is like an ice cream cone, very wide mouth, tapering away to, a narrow, just like an ice cream cone is. It was made of cloth and, as it was being
- 03:00 towed through the air, of course, it was fully inflated, and the bullets would rip, through that and leave behind a paint stain. So that at the end of the exercise the instructors could count those colours and so well you had 3% shots, you had 5% you had 10%. Nobody ever got 100% of course. But you were able to get
- 03:30 a percentage of, of, success rate. At this drogue tally. As well we also had what we called a camera, synchronised to the guns, we had fighter affiliation, that is that a fighter trainer called a Martinet would come up and try to attack us, and we would try to, catch him in our camera, as we shot all the time.
- 04:00 You know, shot with the camera, so that, we would have to maynover out of his range, but still keep the camera gun on him, as though we were shooting him down.
- And you were taking pictures?**

We were taking pictures, so that after woods, they could take the, film out of the shooting gun and show us how good or bad we were. So, and it really did show whether we kept it under

04:30 control or not.

So all this training without shooting but positioning?

Yes that right, the only shooting we did was of this drogue, but, and ground flying too, cause we had to keep our eye, and we had, did a lot of, duck shooting or clay pigeon shooting. At other fixed targets as well on the ground. So that was really

05:00 how we trained, as gunners, getting full into an operational unit. Or it was an Operation Training Unit. This went on for, in the meantime pilots weren't training on, different pilots were training on the Wellingtons. Different navigators and different wireless operators and different bomb aimers. So everybody was still in training but we had not,

05:30 at that stage formed a crew. Because we couldn't, there was no room on the turret for the 2nd gunner, okay. So, but we trained there for about 3 months, and towards the end, towards the end of the training that when we had to go and choose our own crews. We had the choice either go and choose our own, crew, or choose that the authorities choose a crew for us.

06:00 So we decided that we were going to fly together and that we'd form up and international crew, because it was RAF unit, we weren't attached to the RAAF unit. So we thought well lets look around for a pilot, and then we spotted a New Zealander, and we liked the look of him so we said well go and talk with him, and see, whether we can put up with him. Not him put up with us, we put up with him.

06:30 And John was actually, probably 12 or 18 months older than we were, so we choose John and then the 3 of us went okay well just, John look for an engineer, because he is the one who is going to be sitting beside you and tuning up the engines. So we got the Scotsman, Tommy. Then the 4 of us, then went okay lets look for a navigator. So we went to where the navigators were

07:00 pooled and we saw an Aussie there, we liked to look of so we said alright well go and ask him. So Reg joined us, so that made 3 Aussies in the crew and, then we 5 said now we need a wireless operator and we need a, a bomb aimer, so we found a couple, went to the pool of wireless operators and found an Englishman from a different part of the country,

07:30 and then we found a bomber from a different part of the country. So we, that made up the crew of 7.

How did you meet, was it in like a big hall or?

No, no out in the open, out in the, the navigators all stood in a pool, the wireless operators, in a pool, the bomb operators stood in a pool, the pilots in a pool, and so on and so forth, so Sam and I and the gunners in a pool, but Sam and I had made up our minds to fly together so then we'd

08:00 just go over to the pilot's pool and, look around for a likely lad, and from there to the next one, then the next one and the next one, until we had 7 of us.

And everyone was doing this?

Everyone one doing that yes.

How would you describe the scene?

Pandemonium. I guess, that probably be, pandemonium with a purpose. Because you had to like to look of the fellow, or hopefully, because you were going to be with a crew and

08:30 a crew has to co-operate fully with each other. There's no such thing as an individual in the crew, you're a constant, when your flying, you are a constant you've go to be bound together. So we found who we thought would make up a good crew for us to fly with.

And, aging on this you had to make decision without knowing these people?

Yes.

And it was just the look of them. Was it anything that you?

Well

09:00 only in the sense that, if you wanted a really mixed international crew, you wouldn't, look for a crew with another 5 Aussies. And there weren't that many Aussies on our station anyway. So you'd look for an international group like New Zealanders, as we did, and the British Isles. So that we finished up with a Scotsman, a Londoner and one from the Midlands.

09:30 So that's the 3 different point of the British culture as well.

Were you using intuition like something in their face?

Oh, I suppose in a way that could have been in the background, but the moment you open mouth,

sometimes the moment you open your mouth, people can tell you whether your idiot or not. And, there were a lot of idiots too, and probably, a lot of people still call me an idiot, but that's beside the point. No, I

10:00 think that probably intuition played a part, but emotion I think.

Then we moved onto picking crews. How did you all get along. Get to know each other?

Oh very well, we all slept in the same hut. And, a hut was allocated to us, and then we had the 7 beds in this hut. So there was no way in the wide

10:30 world that we couldn't get on with each other. If we couldn't on the ground we weren't going to be any good in the air. So that was sort of a grounding situation. We did have a problem with Martin, the bomb aimer. In that he was an Englishman and we used to have to drag him to the showers once a week. We could no longer put up with it. Were, they used to be absolutely amazed at us wanting to shower everyday. No mater how cold it was,

11:00 where as they didn't shower everyday. But Martin was the worst, the other 2 weren't too bad, they did every couple of days. But, Martin we would drag him screaming to the showers every week

Did you have any, like practical jokes or anything you played on each other?

Oh, well not much practical jokes. We enjoyed each others company and we all, went out together,

11:30 in the early stages until later when we bought the car and the bikes. That wasn't until we got to the squadron. But we'd all go out tougher and, one memorable night, and I'm just stepping a little ahead here. This was when we went to heavy conversion unit to train on Sterling's, that was the first of the 4 engine aircraft. And, 2 crews, that's another

12:00 New Zealand led crew and ours, went out to the local village one night. That made 14 of us. We all shouted, had a shout so that made a least 14 drinks. When we were coming home 2 things happened, we were walking back to the unit, when, suddenly John, the pilot had disappeared, he had fallen down an embankment. And,

12:30 of course we still, we were all, should we say, non compos mentis, but a bit under the weather [not feeling well], so it was great hilarity, trying to pull, John out of the, out of this trench. So we then proceeded further on our way to the unit and when we were getting closer to the unit. Mind you we had, I'm stepping ahead of time here.

13:00 We had, not long been at this unit, when we, heard the rat-tat-tat of a machine gun. Then we looked up and we saw one of the Sterlings that had been circuits and bumps had been sprung by a night intruder. This is what the Germans used to do. Come over when, circuits and bumps were being practiced. And he shot the Sterling

13:30 down and it crashed into another hanger and, so, that crew seldom perished, and I think about 5 of the Sterlings were blown up in the crash as well. So by the time we got back to the station we, we were very, in a much more sober mood. And , you know went straight to bed without any shenanigans [antics].

Did that bring home to you, that you were in a war?

Well I guess in a way it

14:00 did, because it bought home to us that we were in a war zone and that, this could happen to us tomorrow night or the next night, or a week later, when we were doing the same thing. Because that was quite a tendency of the German intruders.

So what happened next? Where were you taken to next?

From operation training you, we went to, the heavy conversion

14:30 unit. HCU [Heavy Conversion Unit] which was training from 2 engine aircraft to 4 engine aircraft. And that's when that episode happened. There was another episode that happened while we were there, more of a hilarious one, in that again we'd been out the local village having a few drinks and when we came back to the station,

15:00 something, something overtook Sam, and he got a fit of the giggles, and he started racing through one of the fields, and racing through chasing him. Then we realised that we were in somebody's cornfield, just adjacent to the station. So we got out of there quick smart and got back to the hut. We no sooner got into bed when the officer came around and we all tried to pretend to be asleep.

15:30 And, because we knew we were going to be in trouble. But we got out of that one okay. But we didn't realise it was a cornfield first, until after we'd been tramping down the corn a little bit. But anyway that's one of those things that happened. But nothing adventurous happened there, we, we just kept on with the training. At that time too, we were a complete crew, because the Sterling's were a 7-man

16:00 crew. So we flew everything, as our crew, all the time. So that lasted for about another 2 months or so,

then we went to, what is called a Lank Finishing School, where we converted from the Sterling to Lancaster's. Because everything was different. The turrets were in the same position, and everything was else in the same position, but the mechanics of it were

- 16:30 different. We had different turrets and so. So we had 3 weeks converting to Lancaster's and then we were posted to our squadron. In the meantime we, we also had leave, at different time, and, I, I'd been back to Yorkshire quite a few times. Sam had gone to, to, Birmingham with the wireless operator, they
- 17:00 teamed up pretty well. Martin, was a loner, he was Londoner, he went back to, London. Reg, Reg was a bit of a loner as well, and he, by this time also we decided also, that we were going to buy a car, when we got to the squadron. To, so we could be a bit more mobile. And, it was in this leave that before going to the squadron, that Reg and I were down in
- 17:30 London and we got caught in this, rear-one episode. Rear-one of course, well it was colloquially known as the buzz bomb. So we helped out there and we got back a bit late, and we go a reprimand and loss of 5 days pay. But you know, was a little bit of a burden. But then it was time to go to the Squadron. We were,
- 18:00 what was called 3 group. Originally we, when we went to train on Wellingtons we were 5 group, now 5 group was mostly made up with Australian Squadrons, and we thought we would be going to an Australian Squadron. But when we got this, mixed group, then, they, decided that we would switch over to 3 group. So we were then in 3 group when we went to conversion unit. And
- 18:30 in 3 group right through. So we finally finished up 514 Squadron which was stationed about 6 miles out from Cambridge.

It must have been quite a long time since you first joined?

Well, yes, yes well it was, it was, I got to the squadron in, at the end of May. And I'm know as, the whole crew were,

- 19:00 Normandy Veterans. Now people say how can you be a Normandy Veteran you didn't, weren't on the beaches, didn't fight on the land. The purpose behind that was that everybody who was flying from D-day [Allied landing in France, 1944] up until the 23 August, was considered, a Normandy Veteran. The same as the navy, any navy ship which took part, even after the landings
- 19:30 was a, Normandy Veteran. Same with the army, you didn't have to be on the beaches on D-day, if you came later on, it was up before the 23 August, you were automatically a Normandy Veteran.

What was the 23 August?

Well that was the cut of time to be called a Normandy Veteran.

Yes, so that date wasn't of any significance?

No, no that was all that. Naturally because I'd already been shot down before the 23 August. So I

- 20:00 automatically a Normandy Veteran.

Did you ever feel an urgency, because you trained for over a year?

Oh to get into it.

Yes to get into it?

Oh yes, yes, I think everyone, not just our crew, but everybody was chafing at the bit to get into it. But of course you still had to undergo this further training, otherwise,

- 20:30 you couldn't go straight from say learning a gun in a furry battle, to learning to shoot from a turret in the Lancaster. So we were all chafing at the bit and of course our first mission couldn't come soon enough.

Tell us about when you finally had a posting, when you were called up?

Well we finally.

- 21:00 When we got to the squadron, we were only there for a few days, because, what we called the chop ratter, that was the aircraft that didn't come back was getting fairly high. So we were put into action, probably 2 days after we got there. I think we did a couple of familiarisation, trips just to, get, the pilot used to the territory
- 21:30 in, which we operated. And then our first, our first flight was a low level, trip, dropping bombs on the German troops in front of the allied advance, over on, on the Normandy peninsular. So that was our first op [operation], then daylight and being the tail I could see everything that had happened, as we,
- 22:00 went away from the target, on the way back. And, that, the, what I could see of the ground from the effect, not just our bombs, but bombs from other, aircraft, what, catastrophic things they were doing to the German troops. And of course, our troops, weren't too far behind, the Germans had started

retreating a bit, but,

22:30 the allied attack was pretty well on, on a roll at that stage. But fortunately we didn't, didn't see too much happening to our troops. All of our bombers finished, up in the place where they were suppose to finish up. So that was our first trip. We did a couple of daylight trips in the, civil type of area.

Just going back to that, can you

23:00 **describe what that looked like?**

Well, if you could, I can best describe it from the night time view when you see the effect, it was, in daylight it was like, an inferno, but you couldn't see the flames, you could just see the smoke and the earth being upheaved. And you know

23:30 we were pretty low, to make a low level attack, the fact that you've got to be pretty low, that's why its called low level. There's no point being up 10,000 or 20,000 feet. And on one trip, not that one, but on one trip on our low level, we were affected by our own bombs. We were so low, that we picked up the shrapnel, from proceeding bombs, not so much our own, because we were past the point of impact,

24:00 but from the other. And we had damage to our fuselage, which was, we were in a different aircraft on the fateful day. Our aircraft we always flew, in, a Lancaster with air-cooled Hercules engines. Now all they, the main stream Lancaster's had Rolls Royce in line. But

24:30 because of the constant fear that there might be a shortage if the Rolls Royce factory had been bombed out of oblivion, they had to have another source of, engines. So they got these, mistral Hercules air-cooled engines and mainly for, they only built about 400 in the entirety. They weren't quite up to the standard of the

25:00 Rolls Royce in line engines, but they carried a very very heavy bomb load. They were very good, its just that they could not get up to the height that the other Lan's [Lancaster] could. So we were in what was called a Lan 2 second generation.

Actually it's a good opportunity to maybe you to describe to us what a Lancaster is, looks like in detail?

25:30 Well, it's a elongated body, with sprouting wings on each side. 2 engines on each side port and starboard. In the front you had the front gun turret, which was always maned by the bomb aimer, when, we weren't on the bombing run. He had two 303's. The pilot and engineer

26:00 sat together in the front cock pit. And the bomb aimer was always in, totally in the nose, if he wasn't in the gunnery he was over the bombsite. Then you came back and the next one sitting behind the pilot was the navigator. Then we had a main sparer. Spar across the fuselage, which was before the wings, and you climb over that then there was the radio operator.

26:30 And the next was the mid upper turret which supported, two no. 2, 20mm cannons. Then my turret right at the back, tail and arse end Charlie, they used to call us. And I had four 303's. Now to get into the turret, what I had to do was, the turret, had to step up onto a platform, because the tail,

27:00 tailplane went across and above what was a, a raised section which I would have to step up on, then, pull myself along on my bottom to the turret. Firstly I'd have to stow the parachute. We didn't wear our parachute. We only wore a harness. Everybody had to stow their parachute in a part of the aircraft, which was stock

27:30 specially built. In my case the rear turret was in on the right, left, my right side, as they squadron forward and, but on the port side of the aircraft. Then I'd open the turret doors and then just wiggle myself in to sit of the seat then reach behind me and close the doors. And I had four 303's.

Describe the turret exactly?

28:00 Well it, mine was a martin turret. There was very little room in it, it was a very very tight squeeze, tight squeeze. That why we couldn't wear a parachute while, neither could the others because everything was a fairly tight squeeze. Then you'd have a control column, with the, trigger, one trigger, and again left or right,

28:30 forward and back, just like a, motorbike controls, steering and, well they didn't elevate in the air, but of course, elevation and depression of the guns. There was a certain degree of plastic, but some turrets didn't have the plastic because that had to be spotlessly clean, because any small mark on the perspex would

29:00 magnify in the dark night air. So you'd always be jumping at things that weren't there. So really the ground crew had to keep them spotlessly clean and the gunner had to check it thoroughly before he go into the aircraft to start off. So there wasn't much room, you know. That's why they wanted small people.

And, describe what it was like in the air, the environment

29:30 **up there for you?**

Cold, cold very cold, I'll tell you what I had to wear. The front crew, had heating. But right out at the tail I didn't have heating so my standard dress when I'd would, do on bombing missions. Because we flew higher. Was on my feet I would have 2 or 3 pairs of

30:00 socks. Electrically heated slippers and then my flying boots. On my body I'd have normal underwear, or thermal underwear. My uniform, not dress uniform but battle uniform, over that I would have an electrically heated suit, and outer suite and then what we called the woolly bull. Then on my hands I'd

30:30 have 3 or 4 pairs of gloves, electrically heated gloves and then gauntlets. So I would, straddling from the transport that took us to our disperse area, to get onto the aircraft I was just like a crouching bear with. But that what, you could image at 20,000 feet the temperature - 30 to 40 degrees. You were never ever able

31:00 to take your gloves off. If the guns, didn't work, if you couldn't crank them, if they wouldn't work then you could not do a thing about it. Because If you took your gloves off and you put your hand on metal it would just stick to the metal. Just freeze completely to the metal. So that's why we had to have some heating as well too. Also, so that's the way I looked

31:30 in the rear gun, the rear turret and I'll show you where my war time office was. Now does that answer your question.

Yes. How did the electric gloves etc work?

They were all wired and they come to, a point and then I would plug them into the heating, to be electric that came from the front.

32:00 So it was all kept, moderately warm, moderately warm, but when you think, you're on the alert all the time anyway, and our longest trip was nearly 9 hours, so we were on attention all the time. Its not easy staring out into the dark sky looking for a pin point. But that's how the electric worked. Didn't keep one completely warm, but it was bearable.

32:30 **How did you communicate with others?**

Oh well we had, with our oxygen masks there were microphones built into the oxygen masks, that was one of the first things you put in to, the connection in the turret, so that you could tell the pilot that you were ready and he was ready and so on. I always had more flying time than my crew, always, because I was in, first off, the

33:00 tarmac because the tail came up and I was always the last home, when the tail came down. So I always had more flying time. Not much but it was enough to be able to sky about it.

Tell us about the name tail end Charlie?

Oh well, I think that just cam from the fact that we were tail enders. At the tail end of the aircraft and, I don't know the origin of the word Charlie. But, I think it just

33:30 rhymed in pretty well and sounded better than Tony or Augusta or something like that.

There was a thing going around that, you were one of the most likely to get killed?

Yes, yes and there were a lot of gunners hosed down in their turrets. Because, take it from the enemy point of view, they want to kill off the first class of danger that they are going to run into. Which

34:00 would be the tail gunner. So they always went for the tail gunner first, if they could, they would try and knock the gunner out and then give them a free go.

Did this make you scared?

No more scared than any other part of the crew, because after all we were all in the one plane and even if I'd go first the other 6 would probably follow soon after because the attacker would have a free go

34:30 in, although the mid upper gunner was still active. But he could come up with a different angle that the mid upper gunner could never hit. Although it was the most dangerous position, initially, it could just, still incur the loss of the whole crew anyway.

So tell us about some more of those missions. We've heard about the first mission?

We did,

35:00 2 or 3 in quick, quick succession in Normandy, with petrol dumps, and with, railway marching yard, we, they were prime targets, of course, for us, for the bombers. We did one on the, at Homburg, in the northern part of Germany. We did 2 to, Stuttgart, the engineering

35:30 works, at Stuttgart, which, was a long trip it was nearly 9 hours there and back. As I said the affect of 9 hours when you've had a full day up, then 9 hours in the air, and staring out into the darkness. They

were long long trips. And you couldn't get out of the turrets, although the Lancaster's were fitted with what we called a Nelson, which is a theoretical a toilet.

36:00 But you couldn't dare take your little fellow out and, snap. So they were rather useless, but. Where else did we go.

What did you do in that situation?

You just had to wet yourself. No it happened to many aircrew on long trips. I mean some of our trips were only 3 hours and 4 hours, that was alright. But, with these longer trips of nearly 9 hours,

36:30 and just having had dinner before we left or something like that, so, but I must admit it was always good to look forward to the rum and coke at the end of it. It was always and upper thought, in our mouths, or in our heads that we were going to get a rum and coke, rum and coffee, coffee and rum. I'll get in right in a moment.

37:00 But we did trips to various parts of Germany and France. We had one very very long low level trip out from the squadron, cross the channel down through the bay, and this day we were just, about 50 to 100 feet about the water. So there was the defeat of the radar. Then we went right round the bottom of France then turned into Germany to do our bombing.

37:30 Then back home we came. That was started in daylight because most of our troops started in daylight and finished in daylight. But skimming across the top of the water and fishing boats was quite exhilarating. When we were in training once we had quite and exhilarating experience, though we didn't have, up mind, uplifting experience.

38:00 We were doing a low level cross country. And of course right in the path of us was a nudist colony, but we couldn't get low enough. But it was just something for the memory books.

Where was this nudist colony?

In England. In England oh they had plenty of nudist colonies over in Europe and England.

I can't image it during the war?

Oh well people still had to live, people still went about their normal

38:30 business, and their normal walk of life, whatever they were doing. They had to of course. They had their play time. I mean the bridges were all closed and they had these anti attack defences and so on and so forth. And then of course I don't think there was anywhere in England that you'd really call a beach. I mean there's nothing in the Riverina that you'd really call a

39:00 beach, if you'd like to call pebbles a beach in the Mediterranean then, you know. They get an eye opener when they come out here. Then Spain and Portugal and parts of Italy have some wonderful beaches. But everybody had to go about their daily lives.

And was it more scary going low flying, because there was the possibility of anti aircraft at the time?

Well, we didn't do low flying over land, only in training and when we did this

39:30 low flying over the channel and the Bay of Biscay, before we came to land again, to approach land we would climb up to bombing height, 13, 14 thousand and then come in, come in on the bombing run.

Tape 6

00:35 **Tell us about those bomb attacks?**

Well Reg and I were on leave in London. I had been staying. We had been staying with relatives of my step mothers. And, we had

01:00 been out, having a few beers in one of the local hotels, named, I can't, I think they lived in an area called Edgware Road. And with the buzz bomb, all the V1s', it was mechanical engine, petrol driven on the top of the bomb. And the idea was they, fired these from ramps in the chalet

01:30 area in France. And, they didn't fly high, they just flew until the engine ran out of juice. And when the engine ran out of juice, of course they couldn't fly any further and they would just come down and, boom. And on this particular, what you would normally do in London, you would hear a buzz bomb coming, they

02:00 gave you plenty of warning, you could hear them from miles away, and you would stand still, and you would hope that the motor was still going as it passed overhead. When the heard the motor stop you would just stand still, and hope that it wasn't just somewhere close by. Well on this particular occasion we had been in one of the hotels in the afternoon. In the early evening, we were in the house, and

- 02:30 we heard this a buzz bomb coming over then it stopped and boom. We knew it wasn't far away, in fact it shook the house, did some damage to the house. But we raced out to see, whether we could do anything at all, but of course you have to keep out of the way of the essential services. But when we got back to the house we saw, we had seen there was a lot more damage to the house than we thought.
- 03:00 So we then helped this cousin to try and clean up. We helped for a few days. We then went back to where the bomb had landed and it was at the hotel we'd been drinking at. And we thought oh well we weren't meant to die yet anyway. So, that's really the story of that particular episode. But it was scary being, when you
- 03:30 hear these motors and then stop and so on. Of course they gave way to the V2. The V2 was a stratospheric rocket, which took off and went straight up into the stratosphere and came down. All the first thing you heard was a great big explosion. That was the V2, because the V1's weren't, a great success, the fighter pilots were able to shoot a lot down.
- 04:00 One method that they had of, putting the, flying bombs off target, that they got up as close as they could to the bomb with their wing, and of course that interfered with the air flow under the wing of the bomb. And it would tip over, so some of them even, got them, instead of putting their wings, just right almost right under tipping their wing and
- 04:30 tipping the bomb over. So a lot were destroyed that way, and a lot were destroyed by machine guns in the fighters, and anti-aircraft.
- What did they sound like?**
- Sound like? A bad two stroke motor. that all they were and so you, you know what a two stroke motor on a lawn mower or motorbike is like. Well that what was, what the noise of the buzz bomb.
- 05:00 **And how much damage did they do?**
- Oh extensive, because it, they did very, about 5, 600 pounds of explosives can do a lot of damage of course. But it was the continuity of them, that was also doing the damage. Not just the odd one here and there, that did enough damage. But you put several coming over, in the one burst, did a lot of damage. Because they also stopped at
- 05:30 different intervals, but, so a lot of damage to London was done by the buzz bombs as well as the, as well as the bomber attacks, in the London blitz.
- Was there something about the fact that they were delivered by pilots, that created extra fear?**
- I don't think it was so much extra fear, they could still hear them, they could still hear the planes, so it didn't matter if there was a
- 06:00 pilot there or not they, hear the noise with the planes of course and there would be an increase then a decreasing noise. Then with the buzz bombs there would be an increasing noise when they came closer and then suddenly nothing. And that's when you got scared because, you wonder where it was going to drop, on you or near you. So that was probably the most scary part. But again London got on with their job. And, I still had a good time in London at different times. You didn't', you didn't stop going to
- 06:30 London just because of that happening.
- I guess where I'm getting at, was there a fear that this was a new weapon that might bring Germany back into?**
- Possibly although I don't know that there was a great deal of that fear because by this time the, we were doing heavy bombing and raid on Germany and
- 07:00 dealing out a lot more punishment there than, they were doing. You know the buzz bomb had a, so called limited range, cause they could attack other areas, it wasn't just in London. They used them in other coastal cities particularly.
- With the, with going on a mission, what kind of instructions would you receive?**
- Well we always had a
- 07:30 long briefing session. We were told in the morning daily routine orders who was going on a mission that night. It was a simple as that. You were just told you were going on a mission. And you were, told when the briefing would be, when you would have, supper and so on. Now we would then proceed out to our aircraft to do, a daily inspection and check that everything
- 08:00 was in working order. The armouries would load the bombs and the, the belts of bullets. Later during the day, then we would all, then we would have our, evening meal, and then the gunners would go to the gunnery section, the Navs to the Nav. The bomber and so on and the pilot. We all had a separate briefing first. We were
- 08:30 told of what aircraft. Whatever aircraft we could expect, to meet, on the way in and on the way out. Not

told where we were going at that stage, and then we would all gather in the main briefing room, where the commanding officer and the operations officer, and the met officer, and other would all gather on the dice. And then a

- 09:00 large scale map would then be unveiled and would be, to where we would, to where we were going on the route. To where we were going, which way we were coming back in colour ribbon. So we knew then when, what the target was going to be. We would then get the complete briefing. How which way we were going, how we'd get there, what anti-aircraft we could expect. The met officer would talk
- 09:30 about the weather. Whether we'd meet 10/10ths cloud, whether we'd meet 4/10th cloud, just exactly what, he hoped would be the type of weather we would meet. The navigation officer would tell the wireless operator, or the radio officer would talk so that everybody would go concise, opinion. You know had an idea of what was going to happen. When that finished, that was time to go.
- 10:00 Then we would be picked up in the trucks and taken out to our dispensary unit. Picture if you can, a large air field, no aircraft were bunched together. Every aircraft had their own dispensary unit. So that if they hit one the whole lot wouldn't go up. So we were, as I said transported out to our, aircraft which we
- 10:30 had inspected during the day and, then we'd have a talk with the ground crew and, he would maintain the aircraft. Then it was time to go we would climb on board, cheerio fellows, hope to see you in a few hours, or see you in the morning. Then we'd climb on board and go to our various positions and then do our own check and. In my case a check, a complete
- 11:00 check of the turret, whether it was rotating properly, whether the guns were elevating properly, depressing properly. Rotation of the guns as well as the turret. Check that the ammunition had been, correctly loaded, and the guns were pointing up in the air. Because you didn't, didn't take off or land unless the guns were elevated, so that, you know, if there was a miss fire it would be
- 11:30 flying up in the air instead of straight and level. And then gradually we'd all report into the skipper, the, that all systems go, ready to go skipper. And then he'd start the engines and away we'd go, out to dispersal, out to taxi, get the, a green light from the control, officer, and we'd taxi out to the, to the take off point,
- 12:00 in the daylight, the WAFs, or in the meantime we, of course wed do our parachute from the parachute section and the girls would all wish us well. Some would kiss us goodbye and say see you tomorrow. Bring that pack back I want to put it back in the slot. And the, quite a number would gather at, at the caravan, which they used during the day as a take off point.
- 12:30 That we would taxi out and get into our correct line of take-off and away we'd go.

Would you have any, or you personally, have any superstitions?

No, no, I didn't carry any lucky charms, or unlucky charms, I didn't really have any superstitions, I'd always say well I hope I get back here safely. On

- 13:00 one occasion we were taking off. It was towards the end of the day. It was still daylight. Because in England in those days, they had double daylight savings time. It was still bright day at 11 o'clock at night. Long twilight and then 2 hours of extra time and when I was sitting in the turret and wed just started up the engines and I saw a, a, girl, oh I don't know probably in her 20's,
- 13:30 riding a bike. We were always quite close to human, human habitation, and this was a roadway, the main road. And she saw us start up, so she got off the, got off the bike and put it down on the verge, and just knelt and obviously prayed, that we'd come back safely. It though that was a nice gesture.
- 14:00 And then we off, I said were rolling and off we went.

Did you do any praying?

No I wasn't, I wasn't a, particularly religious person, still not, but no, no I don't think so. You know when the pardre, we had to go to church service every now and then. Well that was okay that didn't worry me. But no I don't, I

- 14:30 can't remember ever praying. I might of said bring me back, something like that.

What kind of formations did you fly in?

We didn't. We didn't fly in formations per se. The Americans did. Each one of, in a bomber stream, had his height pattern, his air speed, had his direction of where he was going.

- 15:00 The, generally the stream, flew at different heights. There might be say, 300 in a stream, 600, 100 in a stream. But you had your different height levels. But that didn't stop crashes. In fact we nearly aborted a couple of times, when suddenly, at night time an aircraft, would, take up our running, just like a motor car takes up a bit of road way.
- 15:30 And we, John would have to throw the aircraft about the sky so that we could escape it. So that

happened. There were many aircraft lost in, friendly fire, or aircraft crashing into the other because it was so difficult at night-time. And you, you, even 300's or 400 aircraft zoning in on 1 target. Theoretical they were all suppose to be slightly

- 16:00 different height, and separation, but of course wind, differentiation up there, could make a difference. And they did. In fact one particular daylight raid I'm sitting in the turret, we, we were doing, bombing of, I think it was railway yards at the time. And behind me there was a Halifax, the other 2,
- 16:30 major bomber, and a Lancaster. Now they were told were going this way, because I'm facing that way. Flying backwards, as I used to call it I'm always flying backwards. Now our bomb doors were open, and these their bomb doors were open. And just as they were pressing the trigger, the bomb aimer in each aircraft
- 17:00 pressed the trigger, they moved over like that and the bombs from the aircraft on top crashed onto the Halifax and I could just see them bouncing off the wings. I knew there wasn't going to be an explosion, because they hadn't had enough height to fall to detonate them. And I thought oh well they got out of that. Then I found out later on that one of the bombs
- 17:30 had taken the nose straight off the Halifax and took the bomb aimer with it. He was the only one, they got back safely with no nose, but they lost a bomb aimer. So it was always on, always a possibility.

How did the pilot and the navigator manage to get their planes on target?

Well the navigator was working all the time. Of course, and, he might,

- 18:00 say to the pilot, 10 degrees to port, get into a new track. And they would, co-operate, you know through the microphone, through the intercom they would talk with each other. Now when the, we were getting close to target, within 15 minutes of the target, schedule time. The bomb aimer would come down into his bomb site,
- 18:30 he would then virtually control the aircraft. He would tell the pilot what to do. Because ahead, he could see the flares from the pathfinders, who had lit up the target and we would get instructions from the master bomber, who might only be in the mosquito at a lower level, and he'd say bomb on the red flares. The
- 19:00 bomb aimer would then, line up the red flares in his bomb site and he would be continually be talking with the pilot, left, left, steady, right, right, right, steady, steady, steady, bombs away okay. So that was run right onto the target. Before we sort of let bombs away the master bomber might
- 19:30 change and say bomb on the yellow flares. Because better flares had gone down, better target, in that, saying that we weren't that far away that we had to change courses, but so, the bomb aimer would then put his bomb site on the yellow flares. Then the same procedure. He was in charge of the air craft until, when he said bombs away, he would
- 20:00 drop the bombs, he would say steady cameras rolling, because we would always take cameras of photos, of the target and then when we'd gone far enough and we'd taken enough photos he'd say right bomb door is closed lets get out of here. So the pilot would close the bomb doors and away we'd go. And the gap navigator would give a new, plan
- 20:30 of compass points to take.

So you didn't fly in formation but you had other planes, like the Mosquito, and the one flare sorry I missed that?

The flares, well they were dropped by Pathfinders.

Pathfinders?

Yes a Pathfinder was a special force. And ironically we, after this trip that we, bought our crew had been selected to go onto Pathfinders.

- 21:00 But we had to do a couple more trips. There was a special officer who went round all the Squadron to get the best crew for the Pathfinder Force. Because they were suppose to be the elite. And ironically we were due to go onto the Pathfinders but we never made it. But they always went ahead to, light up the target with flares.

21:30 How would the Germans counter a bomb attack, what defences?

Oh well with anti-aircraft, vicious anti-aircraft, fire, because by the time that we got there they had, they had very very good radar. Excellent radar and they could pick us up. We used to also have to try and defeat their radar, we had, material,

- 22:00 aluminium strips which we called window, that we dropped these aluminium strips which would make a 300 bomb stream look like a 1000 bomb stream, because the aluminium would show up on their radar exactly the same as the plane would show up on their radar. You see so, we did have that sort of material as our defence. But they had very good radar, very good radar.

- 22:30 And they would vector their aircraft onto our aircraft. They had 2 types of fighter pilot, they had a freelancer, who just, knew there was a bomber stream and would go seeking, just seeking any target at all, and then they had the other fighter pilot who were vected, onto they new what, exactly where our aircraft was and they would vector their fighter onto that aircraft.
- 23:00 Just pick on in the area. And the anti-aircraft of course, with their search light, they could show up, and if you got caught, go caught in the searchlight by one searchlight the rest would cone in on you. They would all come in so that everyone was point up at that aircraft. We got caught a couple of times ourselves, but our pilot was able to get us out of it. That was a very

23:30 dangerous situation to be coned.

Describe that for us, when that happened?

Well what happened was that one aircraft would pick you up in the stream. And every aircraft in that vicinity would then automatically come round, to join that other one, and they would, there might be half a dozen aircraft, half a dozen search lights on the one aircraft. So it was lit up like the proverbial beacon

- 24:00 and then the fighter and, fighter and the anti aircraft guns would have a better target that they could see.

How did that feel when you were lit up?

Oh not very good, not very good, get us out of here John, get us out of here quick time mate. No it, it was always a bit of a scary time, because, you, you could, the whole interior of the aircraft was just caught in, there was this one

- 24:30 very very bright searchlight . The beam of the searchlight is very very powerful indeed.

And how did he manage to get you out?

Well by manoeuvring the aircraft, diving, diving one way and the other was. It's like when we attack, only when we attack, when we were attacked, the first order, that the gunner would give to the pilot, depending on from where he came. If he came in

- 25:00 from the starboard quarter, he would say corkscrew starboard. Now you can image what a corkscrew is like, you know what it is, the manoeuvre would be dive starboard, climb port, dive starboard, climb port so it was, lessening the target area for the fighter. So just like a corkscrew does, you know how a corkscrew goes around like.

- 25:30 So that how you'd try and get out of the searchlights. Put on a lot of speed or decrease speed and hope that the searchlights would get ahead of you and not be able to get back to pick you up. So that, they were the basic manoeuvres.

And did you have fighters escorting you?

No, no. Because it was no good trying to escort a night time, because we couldn't

- 26:00 see them they couldn't see us. We did the Americans always had fighters, because they did mostly daylight raids. I don't know that they ever did any night-time work, they may have, but they were really daylighters. They flew in formation, a box like formation. The lead aircraft and one would tuck in between them and so on and so forth, because then the

- 26:30 guns, were also protection for each other, they overlapped. Usually they dropped their bombs on the lead plane, there was only the one bomb aimer in the lead plane, when they said bombs away, everybody would drop their bombs. The, and they never carried anywhere near the weight of bombs that the Lancaster or Halifax did. Because they were also very heavily armoured. Whereas we didn't have any armour

- 27:00 plate at all. I think the back of the seat of the pilot was armour plated, but that's about all, we didn't have anything. There was no armour plating in the turrets, nor, in the rest of the aircraft.

So you were pretty exposed?

Oh pretty exposed, yes. That right.

- 27:30 **With the night missions what could you see from your position?**

Well I could only see the ground over which we were going, way down, way down there, you'd see an occasional light of course. I had, probably the best view, of anybody in the crew,

- 28:00 after we dropped our bombs. Because I was the last to go over the target, and by that time of course the bombs had exploded, the incendiaries had started and that was the time it was really, like looking into, Dante's inferno, and you could see explosions happening all the time, new fires starting, billowing smoke and.

- 28:30 Always a comment from the front, "What does it look like Chester-Master?" Well we plastered that place

by the looks of it from here. So it looks as though all of our bombs had exploded and of course, the bombs from the previous aircrafts. The bomb that were still coming and dropping from the aircraft behind us. So that was always, a birds eye view of exactly what was happening

29:00 on the ground.

And what did you think about these?

Oh the poor bastards that were down there. That's about all, and, but it never worried me because they were, there doing it to us. They started the war we didn't. You know they have to put up with it.

How did you cope with that kind of idea?

It never really worried me. I didn't have any

29:30 worries about it. If you start, if you start worrying you shouldn't be here you should be on the ground and going home. Because, you weren't going to be able to do your job properly. If you started to worry about what you were going to do, or what happened last time, you can't do that.

Did you ever come across what was known as lack of moral fibre?

No, no I never saw that, at any stage at all. I know that it did happen,

30:00 but then you can't always say that its, it's that persons fault. The mind is a very very funny thing. And many things can happen in the mind and the mind is, only a very thin line between sanity and insanity in any case. And, if some of them went, went a bit bonkers you couldn't really say, what you could say is probably

30:30 as for the grace of God go away and be satisfied that you hadn't gone the same way.

What was a good kind of way of coping with some of the difficulties of war?

Not to worry about it. Not to worry about it and think of the next leave your going to have or something like that, you know. And we enjoyed ourselves on leave, we didn't enjoy ourselves going out bombing. Anybody who said they got enjoyment was, is a

31:00 liar or crazy themselves anyway. But, no I don't think any of us in our crew, had any of those feelings, as I said a little bit of poor bastards down there. But then you think of what they did to the cities of London and England and other countries.

And what humour did that come into it?

Yes well we made our own fun and humour, when in different things that we did. For example when

31:30 we weren't flying, I quoted a couple of incidents before. And we go out into the local village, and one particular, time in the stormy season, we were walking down from the village, we came, we'd had a few beer, we had a couple in our hands, and came across a vendor selling beautiful strawberries on the side eof the road. So we walked along munching strawberries

32:00 and having a drink of beer. It was good fun, good stuff. Sorry one day we were going out, we decided to go to the pictures in town and I said oh I can't be bother having a shave. But, for some reason somebody from another crew said oh there's a little fellow in the village, he'll shave you. So it cost you threepence for a shave. But things were low cost then.

How did you get through a whole night of bombing, with the

32:30 **concentration? How did you all manage with that?**

Well it was very very tiring, of course, even 4 hours of flying and the stress, it was tiring, but as I said our longest trip was nearly 9 hours, with a Stuttgart, we went 2 nights out of 3. That was very tiring, but then of course we were young, we were young and different from now. I don't know whether I'd be able to stand it

33:00 now. That was when I was 19. That a different kettle of fish.

Well talk about on the 13th mission, the story when you were shot down. Take us through right your feeling when you were loading up for the day?

Okay, we had advice that day, which was on the 12 August 1944.

33:30 that we were going on a mission that night. Actually we had a expected to be off flying because we had had in a week 5 missions and on our last mission was when we had damage to our aircraft. Incidentally we called our aircraft, most crew gave a name to their aircraft. We called ours the Swoosee,

34:00 a cross between a swan and a goose, elegant but ugly. Spitting fire from both end and dropping very big eggs from the middle. So that's the way we called our aircraft the Swoosee.

On that you received damage, tell us about the 12th mission before you get onto the 13th

mission?

Oh well it was a low level mission, and we got fuselage damage, from shrapnel

- 34:30 from the bombs of the aircraft ahead of us. I don't think we did it so much from own, bombs, because we would have passed over the target before they had exploded. So it was shrapnel coming up from the, aircraft, dropping the bombs before us. And the fuselage was damage. But we didn't worry about that it was just, it was reported,
- 35:00 and we'd though it would be all fixed. Well on the 12th August we were told that we would be on a mission that night. So we did our, pre, preparation of getting our gear together. Then we went out to the dispersal area, taken out to the dispersal area, but we saw the Swoosee wasn't
- 35:30 there, and another aircraft was in its place. So it was, we spoke with the crew, the ground crew, and we said what's wrong. They said well the damage hasn't been recertified so you're going to take this, which was a Rolls Royce Inline Engine so you'll be on this one tonight. We found out that, we boarded eventually with a bit of trepidation because we'd found out that the lettering
- 36:00 on the aircraft had been taken from an aircraft which had been shot down, previously. So we though oh well we've got the letters of a dead aircraft, I hope it's not a bad omen. And then though nothing more about it. So we'd had our briefing, we found that, at the briefing, we were a little disturbed, because we found that they had tracked us into the target and tracked us out
- 36:30 practically on the same, route, but in the opposite direction. We thought that's not good because, you know all the enemy fighters and defences would be alerted to the fact that we were going and bombing and then were going back. So we were a little bit concerned about that. And never less, cause we took of and, it was still the 12th August and we did our bombing run
- 37:00 to the town of Rottenstone, South East of Germany, and this was at the opal works, which were making wings for the V1, the buzz bombs. We plastered it good and proper, and my last view of it was it was burning fiercely. Then we set off for home, and I'm scanning the turret, scanning the skies with my turret and I had,
- 37:30 on the port side scanning the skies there and out of the corner of my eye I saw a German green tracer-fire. Germans always used green tracer. Out of the corner, so I knew we were under attack. So as fast as I could I got the turret around and in the meantime I'd told the pilot to corkscrew starboard and, I could sort of hear the thudding of the, cannon. They could open fire along time ahead of us because they
- 38:00 had 20mm cannon and I had, 303 rifle, 303 rifles virtually. But I knew that we'd been hit anyway. He'd made a fatal mistake, when he, came in to us he took off that way, exposing his belly, so I just. I immediately, I followed him around and was pouring shells into his belly all the time with my, machine gun.
- 38:30 And he caught fire and I could see he was mortally wounded because he was on dangerous fire and I could see part of the aircraft coming off in the light. Then he just dived and crashed down. We kept on flying, we didn't think we had been mortally hit, and, gradually we started to loose a bit of height.
- 39:00 The mid-upper gunner then called out to the pilot, that, there was fire on the port wing. Engine in fire. John checked with Tommy the engineer, whose, whose instruments did not indicate, and Sam said 'Well you'd bloody come up here and you'll soon see the fire' so, the order was to start the fire extinguisher, to try and put it
- 39:30 out. Sam then reported that there's more petrol and oil on the wings and all this time we'd been loosing height. But we weren't' worried about 2 wings going because we'd practiced flying on 1, on 1 engine I should say. But then starboard engine went and, all this time we were loosing considerable amount of height and then John put through the mike that
- 40:00 he was having trouble holding the aircraft, the rudders and the aprons had been shot. Then he issued the order to bail out, bail out, bail out, bail out. By this time of course it was, I knew we'd gone beyond the midnight marker and we were on the 13th of the month. But, as I said 3 go from the front and 4 go from the back. But buy the time I shuffled myself out of the
- 40:30 turret, it was time to go.

Tape 7

- 01:00 ...actually you asked about whether the adrenalin was flowing well the adrenalin started to flow from the first time that we were under attack, and... really kept on flowing because there was no time to even think about fear or what's going to happen next, the adrenalin was such a great driving force. And so was self preservation. And, eventually the pilot as I said had to

- 01:30 issue the order bail out, bail out, bail out, which was not so easy from my point of view because what I had to do was make sure that the turret was centralised, straight and narrow, reach behind me to slide open the door, and then slide out on my bottom. As it got out of the turret I would then have to reach to get my parachute from the stowage area, because we didn't wear in the turret,
- 02:00 only the harness, and as I was backing out on my bottom, then clipping the parachute on, making absolutely certain that both clips had clipped in properly. Then when I got to the end of that particular area, it was then that I would swing around and put my feet onto the main part of the fuselage and at that stage I found that the rear door was open, so I realised that everybody who was to go out from that area had gone.
- 02:30 And I would be the last person out. When I went to the door I realised we were very very close to the ground. I calculated probably about 1000 feet and usually, we were told that if we had to bail out we counted to 7, before we jumped, so that the parachute, when it opened would not get caught in the tail plane of the aircraft. However there wasn't any time for me to do that.
- 03:00 If I had done that I wouldn't be sitting here talking today. So what I had to do then was to throw myself out and pull at the same time. Hoping of course that it didn't get caught in the tail. But it had opened a little bit, just before I hit the ground because I was so low. I reckon at that time I was down to about 700 feet. When I did hit the ground a sharp, very sharp pain, went up my left leg and I realised that I had done
- 03:30 some damage, but I dint' know what it was. It was 1.30 in the morning on the 13 August on our 13th trip so if you can calculate the odds of that happening then you're a better mathematician than me. However I was there and that's all there was to it.

Just while were talking about the parachute now. Go backward and explain the type of training that they had given you with the parachute?

Well we didn't have any training drops.

- 04:00 The only training that we had was to jump of the back of a moving truck, so that we got used to having to roll, to try and, protect ourselves no matter where we were going to land. So that's the only training we had on parachuting.

Did that help at all?

No, no not in my case it didn't. It might have helped a lot, but t in my case I didn't have any time to really think where I was when I hit ground. But,

- 04:30 when I'd sort of recovered from the impact and the pain, was pretty intense, I looked around and realised I was in a field of hay stacks, so I crawled over to the nearest hay stack and, being in the morning and by that then the adrenalin, was starting to wear off and I was pretty tired. Because we'd been on the go all day, it had been a long trip. Flying makes you tired anyway. So I crawled into the stack and dragged in all my gear behind me and..
- 05:00 I thought well there's nothing I can do so I might as well go to the land of nod. It's the only place I could think of at that moment. So I slept pretty well, because by the time I woke, the sun had been shining through the stack, and so I thought well I've got to get out sooner or later. I adventured out, crawled my way out and sat at the base of the stack wondering what I was going to do next.
- 05:30 Well the first thing to do was to get into my escape kit and get some analgesics. We used to always carry an escape kit with us, with some emergency supplies, like analgesics, chewing gum, chocolate, almonds and knife, all sorts of things. So I swallowed a couple of analgesics and then, I though well I cant really walk anywhere, but which was would I go. Now we always carried 2 compasses,
- 06:00 One was in our collar stud, if you, in those days we had collars, unattached collars using a central stud, and a back stud. Now the central stud, was coated with enamel at the back. Well you scraped that enamel off and it was a compass. It automatically pointed around to magnetic North. Another compass that we had was the fly button, there wasn't zips in those day. They were fly button, 2 of the buttons made a compass, 1 had a little
- 06:30 pin on it, the other one had a white dot. You put the white dotted one on the pin and it automatically went around to magnetic North. So at least there was an idea of which way was North, South East and West. But I thought well I can't do anything about it at the moment I will just have to wait and see what it going to happen for a while. Well then I saw a farmer crossing the field with a dog. The dog spotted me and came barking over, and that attracted the
- 07:00 attention of the farmer. Who came over and, he spoke as much English and I spoke Flemish, which was negligible. Nothing on either side. I thought, well how am I going to communicate? But I got the impression from him, the way of his gestures and the tone in this voice, that he wanted to tell the Germans that I was there so he could get some help for, for my leg.
- 07:30 At this stage I still didn't know what happened, because I wasn't game to take my boots off. I then in no uncertain terms made out that that was not my vision and so we compromised and he said, indicated that I should crawl over into the woods. So he found a stick for me, and with the assistance of this and

hobbling and crawling I got over into the woods.

08:00 **What sort of thoughts were going through your head when you first saw him. When you first saw that dog?**

Well, before I saw the dog, when I first sat down, I thought, what the bloody hell is going on, here I am a 19 year old Australian, can't speak any other than English and I'm in a foreign country and nobody's here to help me. So I felt I've only got to help myself. But I thought well gee it's not going to be very easy at the moment. I would have eventually, I'm sure I'd have crawled over into the woods anyway

08:30 to try and get my bearings a bit better, and wait for the pain to go down. So this saviour came along, and he really did turn out to be a saviour, because after I got into the woods and spent the first night there, and I was, probably went to sleep again, because I was still very tired and the strain of crawling over had, taken its toll a bit on me. But in the morning I heard a whistle and I thought oh well somebody

09:00 knows I'm here. I waited a while then crawled out to the edge of the clearing and found some food and water had been left there. I thought oh well somebody knows I'm here. And this went on for the first 3 days and...

What sort of food did they leave for you?

Oh it was just a sandwich, one of these sort of, I can't think of what they call it on the continent. A bacon, ham type of meat, I thought well I'm just

09:30 lucky to have. I don't care what it is I'm going to eat it. So.

What did you do to entertain yourself during 3 days sitting in the woods?

Well I suppose just, going over thoughts, going a bit over the past. Not looking too far into the future, but hoping I guess that I would have a future. Really not much you can do when you're, injured, in the middle of the dark woods and you don't know what part of the country you're in.

10:00 So, but I didn't let thoughts worry me too much, because I was still fairly anxious to get out of it anyway.

Were you thinking about what had happened to the rest of the people on the plane?

Oh well, well, I was definitely wondering what had happened to the crew because I knew that we would have been completely separated. Because of, when you open a parachute the wind carries you in all directions and, and it also depends on the

10:30 interval between people jumping out. And knowing that I was the last, from that area, and I didn't know whether anybody had got out from the front, because the plane crashed about the same time I landed. So I wasn't that far away when the plane had crashed. So it went through my mind, obviously, what the heck, am I the only one, or did all get out? So those thoughts over the next couple of days

11:00 were wondering through my mind. And then eventually... I heard some crashing through the under grass, undergrowth and two men came through into the clearing and they indicated, that they were going to, they were helpers, they were friend, and they couldn't speak English either. But

11:30 they, then one of them picked me up and carried me on his shoulder and took me out to another clearing. When we got out there I saw there were 3 bikes and I thought how the heck am I going to ride a bike. But they, one was a fixed wheel bike, if you know what. In those days there were 2 types of bikes. The free-wheel where you could stop peddling and just freewheel, particularly if you were going down

12:00 hill, and a fixed-wheel bike where you had to peddle all the time. Now they put me on the fixed-wheel bike and strapped my right, foot to the peddle. So that the peddle, I'd be always on the peddle, and my left leg was just dangling on the side. I guess we must have, have ridden through country lanes for about 15 km, distance of course didn't mean anything.

12:30 I, the pain was still there. I'd taken some more analgesics, they were the days. But the pain was still pretty intense. And so we just, rode through these villages until we came to a particular house. And there I was given, a shower to get out of my clothes, and... they must have given me some other civilian clothes there, or, alternatively

13:00 I still had my uniform on. I can't quite recollect at that point. Because then we set off again to another, house, another village, which turned out to be a village called St Leurenhutun, which is not the correct pronunciation but you just have to try and spell it anyway. And that was going to be my safe house for the next period of time.

13:30 **These men that came to you in the woods. Did, were there any difference that you noticed between them and the farmer, were they differently dressed?**

No, they were, dressed in similar attire. I didn't know whether they were farmers or whether they were just, they were in workman's gear. I found out later that they had been told by, the older, bigger fellow, had been told by the local doctor

14:00 to go and find a peasant in the woods. And I was that peasant. So I realised, then that the first farmer had told, somebody, in the resistance movement who then passed the message on to other workers to come and get me. I didn't find that out till later of course but nevertheless that's how it happened.

So you didn't, obviously you knew about the fact that the resistance

14:30 **existed. But did you trust these men?**

I had to, I had no alternative, no alternative because I was still behind enemy line. I was in German occupied territory. So I just had to trust, even the first farmer I had to trust him, because he could just as easily have, felt sorry for me, with my bung leg as he wanted to go and tell the Germans, and that could easily have finished up in a

15:00 POW [Prisoner of War] camp. So I trusted him, and of course once the other persons came I, my trust in the first one was exemplified and I had complete trust in the other two. Not only did I have to have trust in them but I did have that trust because of what the circumstances. So then we set off again on the bikes and we came to this house in the village.

15:30 And there I was welcomed, and... stripped of my uniform, I'm sure that's when I lost my uniform. And given trousers and a shirt, of.. the owner. He had been in the Belgium army, but they had to be demobbed when Germany took over Belgium. That was part of the surrender that the Germans, the

16:00 Belgium army be completely demobbed, and that was a home of a Hector and Maria Desmetch. I didn't know their names at that time, I knew Hector and Maria but I didn't know the surname. But apparently that's like Smith, it's a common name. But they were very kind and very good to me, and... I had a bath and then changed into the civilian clothes. Never saw my

16:30 uniform again, and then was sent up to the loft, bedded down in the loft. And that's where I had to stay, because you couldn't trust anybody in the village. They didn't know who might be trading to the Germans. And this is where a great deal of courage and bravery of these people came into it. If they had been found to be hiding me

17:00 then they would have been shot on the spot. So they risked not only their lives but also feed and watered me. Shared there meagre rations, bought some on the black market, as was the thing to do in those day. If you had enough money. And, then, of course I was very lucky to in their garden they had a very big plum tree, and they were quite delicious plums.

17:30 I used to come down at night and reign a few of them, with their approval of course. So I spent a bit of time there. But one morning.

Just when you were in the loft, did you, you said you couldn't trust anyone in the village,

18:00 **if somebody had betrayed you. Were you given somewhere to hide in the loft or did you have a contingency plan?**

No, no contingency plan I would just have had to give myself up. If they had, if Maria and Hector had been betrayed they would have come looking for me anyway, and there would have been no place to hide. I wasn't in a position to anyway, to do it because my leg, I still didn't know what had happened to my leg. Although my boot, had been cut away and of course, it was badly swollen. The doctor must have come,

18:30 because then the next thing my leg was heavily, the whole ankle and up the leg was heavily bandaged, pressure bandages, but there weren't any x-rays done, because they couldn't get them done, simple as that. But it wasn't just a sprained ankle. It turned out to be a fracture anyway, not a bad, not a bad fracture but bad enough.

When they took your uniform and gave you

19:00 **civilian clothes, did they take you pack and you kit and things?**

Yes well, yes they took the lot actually, in our packs we also carried, money, money for Belgium, Holland and France, so that if we were shot down we were able to give them some money towards there, our upkeep so to speak. So I gave them that money and well, the rest of the

19:30 pack they took too, because it wasn't going to be of any use to me anymore. Except a couple of things I kept which I would like to show you after. We always carried an escape, a silkscreened map, of the countries over which we flew. And you will be amazed at the standard of silkscreening, which is pre 42, so

20:00 silkscreening is not new. Anyway they took everything, and when a couple of days later, 2 or 3 days later I was called down to the kitchen during the day. And when I went down there, there was a group of a few people. And I was heavily interrogated to make sure, that I was true to name, that I was a downed airman and being of Australian vintage

20:30 and not a plant by the Germans, because they did do so on occasion, they'd plant somebody in as a downed airman so they could get into, the resistance group and try and find out the leaders.

How did they interrogate you? What language did they speak?

English, they spoke English. The chief interrogator was a, girl, probably in her late

21:00 20's early 30's and she, quizzed me on England, a little bit on Australia, but quite frankly they didn't have a clue what Australia was all about. Even where it existed and even if it existed. But, I passed obviously.

Can you tell me the questions they asked you?

Well I can't remember, particularly I think it was names of cities in, the UK [United Kingdom].

21:30 Names of cities in Australia, but I think sometimes I could have said anything and they would have had to believe it. That, because they would think anyway the Germans wouldn't know what the capitals of the various states in Australia. But whatever it was they asked me I obviously passed, I must have.

Were you a bit nervous in the process?

I guess I was, but I didn't want to show it, I just wanted to

22:00 answer their questions in all honesty. And, or portray myself as a very honest citizen of Australia. That I had come over to help them, as well as help the rest of the world, so to speak. Australians helping the world.

Was there just, before we move on from the interrogation. Was there anything that you had in your pack that was personal possessions that you would take with you, photos maybe of a girl?

22:30 Yes one very very important thing, that, I did have was a portrait of myself, which we always had taken on our squadron and always carried with us for such a situation, so that if we were forced down and the resistance was helping us we were able to give them, a portrait for them to be able to put into false identity cards.

23:00 Because they couldn't get photography done, in behind enemy lines, so I handed over my photograph and, then they took that and eventually they went off and a few days later they came back. Continued a little more interrogation, and then gave me my false identity card. Now in this, my name had been changed to

23:30 Albert Williams, my status was a celebrant, or bachelor and I was a comptable, or an accountant. So I was a, bachelor accountant named Albert Williams. And I still have that in my possession. Its one of my treasured memories.

If you had been stopped at some stage, by, a German,

24:00 **did they give you any sort of language?**

No if we'd been stopped the only thing, anyone of us could do, I think, was to pretend to be deaf and dumb and an idiot. And I'm pretty good at betraying myself as an idiot. But it would only pass a cursory glance to a German soldier who come from peasant stock or Belgium from peasant stock. And they would just look

24:30 at the photograph and look at you and hope that would work. It did work in many cases, in other cases it didn't work. But also I think that the Germans knew photographs that had been taken on squadron because they were all similar. And they, I found out later, much later, they were able to tell what squadron had taken, on what Squadron that photo had been taken. It was quite remarkable. But anyway

25:00 I didn't have to use it so all was well.

So what happened after they came back and gave you the identity papers?

Well I spent a few more days there and then again came down one morning, called down on morning and said "oh well its time to go." So again I had to ride a bicycle. There were two different guides on this occasion. So we set off after a hurried breakfast, and set off,

25:30 and again we went for a fair distance. A lot longer than the first day, we did it in a couple of stages, rest stages. And it wasn't the best of riding because the country tracks and my leg was still hurting, although bandaged. And eventually I could see buildings in the distance and realised we were coming to a fairly substantial town, or city.

26:00 Which turned out to be Brussels, in the, coming into the outskirts we had, the lead guide and myself and the rear guide. And as we were going down the hill the lead guide did a u-turn and as he came level, he indicated we should do the same thing. So we went a little bit further down and then did the U-turn and just to try and make it look as though we were all different people.

26:30 And we went off into a side street. And the lead guide indicated that he had seen the Germans had blocked the bottom of the hill and were checking documents.

Did you have any idea why, could they have been looking for you?

Not particularly, except to say, to know that this had been a constant thing, they were always checking documents, they would spring it on. Just the same as our police spring on radar traps here

27:00 without you knowing anything about them. But we got out of that, and after cycling through some of the suburbs, we came to what was going to be my next safe house. And this was a 3-storey building and I'm going up the, walking up the stairs up to the top, up to the top landing. And the rear guide knocked on the door and it was opened. And

27:30 he spoke to the lady inside and, she came out a little bit, and she spoke English, even though she was Belgian. And then she, indicated to come in and then, much to my surprise, when I got inside was, Martin, the bomb aimer, so he had also been picked up by the same group of resistance movement. And it was really good to be able

28:00 to talk to somebody, somebody who understood what I was trying to say. So we spent, quite a time, just yabbering at each other, and still not know, he didn't know whether anybody else had survived. So we were both in the dark, but we just, exchanged, adventures. What had happened since we had to get out and,

28:30 then, he was able to converse in French? He spoke quite a bit of French, and Renne, who was the owner of the house her and her brother. They were able to catch up on things, Martin was then able to tell me about it. So by spending time there, then they decided that we should try and get down

29:00 through the Comet Line, down through France down to Spain and connect up with the, with the Comet Line further down.

When you say they, who were they?

The people, the people in the house and the other resistance workers. They felt that it was time to move on, move us on and try and get us home. Back to England.

29:30 **Did they consult you about this?**

No, no there was no consultation because they were in charge and they were our saviours, so we had to do, we wanted to do what they wanted us to do.

How long was this after you arrived at the safe house?

About a fortnight after we arrived. They decided that we should try and move on because they didn't, want the same, two people in the

30:00 same house. Too long, just in case.

So what did you do in that fortnight. What did you and Martin entertain yourselves with?

Oh we had, they had some English books, and we just enjoyed talking with each other, reminiscing about our trips and so on and so forth. I think the time went pretty quick to be honest.

Did you mention early, that Martin was the member of the team that was a bit of a loner

30:30 **and did this strengthen your relationship?**

Martin was a bit of a loner, he was a Londoner and, he was a bit of a loner, but, we had always got on very well together, being a loner was no skin off our nose. He liked to go off and do his own thing, which was fine, but as a crew member he was the best. He was a top grade bomb aimer and a top grade

31:00 member of the crew. But just wanting to go off and do things on your own, because being a Londoner he had that many friends down there, it wasn't funny anyway. So he was never a loner in that context. He was only a loner in the sense that 3 of us had joined in a bought a motor car, and 3 of the others had bought a motorbike, so we were all mobile. Martin had a pushbike but he wasn't as mobile as we were.

31:30 So he was a loner in that regard.

But did this time that you spent with him help you get to know him in a different sort of way, in an intense way?

Oh I guess it must have, I don't know about intensity, but certainly we got to know each other a bit better, because he didn't really know anything about my background, he didn't know anything about Australia. So I was able to educate him a little bit on the best country in the world. Which they

32:00 don't believe anyway. But, so I don't think necessarily that it strengthened the bond, we were bonded by circumstances and we were quite happy to be in each others company, it was not that we had, either one of us had any problems with each other. And we used to listen to the Kelinstein Radio and the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] news, which was always interesting to know.

32:30 And we thought, we were, the British had been advancing and we thought well it's not going to be long but then the Germans put up a counter punch and the Battle of the Bulge, which was well documented, and forced the troops back. So it was then that our friend decided that we should move on to try and get

home.

The woman who ran, who owned the third safe house was Maria?

33:00 No, she was Marie, Maria was in the first house.

And what was your relationship like with Marie, did you spend much time with her or get to know her well?

No we got to understand her a little bit. But it, the foremost thing in my mind was how kind that she and her brother were to us, because again limited rations

33:30 behind the lines, and they shared them with us and I'm sure it must have cost them money on the black market. For another 2 mouths to feed, because they couldn't get it legally. Otherwise for whom are you getting this extra food. It was always a, cautionary situation where you had to be very, very careful. But then they said it's time to move on so

34:00 we packed haversacks and put them on our back. We had a guide.

What did you put in the haversacks?

Oh I think it was just some food and water, that's all, just food and water to see us on our way. We knew that we, once we set off we were going to go to another, there would be houses or friend along the line as we progressed down. And we got as far a Northern France and then we were sent back

34:30 because the Line ahead had been betrayed. A lot of the resistance workers had been shot, and the connection had been lost. So they said well, you know you'd better to back to your safe house. So our guide then took us back into Brussels. We were made welcome when we got back, but, you know understandably they were, they though we had been gone. But that wasn't any problem for them,

35:00 they just thought we were on our way to safety.

Had you spent much time when you were in the safe house, because you couldn't walk around the city at all could you, you had to stay in the house?

Well, I'll tell you about that in a moment. We, then sort of unstrapped ourselves and we resigned ourselves to the fate of waiting and by this time Martin and I had got very very, housebound, felt very housebound, and we

35:30 decided that we would go down town. And walk around, we knew, in that back of our minds that we were taking a risk, we knew that we were going to take the risk of being caught and, who knows about being tortured, to find out who had, who had helped us to get that far. But despite that risk we felt we

36:00 just had to get out, and it was quite an interesting walk because Brussels, was still occupied, there were plenty of German troops there plenty of Gestapo there. You could see the difference between the main troop and the Gestapo. You could see the difference in their being, the difference in their manner, the difference in their facial attitudes. But again we, as I said we took a risk. We should not have taken, but we did do it.

36:30 But we got back home safely anyway.

What did you do on that walk? Can you walk me through it?

Well we just walked around, just gawking, because Brussels was a beautiful city, and it was one of the cities, the only other city that was not bombed was Paris. And a packed had been made between, England and Germany particularly

37:00 from the point of view of the Germans who told the French and the Belgium's that if they surrendered they would not harm their beautiful cities. And we agreed not to bomb them. There was no British bombs dropped in Brussels or in, or in, Paris. So they were declared open cities, which meant that neither side was going to bomb them.

37:30 So we weren't worried about coming under air attack or anything like that it was just that it did concern us that we were taking risks. But as I said Brussels in an absolutely beautiful city and we had a good look around. I suppose we were away for a couple of hours and then we got back safely to our safe house.

Was Marie and her brother cranky that you had put them at risk?

Well they were upset, they were upset I think.

38:00 But, I suppose they could have locked us in, but they could have locked us out for that matter. But they forgave us, they understood I think the circumstances.

How old was Marie and her brother?

Oh they were in their 30's, or Marie was early 40's her husband, was taken a

38:30 prisoner by the Germans. He was in the Belgium army and was somewhere in a prison camp. And her brother Willy, well he was, he was in his 50's. I don't know that he was in the war, but he certainly was in the resistance group.

Did you ever ask them about their motivation to helping you?

I don't know whether I'd put in

39:00 those words, but often what they said was that, they felt that they had to help because we had come to help them. And, we were helping them fight the Germans, so I think they felt from that, and motivation of course too was to get the Germans out of their country so they could be free again instead of under the heel of the German might's.

39:30 In a way it was a 2 way stretch. They were thanking them and they were thanking us. Then it was eventually decided that we would try and get to Switzerland. So we went the same procedure. But we didn't get very far with that, we were sent back again because, they said well, the British fighters were

40:00 strafing anything that moved on the roads, so it was safer to keep out. So we went back into the safe house.

Tape 8

00:38 **So we just finished on them starting to try and get you to Switzerland?**

Yes we started off again, and we did set off. But we hadn't gone very far when we were sent back because the allied fighters were sticking it to moving vehicles, because they

01:00 felt that the civilian population wouldn't be moving about, and therefore anything that moved could be Germans. So because they were in retreat, they were retreating quite fast. So we were sent back, and then just had to wait somewhat impatiently.

So how were you moving, how were you being transported?

On foot, so it's not, but then,

01:30 we were at one stage, getting, being given lifts and, from one spot to another spot, for short distances. But basically it was walking, but they thought the roads were far too dangerous to be out and about. Only if you had to be.

How about walking through the streets of Brussels. Was that a danger?

Well it was only a danger in so far as if we had been,

02:00 pulled up, for an identity check, that would have been dangerous of course, because I don't think we would have passed muster. Although you must remember too, that there was a lot of foreign workers. Foreign slaves so to speak, in Brussels and then behind the lines because the Germans were using illegally. And that the POWS they weren't supposed to be put under

02:30 working conditions. And there were a lot of them about and we could of just, just passed as anyone of those. Not able to speak German and not able to speak gibberish. As I was ready to speak. When they speak Australian gibberish no one could understand you anyway. I won't give you an example.

Do do,

No, no never mind

No No do.

Well slang in those days was totally different from slang

03:00 today. So don't worry about that one. But I thought I would be able to bluff my way, if, we'd have been pulled up. But there was always a risk, and just walking around was a risk. Not from being shot at from the air, but simply by being pulled over for an identity check. But it didn't happen so there we were. But they decided we'd stay in

03:30 Brussels because the allies were advancing fairly quickly, and the day, and we were following it on BBC and then the day came that, we knew soon after we, had that walk, that the Germans were vacating Brussels so therefore, we resolved that we were going to be pretty safe soon. And eventually that day came.

04:00 **What was the atmosphere like on that day, was?**

The day that the British came though.

The day the Germans vacated?

Well we only heard that through them. Through Marie and Willy, that they had been down town and they could see that the Germans were pulling out so we knew that the British was getting closer and closer. We also knew that there'd be no fighting in Brussels. The Germans

04:30 were, seem to be honouring their commitment not to damage Brussels.

There was no hostilities from the Germans towards the Belgium's as they pulled out?

There probably was but I, we didn't hear of anything anyway, so there may or may not have been. I would just have to let that one slide, because we had no way of knowing, Marie and Willy didn't say anything at

05:00 all. But then we knew when the, it was going to happen that the British had come because they were coming closer and closer and we could hear the gunfire and, then the message came through that the Germans had gone and the British were about to take Brussels. So we went all, went down stairs to line the streets as the first tank came over

05:30 the hill. Out of the suburbs into Brussels. And as the leading British tanks came through, we, they had, they were continuing to move then suddenly they had to stop and one of the tank commanders was up in the turret, so I called out to him. I said "Look I'm an Australian airman I've been in hiding here, can you let me have a cigarette." He said

06:00 "Yes" and threw me down a packet of cigarettes, which as they landed at my feet I could see that they were, Woodbines, which were a lower cost cigarette, but still a very good cigarette, and would have been a lot better than what I had been smoking.

What had you been smoking?

Anything that you could get your hands on, starch tobacco, just put it that way it, starch tobacco, terrible stuff. I never bothered to enquire what was, exactly what was in it. But before I had a

06:30 chance to pick up this packet of cigarettes, one of the Belgians standing close by, spied it and just swooped down on it and off he went. So I thought oh well, his needs greater than mine. But the tank commander threw another packet down anyway. So then we knew that we were free but we still had to get back to England. So we had no, nothing, no alternative but to wait for authorities to make some announcements.

07:00 **In that time when you knew you were free, did you feel like you could walk around the city more and did you actually go out?**

Oh well, well we really didn't have time, yes we did, I'm sorry, we all went down town, we all got drunk, we all had a wonderful party and it was quite fabulous. Then the army

07:30 put through a broadcast, because the Germans had put a PA system throughout the city. Once they had sort of settled in they put through an announcement requesting anybody in hiding to report to headquarters at the famous Metropol Hotel in Brussels. So I decided that I'd go down, Martin thought oh I'll leave it for a couple of days. He had nobody

08:00 to report to anyway, but he was also falling in love with a cousin of, Marie's so, I said alright I'll go down anyway. And when I went down there I was only one of about five hundred who had come out from ever nook and cranny. And this is an indication of how many people, had been saved by the resistance movement. And when I reported to the hotel,

08:30 there was my navigator Reggie. And he'd been in the same group as well. Again we still didn't know about any word of the others. So I reported and I met a journalist, or actually a war correspondent, named Eric Bown. Who was a war correspondent for the, British, oh Brisbane Truth,

09:00 as well as other syndications. And, I gave him my name and my parents address and asked him if he would just let them know and he wired through that I had been found. And they got the message from Eric, before the airmen try had advised. Because they didn't know that I had been saved. So the army booked us into this famous hotel, gave us

09:30 a room each. Now you will entertain your helpers. Well then the champagne really did flow. We had some riotous parties at the hotel. RAF sign you name that's it. It was fantastic.

Who did you entertain?

Oh well Marie, and Willy and the two, two cousins who were in the group they were Susan, was I think about,

10:00 21 and Rachel was about the same age and they were cousins. And, incidentally also the army put, took my, gave me a uniform, one of the army uniforms and said now hand these civilian clothes back. So I was in army uniform for a while. The little beret, the brown beret, so I was a British army pilot

10:30 for a, when I got back to the UK.

And was one of these cousins that you partied with the one of the ones Martin was falling in love with?

No. No, it was a totally different one of their cousins, you know. You work it out.

Were they involved in the party as well?

Oh yes, oh yes they were part of the resistance group and you know message girls,

11:00 dispatch riders, so to speak, taking messages, by bike from place to place and so on. So they were within the group. And so we did have a very riotous time, not righteous, riotous, that's better. But it was a lot of fun. It was a funny situation there too, eventually only had a few drinks, I needed to go to the

11:30 gentleman's residence, so I said, asked where I would go and they said down the stairs. As I was walking down the stairs, there were women coming up opposite. I thought oh god I'm in the wrong place. I went back and said to where do I go. Down the stairs, cause unisex toilets, first time I'd ever seen this. You stand there on one line and the ladies would go to the cubicle on the, in the same room but on the other side.

12:00 So that was my introduction to unisex toilets. And I think we should have more of them today because there isn't enough toilets for the girls. Wherever you go. Anyway so that, that unfortunately came to all too soon, to an end, but we still had a lot of parties.

How long did it last for?

Oh about a week, it was really really good and of course so we, the Belgium girls enjoying with a

12:30 group of soldiers as well. So they eventually they said well we've got a plane and you're going back to, going back to England. Reg and I were shipped off, Martin still stayed behind, and we shipped off in the DC3, back to the UK.

What happened to Martin in the end. Did he marry the Belgium girl?

Yes, yes he did,

13:00 and that's a story in itself. I'll talk about that, if you're going to talk about post-war stuff. So Reg and I were sent back to England and we were.. had to be debriefed by British Intelligence, or the RAF Intelligence. As to what had happened to us, what had happened to the rest of the crew,

13:30 who were our helpers, they always took names so that they could try and help them at a later date. And then, we were asked what did we want to do? And Reg said I want to go home. He had been training in Canada as well so he'd been out of Australian for a lot longer than myself. And then they asked me I said well I would like to go back to the squadron and re-crew, or either as a

14:00 stand-by gunner or make up with a new crew. And they said "You can't do that" and I said "Why can't I do that." They said "Well you've done your share and there are others waiting to do their share." I thought well that's no fair, I'm experienced, I'm trained. And you still have to train those others. No you will be going home. I said "Well sir I want a commission." "Why do you want a commission?" "Well its higher rank I'm only a

14:30 flight sergeant, I would like a Queens Commission," Kings Commission at that time, I should say. "And if you had come over under the conditions under which I came over on the ships, you would also want to go with a little bit more luxury." "Oh don't be so stupid!" I said "All right Sir," then I was re-equipped in flight sergeants gear and we were sent off on leave. Reggie didn't have anywhere in

15:00 particular to go so I said well come up to Eden to Leeds with me and they will be very happy to welcome you. Because, as I said, they had been on might list of 2 to advise when I was lost and when I was safe. So we went up to Eden and, we also then went onto, we found out that Tommy our, engineer

15:30 who was a Scotsman, had come back so we decided to go up to Scotland to see Tom. And then the leave finished and I was called back. No I was called back not before the leave had finished I was called back on the basis that my commission had through. So they had decided to do that.

Just to back track a little bit, why were you, why did you want to re-crew so much,

16:00 **did you not want to head home?**

Well really I didn't have anything to come back to, in you know, real, going back to what I said earlier, we weren't a close family. I didn't have any girlfriends back in Australia, nobody pining over me or anything like that. So I you know I thought well I haven't really done the job. I have only done 12 missions. I'd like to

16:30 go back and finish what we called as a tool, which was 30, and eventually reduced to 27. I said well I want to go back and finish the job. But no they, they also said that they had the concern that if I had been shot down again and the Germans had had knowledge of my being there, on the previous time, and I was subsequently captured the might try and give me a

- 17:00 rough time to try and get names of people. I thought that was a little bit drawing a long bow, but nevertheless, they said no you've had your turn others are waiting. So I said "Well if I've got to go I've got to go but I do want that commission."
- And the trip, the first trip back to Eden they had they been notified that you were missing?**
- Oh yes, yes.
- What was there reaction?**
- Well they were very very
- 17:30 sad of course, they told me, they were very sad to get that information. And they didn't know I was safe until I sent them a telegram, "Kill the fatted calf, Reg and I are coming home, for a holiday were back in England". Because they knew about Reg I always talked about my crew anyway. So they were expecting us.
- 18:00 **What was the status of the relationship with Margaret at that time?**
- Oh, well you know, close but not that close, not that close that I was going to go down on my knee and say will you marry me or anything like that.
- Do you think she expected that?**
- I don't know, well in later years when I came, after I went back home, she sent a letter that she had got
- 18:30 engaged and of course I sent a sad long, sad story, I was just waiting for the opportune moment to bring you out as a war bride. Whether that was true or not I don't know. I still had a yearn.., a feeling. But you know the old saying, absence make the hear grow founder, but it also makes it grow further and further apart. But then we weren't that close, and were both young. I mean I was only, hadn't had my 20th birthday.
- 19:00 And, had I had my 20th birthday. I was 19 in no, I was, I didn't I came back after I, had my 20th birthday in the November and I left the UK to come home in the December. Yes that's right, so I was you know not 20 but close to it and she was about my age to.
- 19:30 I had plenty of war time romances but I wasn't in that situation to even think about it really.
- And how about, obviously you found Reggie and then later you found who was it was it the navigator?**
- Well Reg was the navigator, I found Tom and then I found, then found Sam.....
- 20:00 George the wireless operator broke his leg on parachuting out and was in a German hospital and was on a train being taken into Germany as they did, as the allied advanced. And he was with an American, and during a, strafing attack by.. our fighters they managed to escape. Even George with his leg in plaster. He managed to
- 20:30 escape and, from the train and then eventually got back to England. Martin as I said stayed behind, and eventually decided, that he better report back otherwise he could have been, well nobody knew whether he was safe or not. Whether he'd been killed or what had happened. Nobody knew what had happened to John, except, Tommy had said that the last thinking
- 21:00 he did was to hand John his parachute. And that the last he saw. So we knew that 6 had been saved but we still didn't know anything about John. And I didn't find that out until 1992. Where, I found out that, John had gone down with the plane, he just did not have time,
- 21:30 as you can imagine me getting out at 700 feet, and the plan crashing by the time I'd landed. What had happed when the, when the plane crashed, it crashed about 100 yards from the home eof the local village shoemaker and in the light of the burning plane he saw a parachute in the garden. So he realised that somebody didn't get out, otherwise there wouldn't not have been a fully
- 22:00 packed parachute there. So the next morning when the plane had cooled down he went to have a look, and he found Johns body and he put it in a box and buried it in his garden. So that the Germans wouldn't get it and nobody would know where John finished up. And then after the war he told the authorities and John, he was, the box was dug up and John is now
- 22:30 buried in the Military Cemetery in place called Schouwenburg, which is a suburb of Anteroth. And I went to that grave in 1992 and that was the first time that I'd really know what had happened to John.
- Did you ever think that if you're leg hadn't been too short that might have been you?**
- Oh yes, a lot of people say to me, did you ever feel upset about not being a pilot. I said yes and no, yes because that was
- 23:00 what I set my mind onto when they had categorised me as pilot, no because if I had been a pilot there were several things that could of happened. One is that I could have finished up as a staff pilot flying top brass around Australia. I could have finished up as an Instructor, just teaching other people who to

fly and go overseas. I could have finished up in transport command, again just, flying supplies around

23:30 and I would not, may not have had the experience that I have had. I could have been killed in the first, fighter engagement I was in, so all of these things you weight up. Every action has a equal and opposite reaction. Doesn't always work out the same way. So yes and no balance, one of those things.

24:00 **And just going back or forward. After you finished in Eden, you headed into Edinburgh?**

Yes, went up to, went up to Edinburgh, because Tom lived in a, village just outside Edinburgh called Faulkner. So, I went to see, we went to see Tom and had a

24:30 few days with his family. And in that time I met another, very nice Scots girl, actually, I was with, not I'm sorry I was with Sam, we went up to Edinburgh because we had met these two sisters and Sam fell very madly in love with one of them, despite the fact that he was madly in love with the girl in Australia. He used to keep talking about her,

25:00 so we knew there was something going on there. But and I guess in the way of the wartime atmosphere, she was a very charming girl, and I, I she used love me saying Margaret. I don't whether it was something in the expression or the way I put it, say my name again. But anyway, so the time there of course came to and end.

25:30 And I can't remember ever corresponding with her. I don't know whether, even if I had her address. I might have done once or twice I can't remember.

But it was just a?

Just one of those things. Another broken-hearted girl left behind.

You had a habit of that?

Well I was a charming fellow.

Did you have any

26:00 **sort of expectations when you were in Brussels; you had a lot of time to think. Did you think about what you were going to do when you were free?**

No I didn't think that far ahead. I just, I just I think, I suppose I was hoping that I got out of it alright then eventually went back home. I must admit that I was looking forward to going back into action again. Because I did feel deep down and

26:30 on the surface too that I really had not done my job, I hadn't done enough of it. I was at a bit of a low when they said no your going home, and again you do as your told, you have to do as you're told. But at least they gave me a commission, which I may not have got if I had prevailed and I'd gone back to the squadron, one weighs up against the other.

Were you getting any news from Australia about the situation with the Japanese?

27:00 No, no because everything was heavily censored and you couldn't say anything very much in letters to Australia and they could say much in letter from Australia because there was, the censorship was pretty solid.

Did you think that it might have been an option that you could actually go back to fighting once you were back in Australia?

When I got back to Australia one of the first things I did ask for

27:30 that I be kept on in aircrew and sent to a Liberators Squadron, because I knew Liberators were operating with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and, that I was still a trained gunner and I could be of some use in Liberators. And again either they had enough people cause this was, now in 1944 when I came back, and the war had changed its pattern,

28:00 of course. No sorry in 1945 when I came back, so the, the war, the total war in all spheres had changed its pattern. And there was no necessity to bring forward any trained personnel. I don't think anybody who came back from England was then sent to fly against the Japanese. Not to my knowledge anyway.

Can you walk me through how you got back to Australia? What were the

28:30 **last things you did in the UK?**

Well the last thing we did in the UK was say goodbye to everybody, because, we had to go back to Brighton, which was again our embarkation centre where they, when the ships were ready and we were ready that where we collected. This time I was in a different hotel, an officer hotel, not the other ranks hotel. Not that it made that much difference of course.

29:00 And but, I was in Brighton for at least a week, before my ship, our papers came through, and had a wow of time there, cause they had a lot of dances in England. The place down at Brighton called the Crystal Palace, which was the, the place to dance. And it was a lot of fun. And in England they also had a,

situation where they

29:30 played a lot of ladies choice. In other words the ladies had the option to go and ask the gentleman to dance. And that was quite fun and I was standing there one day, one night just, I'd had a few dances and was leaning up against the post and I felt a tap on the shoulder, and I looked around a very charming girl, asked me to dance. And I said I'd be delighted thank you very much. So we spent the night together. On the dance floor...

30:00 but then I had to go back to my hotel eventually. And it wasn't long after that before the paper came though that I was, shipping back, so I was shipped out of Brighton with, a lot of other air force of course, by train back to Liverpool. Then we sailed from Liverpool on the Queen Mary, which was a lot, vastly different from

30:30 what it was, when I went to England. It was a nicer ship, much more comfortable and I had officer status. Which just made a little bit more difference.

What did the officer status do?

Oh well the size of the cabin, other duties, you didn't do any duties as an officer, the other ranks did that. But it was just, a more comfortable feeling, comfortable journey. And we went back to New York and

31:00 spent again. Again I spent Christmas in New York in 44.

With the sewing machine lady?

No, no just a, we were camped at Camp David, which is well known today, and we just had a day trips into New York, got down to Boston, and, but the time there was very short and then,

31:30 we trained back across the continent to San Francisco. Reg was with me, now he had some relatives down in, San Francisco and we spent, spent a lovely time, there was the forest, it had beautiful trees, but again I didn't get a chance to get down to Hollywood, to get a look at the Hollywood Canteen.

32:00 What is the Hollywood Canteen?

Well that was a Canteen in Hollywood set up for serviceman, and all the stars would go to the canteen and entertain the troops, it was a simple as that, a big continuous concert, dancing type situation. But I did go somewhere and I allowed, Caesar Romero [actor], who was one of the, the stars of the day,

32:30 those days and he played in quite a lot of romantic stuff, as well as other. He was quite a good actor. And I allowed him to shake my hand. I can't remember how I met him but anyway.

Were you getting any more news of the Pacific war in the US?

No, no, oh the papers were there but we didn't bother to read the papers. We thought well what the point in, reading papers, and,

33:00 they were so bulky we couldn't carry them around anyway. On the train I think we might of looked through a couple of papers, but not particularly. But we knew that the Pacific war had changed and it was going on a lot lot lot, better. It seemed like the European war, that both of them were going to finish in the not too distant future.

Did you get to see

33:30 more of the country this time in the US?

No because we were, again by train and, we weren't allowed out of the train. At any of the stops, because we didn't stop long enough anyway. I mean get out and stretch you legs but not to see any of the countryside. Sure we saw the countryside though the windows of the train but that didn't mean a lot because we didn't know what state, states we were in, or passing through. Because it was a great detour again.

34:00 So then when we go to San Francisco, we had a few days there, and that when Reg and I went down to see his relatives and, trip though the Estuary Forests and, I did get down to Hollywood. We did get down to Hollywood but not to the Canteen itself. But never mind that was beside. Then it was time to get the ship, and as it turned out

34:30 it was exactly the same ship that I'd come over on the Lurline. This time I was coming into Brisbane and we had a much more, pleasant trip back from the States to, again we weren't in convoy, but with the higher status I wasn't crammed in a cabin of 8 people.

Did you have to do submarine watch again?

No, that was the ranks.

Did you have to do anything?

No.

What did you do?

35:00 Nothing, except stroll around and look as though I was enjoying it, which I was, because I guess I was going home, whether I was going home to anything. I was going home, back to Australia and I think they weighed more with me than anything else.

Did you have the sense of that homecoming as you pulled into Melbourne did you say?

No we came into Brisbane, they all came into Brisbane, went out of Melbourne, came into Brisbane.

35:30 Oh yes and no. It was quite dramatic, my Dad was there at the wharf, but when they unloaded the luggage, my big sea trunk was missing. Now in that sea trunk I had about 15,000 cigarettes. I had about a dozen pairs of silk stockings, because buying things on the PX was you know so cheap

36:00 and the trunk was missing. So Dad got onto the local, federal member and he sent wires backwards and forwards and of course, he didn't realise it was getting me into trouble too, but eventually the, my trunk turned up all ship shape. They had just, had not offloaded it. Now the trunks were marked, well firstly we had to paint on it

36:30 NYM, that was New York Mary, Queen Mary, and there was nothing else on it except my, a tag with my address in Brisbane. And although it was loaded in with the gear to get off in Brisbane, it, they just left it on board. But it eventually turned up anyway.

Were you not allowed to have cigarettes in it?

Oh no it wasn't that, we didn't go through customs. I was just,

37:00 I just got the round of the kitchen from air force about timely rockets being sent. I said "Hey you can't blame me, blame the federal member of my father, it's not me."

So did you put the silk stockings to good use?

Oh, I distributed them around. I mean I had a few friend, not girlfriends but friends that I knew and with the cigarettes, I was quite a heavy smoker myself then and, but

37:30 4BH, radio station 4BH had a programme on called 'smokes for sick soldiers' and I did take a girlfriend who was a sister of, an army fellow I knew and we went to this radio station, concert for these sick soldiers and I took about 5,000 cigarettes with me and presented them. And they made a big thing on the day

38:00 because there was so many and I said I'm quite happy to do it. I know what a cigarette is like when you really need one. And I then smoked the rest of them myself. Over a period of time. Until January 1946. When I was discharged in, in November late November 45 we always got an ex-service ration of either 60 cigarettes, or

38:30 the equivalent in tobacco to make your own. And on this particular Sunday night, I always enjoyed a cigarette after dinner. It was this Sunday night after having dinner at Margaret's, I thought oh well now I'll leave the table and I'll a cigarette. And I pulled out the packet and there was only one cigarette in there, that was the last on my ration. And I said "I'm not going to count out to soldiers, to storekeepers

39:00 who really had the wool over you, begging for a packet of cigarettes. I'll give it up." I've never smoked a cigarette since. And I was smoking over 40 a day. Never had once since. I've had a few cigars but never had a cigarette since. And people who say they can't give it up that balderdash [nonsense]. They don't want to give it up. There obviously weak willed. If I could go from 40 odd to nothing overnight, and I

39:30 did enjoy a cigarette. And that is the story of where my 15,000 cigarettes went.

On the topic of cigarettes, did you use them as a stress relief or something, did you have a lucky cigarette before a flight?

Well when we were in the squadron, particularly, we always had a cigarette in the dispersal area before we boarded the aircraft.

40:00 No matter how many we'd had during the day, we always had a cigarette, talking with the ground crew. And the first thing we did when we got out of the aircraft and out of the danger area the cigarettes and the lighter would come out. Whether it was to steady the nerves or should we say a joyous riot that we had got back safely. I don't know, didn't put any

40:30 superstition, or anything on it, I just enjoyed that cigarette after we got out of the aircraft. It's a bit like that first Woodbine that I got from the 2nd packet that floated down from the tank.

00:53 **Tell us about the car?**

Well we had a car in the squadron and we used it quite a bit,

01:00 and petrol rationing was pretty tight and it didn't take much to use up our ration. But I found that we had between our squadron and Cambridge, there was an American Drone. So I said to the boys what we do is that, we almost bleed the tank but leave enough it to get into Cambridge

01:30 scoot around a little bit, then enough to get home. We would pull into the American drone, and say "Listen boy we're, you know from the squadron out there and we want to do a bit of running around the town but we have no petrol out of ration tickets, could you help us?" "Sur buddy drive in" so we'd drive into the petrol tank, fill the car and the motorbikes up, sign RAF sign our name and off we'd go. And we did this quite often,

02:00 so we, and keeping our ration tickets so that It was quite an exciting time. It was only a little Ford, a 1937 Ford I think it was. But 3 of us owned it, cost us, 9 quid each and so, the joint ownership was there. When we went missing of course, the car was taken and put in a car pool.

02:30 And there were a lot of cars in this car pool, when I eventually got back to claim the car. And of course we didn't have much time to, well Martin wasn't with us, it was just Reg and I, so we decided eventually that'd we'd sell the car and keep the money in case we met up with Martin, take our share out. And that's what happened to the car. But we were finally able to sell it to

03:00 other air force personnel, and Martin never got his money because we didn't see him again. We knew that he was safe but we didn't see him.

Did it bring you together actually, owning a car together?

Oh yes well we were pretty tightly knit crew, I mean when we set off in the car, in fact our skipper Johnny Lorry, didn't have any transportation, he always came with

03:30 us. There were 4 of us in the car, and 2 of them on motorbikes. Martin bought a motorbike. He really didn't know how to handle a motorbike. He finished up in a ditch and the motorbike, got, set on fire, well they put the fire out and they put the fire out very easily, because we'd had a belly full of beer, and 4 combined help put the fire out, if you understand what I mean,

04:00 if you don't you shouldn't be listening. But then Martin decided that yes I'm not to have the motorbike anymore I will just use a pushbike when I want to go anywhere. But we did do quite a bit, in the, together in the car.

Just one other thing, you had a painting on the side of your plane. Can you describe that for us?

Oh well that was the Swoose, we had painted on the plane the Swoose.

04:30 And the Swoose was a combination of a swan and a goose. The delicate nature of the swan, and the heavier nature of the goose. And we made up the little story that it sat, spat fire from both ends, front and rear whenever it was attacked and, dropped very big eggs, which had a tendency to explode when they hit ground. So that was our Swoose.

05:00 But unfortunately that wasn't the plane that we crashed in and I found out subsequently, that the plane was repaired and given to another crew and eventually the plane was destroyed. It was shot down on another mission.

Well we'll return to coming home. So you were on the same ship, the Lurline?

On the same ship.

Can you describe to me

05:30 **what it was like coming home, what was the feeling?**

Oh it was a much sort of freer attitude coming home because, by this time we'd know that the Pacific war had gone well away from where we were, that things were going head and shoulders, you know full boar ahead in Europe. We felt that that war was going to finish in the not too distance future. Or we thought it would.

06:00 So the journey home it was, quite comfortable, quite interesting, and being this time and officer it was even better than the trip going across.

How about you personally, how did you feel, were you the way it changed you?

My experience I suppose a bit more mature. I don't know that it had really changed me

06:30 much, perhaps not a naive. You tend to loose naivety very quickly when, when you're with a bunch of fellows or in life itself, and you, guess going to face danger, and facing danger, I think it tends to mature you fairly quickly.

What were some of the good aspects of having experienced this time?

Well I think the

- 07:00 good aspect settled around the friendships that I made in Belgium. The wonderful courage these people had display, their bravery, and the thing that when I did go back to see them, I still could not do anything for them, every time I'd go back I'd say lets got out for dinner, no, no we take you out, you have come 12,000 miles to see us,
- 07:30 again. But you gave me a 2nd chance of life, I now celebrate 2 birthdays a year. August the 13 because that's when my parachute opened a little bit and I got out of it and November the 13th which is my true birthday. So I have a couple of drinks each year each time. And this is the way I'd say to them that you know you gave me a 2nd chance at life. No, no you came all this way originally to help us. Now we help you
- 08:00 again. So I could never do anything for them. When Margaret and I, every time we had a wonderful time with them and I always looked forward to going back. And we did that, Margaret came with me on 8 occasions, we went back to see them and that's when I, in 1992 when I first really learnt what had happened with John Lory. So the story, was I think I have mentioned that before.
- 08:30 And I went to, to the cemetery, took a photo of his grave, he was the flight sergeant at the time but he had been given a prosperous commission, so he was buried as Pilot Officer John Lorry. The people who helped me find this, I put it on them to help me find Maria Deschete. Hector and Maria my first safehouse,
- 09:00 and I had written across about that, because I knew I was going then and, this was to the godson of the man who carried me out of the woods, or a friend of his who was doing writing a book, or compiling of all the plane crashes in Belgium, because there were 100's of them because Belgium was our main route across into Germany.
- 09:30 Anyway he wrote back and said Deschete, it's a name like Smith, and I'd given him the name of the village, but of course he said they had left the village and I though oh well it was a nice try. But when I got over there he had found Maria, he had also found Norm....
- 10:00 the man who carried me out of the woods, his Christian names just escapes me for the moment. He had found him so we all met up at the, not a Maria's home but, somebody else's home and they had kept, as a surprise, that they had found Maria and they had found.....
- 10:30 let's say Norman Von Herion, that's not his Christian name. And so we all met up together because he knew Maria as well and that when I learnt also that Hector, had died, and Maria said to me, I've got a problem with you Robert, and I said how do you mean that. And she said you, borrowed Hectors trousers and shirt and you haven't
- 11:00 sent them back. And I said well I'm terribly sorry Maria but you've got my uniform and you didn't sent that back either. So we just, a bit of fun. But it was very good to see them and I saw them again on another trip and the fact, one of my trips in 1994 when I went back with the Normandy Veteran, because I'm a member of the Association,
- 11:30 we went back to march on the beaches of Arromanches, which was the British beach and I took with me and Australian flag. I carried the flag in full uniform, in front of the, in front of the Queen and Prince Phillip and had a very very enjoyable time and I also took with me an Australian flag because I knew there had been a new college
- 12:00 built between the two, villages of St Leurenhuton and another village close by called Vabergam. And, I made that I wanted to present an Australian flag to the college. Well the godson of Norman, the godson had arranged quite a function. He put a little ad in the paper, the local paper
- 12:30 about my coming over and a lot of people, rang him and said I know that incident can I come to the function. Anyway when I arrived there were 300 or 400 people there. And the college people had go the, a bugler to learn the last post, and also the band to play Advance Australia Fair. So it was
- 13:00 quite, an emotional meeting, and it presented the Australian flag which flew from their flagpole whilst I was there. At that particular time, or when the ceremony was over a lady came out from the congregation, and handed me a little pin and, cause I was a battler, and she said, they are parts from your crashed aircraft. She had kept them for 50
- 13:30 years. And its part of the fuselage, you can see part of the round L which, the coloured red and white and the round L. And we spoke about this, she spoke a little English and as I was closing the tin to hand back to her, she said no you take them home for your memories. So I still have it over there if you want to have a look at it. Then I was told at the next
- 14:00 day that I would be picked up from my hotel, and to leave my car and I would be driven following another car, to a certain place. So we drove though these little villages and eventually we stopped, climbed up an embankment and got over the top of it and the chap who had been in the leading car, came over and said Robert this is your field. This

14:30 is where you landed. They are the woods, told me to go over. He was the original farmer. Then his wife came up to me and put her arms around me and said Robert I made 4 blouses from your parachute. What was good about that was to know that something had been made good from the parachute. So that sort of

15:00 closed, that chapter a little bit.

And what was that like seeing the field again?

Well it certainly bought back good memories of the people who had helped me, it bought back the memory of how lucky I had been to have landed safely, how be it with a busted leg, but I landed safely and I finished up in safe hands.

Did you ever feel there was someone watching over you?

15:30 Well I wasn't that type of person I'd, I don't know that I reflected on that, I just, I guess I reflected on just how lucky I was and that id met up with the right people and therefore they became my saviours.

Did you see Martin again?

Not,

Or does he not live there anymore?

No he, in 1945, we had been to Belgium

16:00 and, I asked about Martin because I knew that he had been in love with this Belgium girl and they said "Oh he married Denise," I didn't know her name at the time. "And he... lives" they gave me his address and phone number, and they also said he worked for BOAC, which it British Overseas

16:30 Air Corporation, forerunner of British Airways. I kept trying Martin's phone all the way through our driving through England and Scotland, and Wales and could never make any contact. We eventually got back to London and about 2 days, I think it was, before we were due to leave, I, the next morning I tried,

17:00 I thought well the only thing I can do is try again and no answer. So I though I'll try BOAC, so I tried BOAC and got in touch with Martin. They finally put me through to him. So we reintroduced ourselves over the phone and I said well look were leaving tomorrow, we haven't got much time. So we said how about I met you on Victoria Station

17:30 so he came and we had a 2 or 3 hour chat over a cup of coffee and then we had to go. And I said to him "Well, now, you work for BOAC so therefore you're going to be able to get a cheap fare. What about coming over to see us. You can stay with us and it won't be any cost." And he said "Yes I'll do that." Then not long after that we had a, at this stage I had still not met Denise.

18:00 And we had a letter, long letter from Denise to say that he had been killed by a hit and run driver, he used to, he lived about 20 miles out from London and he used to ride his bike backwards and forwards and he'd been hit by a hit and run driver and had died. So we then prevailed, by constant correspondence for Denise to come out and, see us.

18:30 So she did, cause being a widow of a BOAC employee. She came out to see us and she spent a few days here, and then she had to overstay here because there, BOAC, had a big strike on and of course, she wanted to get back for the anniversary of Martin's death and we had a terrible time to get her back, a torrid time. We had to call on another friend, called on all

19:00 sorts of help, but we finally got her back and she got back just in time. Well subsequently on other trips we had stayed with Denise, but that was Martin's fate.

Did the war teach you any lessons?

Try and be tolerant, more tolerant of people. Try and understand, about other people's opinion,

19:30 try and understand fully the bravery of some people. And they do it without wanting recognition. It enlightens me to what do they say, to report with the Air Crew Association, that when you work as a team nobody cares who gets the credit. And they worked as a team and they weren't concerned about who got the credit.

20:00 So those sorts of things I think, and I guess it taught me the value of life and you never know when you are going to go so enjoy life as long as it doesn't harm somebody else.

Any bad memories?

I guess only in the fact that nobody can foresee the consequence of war. There is always going to be wars.

20:30 Man was never in my opinion was never meant to live with man. Same as sometimes man was never meant to live with women, or woman. But we'd always have wars as long as a country, can allow one

person or a group of persons to dominate totally, and that's what happened in Germany but of course it was different circumstances, the great Depression

21:00 and, Adolph [Hitler] was going to be the person to get out, get the out of this trouble where it was costing them millions of marks just to buy a loaf of bread so he really had it all hand made for him. But then the people had to stand up for themselves. And of course that's happening in the world today. One person dominated and they become dictators

21:30 and nobody is going to do anything. So I guess it taught me to be very careful of what you say and do, where you go and what happens. But without stopping enjoyment of life and living.

Better move on to post war, pretty quickly, but you covered bits with your trips already. So you came back and what work did you get into?

Oh well when I came back or,

22:00 when I came back I went down on leave I was still in the air force, so I had leave. Went down to Sydney to meet up with the general manager of a company. An international pharmaceutical company for whom I used to do some work, with this shipping organisation I was with. And he asked me what I was going to do and I said well I guess I'm going to go back to the shipping company although I'd like to take on accountancy,

22:30 I think I'd like to be an accountant. And he said "Well would you think over coming, about joining, joining us and leaving Jackson and Spring and joining us as a salesman." I said "Yes, I'll do that." So when it came time to have my discharge, I contacted him in Sydney and I was employed with them as a storeman come representative, and

23:00 I stayed with them for 5 years more on the representative side. And didn't really thoroughly enjoy the job but the sales manager of that particular company he left and, asked me, he left and became the general manager of another American international pharmaceutical company and he asked me if I'd join them.

23:30 Basically to the offer was good, and I was to go up to Townsville and open up North Queensland for them. So I checked with Margaret whether she was prepared to leave Brisbane and go up with me and we thought it was a good advancement, better than my chances with the other company. So we went to Townsville for about 18 months then came back as the Queensland manager

24:00 and, progressed very well and then, I was approached by a German pharmaceutical company, who knew of my record, because my sales had been particularly good and they asked me if I'd join them. Well they made the better offer, you always have to hand onto the faster horse, so I joined them and stayed with them for 33 years as state manger with a team under me.

24:30 **Was there any trepidation with the fact that they were a German company?**

No, not at all, it was quite interesting when I went down for the first interview. Cause around the walls in the managers office he had some, photos of bomb damage to the factory. The interesting thing about this company was the father who founded the company in Australia, was interred as a, in the internment camp and his two sons fought in the Australian army, so that's how the

25:00 stupidity of war. And he was the only civilian to be killed, in a plane crash in the Berlin Air Lift, not the Berlin, yes in the Berlin Air Lift going back those years. He was on a mission to our factory in West Berlin and, the plane crashed and he was killed and he was the only civilian to be killed, because it was in

25:30 a military aircraft. So the sons took over and one did pharmaceutical side and on did the photographic side and as is said I stayed with them for 32 years and retired in 1987.

So where did you live when you first got back. Did you live at home?

No I lived in boarding houses. My family had retired and they had a house down at Hook Island. My Dad retired at 60 on the

26:00 burnt out diggers pension and, really I had no where to live and I didn't want to go down to the island. I still had my own way to make in civilian life. So I went into different boarding houses and then eventually, I went to board with Margaret's parents. Because our father, her father and my father were tram conductors together, and they enjoyed

26:30 each other and the company. I got sick of boarding houses and I was asked if I would go and live with them which I did.

Did you feel a bit unsettled after the war having to move around?

Oh well I was a bit unsettled in the sense that I didn't know where I was going to finish up living, or what I was going to do, although I knew, again this is going back to 1945, 46, 47

27:00 and I still hadn't settled into my civilian career properly. It had only just really started and I was, you know a little bit unsettled but then I started to settle down a bit when I found, sanctuary, should I say

with Margaret's parents. And she had brothers and sisters, her brother was in the Navy. We got on pretty well together.

27:30 **And when did you know that you were going to marry Margaret?**

Oh I don't know, it crept up on me. I used to be her confidant with her boyfriends, and then the last distressing break up, I was really her confidant. I said one day, let go to the pictures and shake you out of this sort of

28:00 nonsense. And it just crept up from there on. And then her sister got married and, I thought oh well maybe I should think about settling down, although I didn't have a permanent address. And I said "Do you want to, you know will we get engaged on the wedding day." Mary's wedding day. She thought that was a good idea but then I thought no I don't want to take the shine away from the bride it was her day, not our day.

28:30 So I let, I said "No we'll let it go a couple of months after that." So we were engaged for about 18 months and then the last 6 months, I got some money together and I built a brick home out at Kedron. So that I lived in that for about 6 months as a bachelor before, before we were married. And we lived in that home, when this offer about going up to Townsville, that was in 1948 we were married. And the offer came

29:00 up in 1950 so I asked Margaret and she said yes she'd go up because it was a better, a better for the career and that's where our first born was born in Townsville and. We stayed up there and came back in 1952, late 52, late 51, early 52 we came back. In the meantime we had been in a flat

29:30 in Townsville and it was a lovely landlady, but she every time our daughter would cry she would come in and nurse her, and I didn't like to constant nursing. So I looked around for a house because I really I thought I would be in Townsville for the rest of our lives. And went into an unfurnished home and bought a lot of, put the house on the market here, cause I don't think we were going to come back to it, with the money

30:00 furnished a home up in Townsville, 3 months later I was transferred back to Brisbane, with that particular company. And didn't have the home. So we had to stay with her parents in the flats, in those days, 1950 early 50's they were very very short indeed. So I couldn't get a flat and we stayed with her parents, there were 4 of us in one room. Margaret and I, Robin and she was pregnant with Robert he was, born, while we were there. So we were virtually 4 in

30:30 a room. And then I was able to get a loan through War Service, Veteran Affairs and bought this house and we shipped it in here. They started the house in 1952, we shifted here in Easter 1953 so we've been

31:00 50 years in our wonderful home. Although it wasn't quite as big as this at the time. It was only a 3 bedroom home. But then I found that later that I, cause we had 2 boys and 2 girls but different ages, older girl, a younger girl and two boys in the middle. With studying and work it became a little bit of a battle, 2 different ages in each room. So I was able to get an extension, of the

31:30 loan from Vet Affairs and then we put an extra 2 bedrooms so everybody had a bedroom. So now I've got a 5 bedroom house and you can have it for \$450,000.

Also just tell us about some of the organisations you've been involved in particularly to do with, your war veteran kind of work?

Well I've been the

32:00 National Secretary of the Australian branch of the Air Force Escaping Society, which was a branch of the English. I'm a committee member of the Caterpillar Club, the Australian branch of the Caterpillar Club. I've been tied up a little bit the ATC or as it's now called the Australian Air Force Cadets. I've done, incidentally on that particular one I was asked would I present wings to the successful

32:30 candidates, of a new parachute squadron that they formed. And I'm the Chairman of the Air Force Association, Brisbane Branch, I'm the Anzac Day Committee, I think that's about all. I'm pretty busy.

Why do you do this?

Well you've got to do something to keep your mind active and keep your body active. And I was for

33:00 12 months a volunteer with Expo, a protocol hosting officer. That was in 88 of course in 89 I did some TV [television] work. At that stage we started up the neighbour watch in our area I'm still the secretary treasurer for the last. We had our 14th anniversary last week. So I'm still the secretary treasurer and will be till the day I die I think. We can't get people to take it on.

33:30 I did 13 years with the Brisbane Tourism. Cause I was interested in tourism, interested in meeting people coming from overseas. And telling them the good things that Queensland had to offer. So I think that's the extent. Except now I'm on the committee of National Seniors. So it never stops.

Just tell us quickly about the parachute job you did?

Yes well they prevailed on me

- 34:00 to present, or they asked me would I present the wings because I was tied up with the Capital Club and they said you will do a tandem jump won't you Robert. I said yes I'd be happy to because I've already done 1 and I liked it because the first parachute jump I did, I didn't have memory of that, because you know bomb out, bomb out bang. The second one was quite good although we only went to 6,000.
- 34:30 This one we went to 14,000 feet and it was exhilarating and the parachutist who carried me on his lap, after we'd free fell for about 5,000 and then when he opened the chute, fully opened, and we floated around a little bit, he said well you can take over Bob you can fly it. So he put my hands in the toggles and pull down left,
- 35:00 well go left, pull down right, well go right, bring the chute down well go faster, let it go up, we'll go slower. So I said right I've got the instruction, off I went. So it was quite good to fly down to about 1,000 feet and then he took over for the landing. So I made a perfect 2-point landing on my bottom, or his bottom actually. That was good, excellent.

So was it kind of like carrying on your love of flying?

Well I think so because I really

- 35:30 do like parachuting now, but I can't afford the, to go and do it. I'd love to, be able to, you can learn to parachute in one day. But I can't justify that expense in the way commissions are today. If somebody else makes an offer to do another tandem jump, I'll be in there with my ears pinned back.

Do you have any finally words that you would like say

- 36:00 **about your life, or your experiences?**

Well I think my life has been full of different experiences, I have no regrets about anything that I ever did. I have no regrets of joining the air force. And I have no regrets of anything, I don't think I intentionally hurt anybody. I never hurt anybody. I always say

- 36:30 that if somebody doesn't like me please tell me why, if I have done something to harm them or hurt them in whatever manner tell me so that I can apologise and I won't do it again to somebody else. But unless they tell me I don't know. So I have no enemies, but if somebody feels that I am their enemy they have a problem I don't. So I just look on life as something to, my remaining days, how many they may be,
- 37:00 in my second chance of life. Then I would like to fulfil as much as I can without harming anybody. So I guess if there was any message that might be what it is.