Australians at War Film Archive

John Smith (Jack) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 22nd September 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/856

Tape 1

00:43 **Jack could we begin by just having you give us a very brief summary of your life to date?**

Well, I was born in Newcastle on the 28th of September 1924 and

01:00 my mother come from Scotland, my father come from England, and they met out here and married. I went to school at Tighes Hill School, in the primary school and then I went from there onto secondary school at Broadmeadow. From then on I went to work in 1938; I started work at the co-op [co-operative] store in Newcastle

01:30 and joined the air force in 1942 when I turned 18 years old. Before that I was in the ATC, Air Training Corps, and then went into the air force in 1942.

We'll come back to the detail of your air force career afterwards. Once you were demobbed what did you do

02:00 **after the war?**

I went back to work again at the co-op store for a couple of years then money was a bit tight so I looked for another job and I started out at the powerhouse at Wangi. I started working there as a labourer for about six months and then I went to a school and become an operator on the boilers and turbines which I worked for 30 years operating

02:30 on the boilers and turbines at Wangi Power Station. I retired in 1985.

And of course you've lived here for how many years?

I've lived here 47 years. Built this house when we, actually built it myself with a carpenter and I lived here with my wife and we had

03:00 four children.

And I understand you've married a second time?

Yeah I met Marj, Marjorie in England way back in 1944 and her husband died many years ago, quite a few years back and we got together again about nearly four years ago and we married so

03:30 that's about all at the moment.

Well, thank you for that summary. That's a good concise account, and that tells us of some of the highlights that we can go back and have a look at later as well. Now there will be a little bit of repetition from time to time. Try not to be concerned about that, because some of the questions might overlap from questions we've already asked, but that's just part of the process. So if we can go back and

04:00 **back to – if you could tell us when and where you were born?**

I was born in Waratah Street, Mayfield. That's a suburb of Newcastle and I grew, went in those days when the Depression was on, well, the Depression was on in the 1930s and we moved around to various houses because you couldn't

04:30 afford to live in one. If it got a bit dear, well, we moved and we moved into about six or eight houses in all the time that I remember. My father worked at the steelworks and when the Depression days, you know only got one or two days a week or maybe three days a week to work and I started school at Mayfield West and then we moved

05:00 to Tighes Hill and I went to school at Tighes Hill School for all of primary school and then went over to Broadmeadow at secondary school.

Well, look I'd like to come back a little later, not too far away to ask you a little bit more about your schooling. What can you tell us about your parents? I mean could you tell us about your father first?

Well, my father he come from County Durham in England and

05:30 he worked in the coal mines. He went to school until he was about nine years old then he went into the coal mines to work in those days and then he went from there. He left the coal mines and went to sea, and he become a kind of merchant seaman and he went all over the world. He spent times in America, San Francisco

06:00 and that type of thing and then he come out to Australia. That's where he met my mother. My mother come from Paisley in Scotland and she was about 19 years old when she moved out to Australia. She left her family over there and come out here on her own and she met my father out here in Sydney. Well, they were married and

06:30 had children. First two died apparently from different diseases and that, prevalent in those days and then there was another six children so we had six. We've still got six in the family at the moment. As far as I know they're all alive. I haven't seen my brother for many years but there was six still, five other children still alive. Three sisters and

07:00 one other brother. He's younger than me. He's about six years younger than me.

Now what can you tell us about the personalities of your parents? Can you tell us what sort of a person your father was?

Very strict sort of a chap for that type – of those times, of the years, you know. They were, you kept in your place and he was, you know,

07:30 a pretty good, he was a good worker. He was never out of work except when the Depression was on and he pretty well, always had a job but he looked after the six children pretty well, considering the times of the, you know when Depressions and all those type of things was on.

And what sort of a person was your mother, could you describe her?

Yeah she was lovely woman. She was a Scotch woman, as I said, born in

08:00 Paisley. Very, very fair, very strict with her children but we all you know got on well, with mother and as I say my father was a fairly strict sort of a chap but he working shift work we didn't see a lot of him you know. He was all over the place but my mother used to look after the children like, well, properly you know. We had to do as we're told and

08:30 that type of thing.

Sounds like children should be seen and not heard?

Yeah, that's right, that's true, yes, but anyway we got on pretty well, with my parents as a rule. My mother died in 1972. She lived to 83 years old. My father was about 77 when he died.

You were starting to give us a

09:00 **bit of a summary of your schooling before. Could you tell us a bit more about going to school and the kind of subjects that you enjoyed doing?**

Went to kindergarten school at Mayfield West but I can't remember much about that but at Tighes Hill School we had fairly good teachers there. I managed to do fairly well, at

09:30 school. I come second top of sixth class at the school before I went from there to secondary school. Second top of the school and then I went to Broadmeadow Secondary School and we did all different subjects there, metalwork and drawing and carpentry because I was a fairly handy sort of a chap. My father was the same. He was very handy

10:00 and I might have taken after him and I did reasonably well, at school. Passed my Intermediate [Certificate] in 1938 at the age of 14 and then I started work. Well, work was pretty hard to get in those days so I got a job at the Co-op store in Newcastle and worked there as a grocery assistant for the first couple of years and then I

10:30 well, I joined the air force from there. Into the ATC first and then joined the air force in 1942.

Alright I'd like to come back to the ATC in a little while. You've mentioned the Depression a couple of times. Could you tell us a little bit more about the Depression as it affected your family and the people that you knew in the Newcastle region?

Depression years were fairly tough when we were growing up.

11:00 As I say, my father only worked about two days a week or three days a week so money wasn't very plentiful. If you got three or four pound you were doing very well, we managed to eat all right, you know. There was six kids in the family and it was pretty tough but my father was very handy,

11:30 made a lot of furniture when we were moving into different houses and that type of thing and like he was a very, well, as I say, handy chap.

What was it that you were moving house so often at that time?

Well, it was cheaper rent most times you know. As I say we had to watch every penny, didn't get much pocket money when we were kids. Might have only got a penny

12:00 a fortnight when we were young and then threepence when we grew up a bit and which is a lot of money. Two bob out of a wage of about three pound; so we didn't have much to spend on sweets or anything like that.

What about other forms of entertainment like going to the pictures?

Maybe once a month or once every two or three months you might get to the pictures because it was sixpence to go to the pictures in those days.

12:30 That was a lot of money but, and, you know, as I say with six kids in the family – my eldest brother, he was six years older than me and he got a job when he was 14 which helped the family.

What sort of work was he doing?

He worked in a hardware shop in Newcastle. That was his first job then he went onto the steelworks and worked there for

13:00 many years after that.

It seems to me that if your father was having to move you around so much that this was a reflection of his own income at that time. Would that be correct?

That's true.

I mean how did you find having to move so often? It can't have been easy in terms of making and maintaining friends at that age?

No, it wasn't easy but I think

13:30 you adapt fairly well,; you know, we go from one school to another and you soon make friends. I don't know.

And can you give us a bit of a description of Newcastle as it was at that time?

Newcastle was a pretty dirty kind of a city in those days. When the steelworks were working, you know, the smoke was belching all over the city.

14:00 Newcastle had a very bad image I think, round the country, as a dirty city. Everybody thought it was a dirty city but we grew up in it all right but no problems. We had you know just made our own fun, tried to entertain ourselves.

So how would you entertain yourselves?

Well, we'd play

14:30 cricket in the street in the early days and then we joined teams; I played cricket for Tighes Hill Primary School at one time and then I joined a baseball team; it was one the first baseball teams in Newcastle at the time. We played baseball for a little while before the war and then I didn't play after the war but

15:00 that's about all I think.

Just to get back to the whole concept of Newcastle as a fairly polluted city. How would that, can you be a bit more specific as, I mean would there be you know layers of grime over everything? Would there be noxious smells, I mean what, can you just elaborate a little bit on Newcastle being a dirty city in that sense?

Well, there was a lot of smoke;

15:30 we were living at Tighes Hill we were very close to the BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary Company] and we used to at times when the northerly winds were blowing you would get a lot of smoke and grit blowing over that way but other than that we survived. We, I can't think of anything else that you mean.

I mean did your mother ever curse the fact that the washing was filthy

16:00 **as a result of the fallout or anything like that?**

No, it used to, you know, you had to do your washing and that type of thing when the wind was blowing the right direction but we managed all right.

What about people's state of health? Were there things like respiratory complaints as a result?

I think it affected a lot of people in those days. You know you could get smells and grit and that type of thing blowing

16:30 our way but I think didn't take a lot of notice of it, I suppose. We just become used to it. Other than that we were all right.

While you were growing up did people talk about World War I at all?

Not a lot. I had only had one uncle who was in World War I but he was in Scotland; my father

17:00 was mainly on the water. He was a seaman during the war and he travelled around a lot but other than that we didn't talk about it. We didn't hear much about it, kind of thing.

And so how important was Anzac Day?

To me it's fairly important. I've always upheld it; you know every Anzac Day we go out with chaps that I was in the air force and

17:30 my brother in law who was in the air force too and we always go together.

What about when you were growing up when you were a child and a teenager? How important was Anzac Day then?

We used to always observe it. We used to like to go and watch the marches in Newcastle. They had big marches in Newcastle with various items of, you know, big guns and that type of things they used to tow down the street in those days.

18:00 They don't do it now but we used to like to go and watch the march.

Seems to have been quite a big deal I think all over Australia?

Well, I think so, yes, in those days we were always interested in it, my age group and kids from school so we used to always watch it in Newcastle.

And at that time how important was the notion of the British Empire?

18:30 The British Empire? It was fairly important, I suppose. We were you know proud of being British and I think we just, I don't know just thought that the soldiers from the last war was pretty good chaps kind of thing and we had where I lived, near

19:00 me there was an old soldier from the First World War and he was a nice chap and we used to always talk to him and he'd tell us a bit about the trenches and that type of thing in those days.

What type of thing would he tell you?

How he was gassed during the war and he used to tell us a little bit about living in the trenches and up to his knees in muddy water and all this type of thing

19:30 but you know we just a bit curious and being kids. Other than that, well, that's about all.

Yeah, I mean World War I seems to have cast quite a shadow over Australia?

I think it did, yes, in those days we never ever thought we'd have another war but then when Hitler started a rise in power we didn't take a lot of notice of it out here, I don't suppose, because we were so far away from it but

20:00 eventually we had to.

So what was your awareness of what was happening internationally in the lead up to 1938, '39?

Well, you didn't consider much about it. I mean I was only 14 in 1939 and didn't take a lot of notice of those type of things in those days but eventually when the war started and the

20:30 soldiers were going overseas and all this type of thing, well, we were very interested in it and then when I joined the ATC at 15, 16 we did a lot of training in Newcastle with the ATC, with a chap called Clem Varley. He was our squadron leader. He was a squadron leader from the First World War. He was a fighter pilot in the First World War and he

21:00 started the ATC in Newcastle. We had two other chaps who used to help train us. One had a shop in Newcastle. He told us a lot about electrical business and another chap called Campbell he was in charge of Nesca which was

21:30 the electric supply in Newcastle and he taught us all the electrical business and wireless that type of thing; so that's about all, we did a lot of training on the ATC.

Why was it that you became involved in the ATC?

I liked – always interested in flying. When we were kids they used to have

22:00 over at Broadmeadow aerodrome, we had an aerodrome in Newcastle and they used to bring aeroplanes up from Sydney from wherever they were Canberra or whatever and they'd have a air pageant and there'd be Westland Wapitis and Hawker Demons and all the modern aircraft of those days. I was very interested in those and used to go and have a look at them

22:30 all the time which made me think; well, that's one of the reasons I probably joined the air force.

And of course it was the era of people like Smithy and Ulm as well? Were they important figures to you, the pioneer aviators of the 20th century?

Yes, yes, yes I liked to see that type of thing, you know. It just interested me.

What was it about flying that interested you?

Adventure I suppose. Everybody wanted to be a pilot

23:00 but everybody couldn't be a pilot. Eventually I went to ITS school, that's Initial Training School and they sorted you out into pilots and navigators, wireless operators that type of thing.

We'll get back to that later of course once we cover your enlistment. Tell me a bit more about

23:30 **Varley. I believe he was quite an influential figure on you?**

Yeah, Clem Varley was a very nice chap. He had a big engineering works in Newcastle and it's still operating now but it's out Tomago way, I think, and he was a fighter pilot in the First World War and he was a very nice chap and had a lot of influence on the young chaps of our age at the time

24:00 and used to tell us stories about the First World War.

So in what ways was he influential?

Well, he used to take an interest in the kids and that's about all he could do. He would instruct us but had other men to do all the actual instructions and teaching, but he influenced us to

24:30 become interested in flying and that type of thing.

What was it about his approach that was so influential?

I don't know, just his character I think, because I mean being a fighter pilot in the First World War was probably a very interesting and dangerous job and I think being young boys in those days we used to look up to him.

Did he ever tell you about his

25:00 **experiences during the Great War?**

Not a lot, but you know, he just used to touch on flying and that type of thing but didn't give us any specific instances of fighting and that type of thing. He just gave us discipline and that.

So how often would you attend the ATC?

Every week at least we used to go, after school or

25:30 after work mainly. I was 16 then but we used to meet every weekend at a place in Newcastle. We got an old shop and cleaned it out and we used it as a headquarters kind of thing and a lot of chaps made model

26:00 aeroplanes and we learned to – another chap called Harry Bond that I mentioned before, he was a mechanic and he had a big an old aero engine and he'd point things out to us and show us how that type of thing, you know, how it worked.

Did you go on any flights at that time?

No, no, never flew until I joined the air force.

In joining the ATC did you have a

26:30 **career in mind for yourself as a pilot?**

Did I have?

When you were taking part in ATC activities how could you see that this would influence or perhaps help your future?

Well, I think most boys that joined the ATC went into the air force because they were interested in that type of thing. I mean if you

27:00 didn't go into the air force, well, you'd go into the army anyway so mainly we liked the air force, you know, so that's why and being only 16 and 17 years old we did, learnt, we did different subjects and we

had teachers to teach us a little bit of navigation and that type of thing and just the

27:30 initial things that you needed to know when you first went into the air force.

So in your case I imagine that if you saw a path for yourself in the air force you also saw that within some kind of war context, would that be correct? Well, okay, so you obviously – like the other people that joined the ATC – you were interested in joining the air force. Could you see that if you did join the air force could you see

28:00 **that having a war application as well?**

Well, the war was on then so we expected to go to, we had to go into the air force when we turned 18 so

Just moving back slightly, your first job out of school I think was with did you say a co-op store?

Yeah.

Just to, before we deal with the air force and enlistment and so forth you've mentioned and I'll just check my notes here actually

28:30 **you just have to remind me what was your first job after leaving school?**

At the co-op store yeah. As a boy, you know I was only 14, I just went there and we packed shelves; in the grocery department mainly and packed groceries. In those days you didn't go to the shop and pick your own things. You just wrote an order out and sent it into the co-op store and somebody

29:00 packed it into a box or wrapped it in paper and delivered it to your door and that was one of my jobs. I had to pack orders and then we went on a drive. I didn't drive the trucks at that stage but I went out with the drivers and we delivered these groceries to everybody's door all around Newcastle.

So what actually was the co-op store?

29:30 It was a general purpose store. It had – you could buy groceries. You could buy household goods, furniture, women's clothing, men's clothing. It was a general purpose store.

Was this a private enterprise store?

No, it's a co-operative.

And what was the co-operative that ran the store?

Well, there was a manager. He run the

30:00 store but everybody used to buy shares in it. If you wanted to become a shareholder in the store you paid about one pound or two pound and become a shareholder and then when you brought things you would get a dividend off it and it used to be 10 cents in the pound in those days, oh ten, no two shillings in the pound

30:30 two shillings in the pound dividend so that meant that you always got a return every six months on your investment in the store so I think most people in Newcastle in those days joined the store and we had a very big clientele, so as I say

31:00 the grocery department was very big in Newcastle and we used to deliver groceries to practically every suburb in Newcastle in those days.

I imagine the co-operative itself was in some way attached to Newcastle being very much a steelworks town, probably with union affiliations as well?

That's right, yes.

When I think of co-operatives I often think of unions and the kinds of organisations they deal with. Was there any direct connection there between the co-operative and the kind of town that Newcastle was?

31:30 I think it was a very friendly town in those days and as I say everybody, not everybody, I suppose, but most people in Newcastle belonged to the co-op store and the steelworks employed most people in Newcastle in the early days. There was about 12,000 men worked at the steelworks and they used to all ride, nearly all ride pushbikes

32:00 down to the steelworks in those days. You know there was no cars around; a car was a rarity, I think, in Newcastle in my young days.

You've spoken about how the Depression affected Newcastle. How did the outbreak of World War II affect Newcastle?

Well, when the men started to join up there was a lot more work around. Before that it was fairly tough to get jobs,

32:30 you know, and that's what I say the BHP and the co-op store and some of the big shops they were the main employers in Newcastle in those days.

So how, I mean I imagine that with the outbreak of war suddenly there were a lot more demand for metal goods for instance and armaments and things like that. What sort of effect did the demands of the war itself have on industrial output in Newcastle?

Well, I suppose

33:00 that, you know, the steelworks was pretty busy. It went on to make munitions and that type of thing. I never worked there but as I say my father worked there right through until he died; he was a crane driver there and so they were busy. You know they had a lot of work in those days.

And did you father ever talk about conditions at the steelworks?

33:30 Well, he had a fairly good job as a crane driver. You know it was pretty tough working in the blast furnace and in the mills and all that type of thing but he was fortunate. He had a one off job driving a crane so he was quite good and bit extra pay kind of thing makes a difference. Ten pound a fortnight was pretty good in those days.

And did he drive a

34:00 **mobile or a fixed crane?**

A fixed crane. It was run along the width of the mills kind of thing.

And what sort of things did he do with that crane?

He'd be lifting all the whatever; machinery had to be lifted in the steelworks or they used to lift these big cradles, I think, with the steel, you know, molten steel

34:30 on it and then they'd have to pour the steel into ingots and that type of thing.

Did your father or anyone else ever talk about the strong influence of the unions at all?

No, he was a unionist, but you know he didn't used to dwell on it.

Yeah, I mean I've heard stories over the years about Broken Hill for instance was very much a union town and a strong union town and I just wondered to what extent that

35:00 **also prevailed in Newcastle?**

I think it was a fairly strong union. You mostly had to be in the union to work there, I think, in those days but he didn't talk about it much.

It's just interesting because it's the kind of fabric, it's like a kind of second layer to much of Australia's industrial history?

Yeah, yeah, the background of Newcastle, yes.

Yeah now getting back to the outbreak of war

35:30 **where were you when you heard that World War II had broken out?**

I was at work at the time. I think it was a Friday night if I remember rightly. We used to work till eight or nine o'clock at night in those days and I think that's when we heard that the war had broken out but I mean I was only 15 so it didn't affect me at that time.

Do you remember what your reaction was to hearing that news?

36:00 Not really. I thought, you know, we just thought it's a war it looks like we're going to have problems you know but it didn't affect us much at that stage at 15 years old.

Were there any concerns that it would be a major war or what was the general feeling about what kind of war it might be?

Didn't give it much thought, I think, because

36:30 as I say you're only 15 and more interested in enjoying yourself at that stage.

Now just moving ahead a couple of years of course you got involved in the ATC activities, can you then tell us how you came to enlist, what the circumstances of enlistment were as far as you were concerned?

Well, I was very interested in the

37:00 flying and when I heard that the ATC there was being formed, I and another chap that lived near me we decided we'd join it and so we went into Newcastle and found out where it was going and as I say, Clem Varley and these other two chaps were forming it so we just went in and joined up with them. We spent a lot of time there. We

37:30 helped clean up the old shop that we went to and you know we were there right from the start in Newcastle.

What were some of the main things that you learnt from the ATC?

What was the – ?

In terms of preparation for your later RAAF experience, what were some of the main things that you gained in your time from the ATC?

Well, we learnt first of all, it was discipline. They

38:00 started off by teaching you discipline and that type of thing. Then we had schools. They taught us a few things and they told us how if we wanted to join the air force we'd have to brush up on our mathematics and that. All the old things that it'd been four years since I'd been to school kind of thing, or three years anyway, and we had to try and just get back onto

38:30 get a new brain working again and they taught us marching, you know, exercises marching and all this type of thing but –

So there must inevitably have been an emphasis on getting yourself fit as well?

Yes, yes we did, we went out on different types of exercises

39:00 and we had a march in Sydney at one stage, when we learnt how to march properly, so it was quite interesting in those days for 14, 15 year old boys, or I was as I say, I was 16.

Tape 2

00:33 **You were in the ATC and had uniforms and did you have any access to rifles?**

We had uniforms, yeah, we all had a blue uniform. Didn't have rifles but.

So right from the word go you had what, a blue kind of serge uniform of some kind did you?

Yes, yes, yeah we even used it the first time when we went into the air force because they

01:00 didn't give us another uniform. It was just an original air force uniform. No, stripes or anything.

Not even, did you have rank within the ATC when you joined?

Yes, I think they had one or two; it'd be outstanding ones became a corporal but Clem Varley was a squadron leader and the others become flying officers, I think; the

01:30 other two that spent most of their time training us were flying officers.

So what was your rank in the ATC?

Just an ordinary airman.

Were you an LAC [leading aircraftsman] or anything like that?

No, when I went into the air force, you do the first three months, it's initial training school; we went to Kingaroy in Queensland and that's when you do all your

02:00 square bashing, get all your needles and that type of thing and then they sort out what you were going to be, either a pilot, wireless operator or navigator and at the end of the three months if you passed you become an LAC.

Just taking it back to actually enlisting, where did you actually enlist?

Actually in Sydney, although we had an office in Newcastle

02:30 and yes, I did, I enlisted in Newcastle. I went in there and they take you all in, in a group and we had to swear allegiance type of thing and then but when I joined when I went into the air force I had to go to Sydney and we had to go down to Bradfield Park and that was the first contact we had with the air force and

03:00 then we went from there up to Kingaroy in Queensland and did our initial training school.

What actually happened at Bradfield Park?

Well, people got their uniforms to start with, but we had uniforms, anybody that was in the ATC, and got your first lot of needles.

What were they for?

Tetanus and typhoid and all this type of

03:30 thing. There was 'TAB' [typhoid vaccination]. I think they called it. I don't know what that was for.

TAB?

TAB, I don't know what that meant, but that was the first lot of needles you had and then we went to Kingaroy and then we got all the vaccinations for smallpox and they weren't the best in those days.

Why not?

Made everybody sick. I've still got the marks on me arm where you got

04:00 them.

For how long were you sick after the smallpox vaccination?

Quite a while, quite a few days. They make you fairly uncomfortable and you get a big scab on your arm.

Yeah, this is bringing back memories for me actually.

They do, yeah.

Mine turned green.

Did they? Yeah, very good. Anyway after three months in the air force we got a little bit of leave to come home. I was home for Christmas in 1942.

04:30 **When you went to Kingaroy can you talk us through more specifically what training you did up there?**

First, you know, we did the first lot of marching. Square bashing you used to call it in those days. That was the main thing, get the first lot of discipline and we'd also go to school and they'd try and find out your capabilities as far as science, maths and that type of thing first and a little bit of,

05:00 see how adaptable you were to flying, you know, used to put you in a type of simulator. In those days it wasn't the best and if you had a little bit of adaptability to be a pilot or whatever you're going to be, that's where you were sorted out and then if you had what's the word? If

05:30 they thought you'd make a pilot kind of thing, they'd sort you out there and then you'd be sent off to a different school.

You mentioned the simulator; what can you tell me a bit more about that?

Well, it was just a machine to test your coordination and that type of thing.

What did the simulator consist of?

It was a very, very crude sort of affair in those days. It wasn't like these

06:00 linked trainers and things that they have nowadays but it was just a type of thing where you could learn to control your coordination, type of thing. You know, your feet and your arms and that type of thing.

Can you describe for me what the simulator actually consisted of?

No, I can't. I can't even think about it now at the moment.

You said it wasn't the best. Why

06:30 **wasn't it?**

No, well, it was a crude sort of an affair in those days I think but it just helped them sort out people who had you know you could work your hands and feet together kind of thing.

So apart from testing out your reaction to being in the simulator it was all about coordination I presume?

I think so yes.

And you mentioned

07:00 **aptitude tests for maths and science. How did you go in those tests?**

Not too bad except for science. It'd been four years since I'd been to school and I was a bit rusty on that type of thing. I did fairly well, in maths and the English and that type of thing but science I had to do a lot of studying and there was another young chap who

07:30 worked in a bank and he was using his brain a lot more than what I was at that time and he helped me get through it, kind of thing. He took me aside and we sat down and he explained lots of things about it, you know, that type of thing.

So Kingaroy, in other words, was very much a testing for aptitude –

That's right, yes.

– and testing for well,

08:00 **you know, your suitability for certain tasks?**

Yes that's true. I mean if you had the thing to be a pilot, well, I don't know how they sorted you out. You may have to have a different attitude. You may have to be more outgoing and then they sorted you; if you were very intellectual you become a navigator, otherwise you might become a wireless operator, which I did.

08:30 **What do you think was it about you that got you selected for wireless operator?**

Well, I think I was pretty fairly good with me hands and I had an attitude that I didn't care whether I wanted to be a pilot or anything else as long as I was in the air crew, so I did my best and it

09:00 depended how many wireless operators or pilots they needed in those days, so they sorted you into those categories.

When you say fairly good with your hands how did that make you suitable for the navigator's position?

Well, you had to use your hands to use the Morse key and I was fairly good; I did a little bit of Morse when I was in the ATC and I knew a bit,

09:30 a little bit about Morse code. I think once it gets into your brain it doesn't ever, ever leave it and I can still do a certain amount of Morse but they don't use it at all now.

So if it came to the point these days you'd still be able to do it?

I could still send at a slow speed. I don't think I could receive it very well, but I could still send it.

Was speed very much a thing with an effective Morse

10:00 **operator?**

Speed, yes, you had to learn to be able to send Morse code at about 30 words a minute. That was the average, but we didn't learn a lot of that at ITS. That was where they just sorted you out and then we went up to wireless school up in Maryborough.

You mentioned coming back to Sydney after Kingaroy for some leave. Did you have anyone special in your life at that time?

No, too young. There was a

10:30 girl at work, we used to go to dances together, high school dances in Newcastle. Both high schools, a boy's high school and the girls' high school used to have a dance on a Saturday night and you know we were only 15, 16 year olds. We used to go there and then when I went into the air force when we come home, well, we went one night but I only had one night at home at that stage but then from there we went back up to

11:00 Maryborough. That's where the wireless school was in Queensland.

And could you describe the wireless school course for me?

Well, it was a very intensive school. We had to try and learn a lot about the wirelesses themselves and how they worked but the most important thing was

11:30 learning the Morse code and so they used to drum that into us five or six hours a day every day and then you had to learn to go out in a truck and you'd learn how to do radio direction finding. Then before that and after that we used to go into flying.

12:00 We didn't go flying for the first two or three months. It was about the last three months we did flying in Wackett trainers. There was a pilot and wireless operator in the back and we used to have to be learnt to be able to send messages from when you're in the air and pick up the radio, learn radio direction finding and

12:30 **You've mentioned the wireless a couple of times. Could you describe the wireless for us?**

Well, I forget. There was a TR, I don't know I can't remember the type of wireless it was. It was just a, you know, it's not like the radio as that type of thing in those days. It was just a wireless square box like that with

13:00 to be able to send messages from but I just don't know much about it now, can't remember.

But how would you use that wireless? What was actually on it that enabled you to send and receive messages? Was there a Morse key for instance on the wireless?

Yeah there was a Morse key. You had to have a Morse key and just an ordinary wireless kind of thing, wireless set and earphones that you could

13:30 receive your messages from and that type of thing.

So were all the messages being sent and received in Morse?

Yes, in those days, yeah.

What about in the clear? Did you do any training for in the clear verbal communication?

Well, we did a little, a little towards the end. We only had a very little, cause most messages were sent via Morse in those days. We didn't use speech for air to air; it

14:00 was just all Morse code because I don't know, that was just the type of thing they used in those days.

Now of course Morse code?

It travels further than speech.

Okay, yeah I'll just get, I've interrupted or talked across you there, could you tell me what the advantages in Morse code were?

Well, Morse code travelled further than speech, you know they're different and different

14:30 frequencies and that type of thing but the Morse would go for miles, many, many miles whereas speech in those days was only local, wasn't the different types of radio that we have nowadays.

Thanks for explaining that. I hadn't realised that actually so it's quite a crucial consideration?

Yes it does, well, it did you know.

15:00 **And I mean obviously in Morse code you're communicating in standard English but was there ever a code or a cipher within that code where you would be sending a message using you know cipher code or anything like that?**

Yeah, well, each fall of letters would be in a block and they could be all scrambled up and

15:30 then you had to, when you could, have to unscramble them, with the original. I forget now what it was actually but that mostly you would send it in plain language but there was times when you had to send it in

16:00 code and then the other end would have a code breaker kind of card that they would use to decipher it.

I believe the codes were changed quite regularly, sometimes daily?

I suppose they did but we just had to learn to – basically we did most of it in plain language in those early days but when you went on, if you went on to

16:30 ops and things you'd have to send it in code and that was when the code business become essential.

Now when you were selected to be navigator were you disappointed at not being selected to be a pilot?

I was at first, yes. I think most people wanted to be a pilot but if you, you know it depends on your adaptability, so they say. They brain washed

17:00 you kind of thing and they know they can pick the ones out who want to be pilots and the chap I joined up with, he become a very good pilot, but he didn't seem to be any different to me kind of thing, but he eventually went on to be a Lancaster pilot.

How disappointed were you not to be selected?

Pretty disappointed at first but it, you just take it for granted

17:30 that they know what they're doing and the powers that be and we just went on as long as we were in air crew mainly.

You said they brain washed you. What do you mean by that?

I don't know. Well, actually they didn't brain wash you but they just picked you out because of certain qualifications you had, I think that's what it was.

I think when you said brainwashed I

18:00 **I was imagining it more in terms of persuading you that the decision they made had been the correct one?**

No, I think they just sorted you out in what they how many different types of aircrew they wanted to start with and then they took the ones who they thought who would be more capable of doing each job.

Now a little while ago you mentioned the Wackett Trainer. I haven't heard of this plane before. Could you describe the Wackett Trainer for us?

18:30 It was a single engine monoplane kind of thing with a long cabin and the pilot in the front and it used to carry one wireless op or two; you could get two wireless operators in, I think; we'd be in the back, the wireless operator, learning

19:00 mainly how to send and receive messages while you were flying cause it a little bit harder to do that while you were flying than when you were on the ground.

Why was that?

I don't know. First of all you had to have a trailing aerial and you had to put this aerial out and the movement of the aircraft and you're trying to send messages and receive

19:30 messages while you're in the air; it's a little bit more complicated than just sitting at a desk.

I imagine that if you'd hit an air pocket or you're in turbulent conditions it could be rather difficult?

Yes, that's right, but we did flying up in Queensland; it was fairly calm most of the time you know. You used to run into bumpy conditions now and again; particularly when you went over the coast. You know it made a difference if you flew over the coast;

20:00 the difference in the air pressure from land and sea.

I hadn't heard of that before actually. How could that difference in conditions manifest itself?

Well, I think the cooler air when you go out over the sea and the air's travelling you know. It's either coming from off the land over the sea, so it's warmer air over the land than it is over the sea, so

20:30 once you travel over that you can feel the difference in the aircraft, particularly when they're only a small aircraft.

So once you'd finished at Maryborough, what happened next?

We did six months at Maryborough and we graduated then as a sergeant and then we went down to Evans Head

21:00 and we did a gunnery course there.

What did that consist of?

We had to learn to fire these air guns, like the gas operated guns. You have to load the ammunition up into belts and then put them into these pans and then the pan would go on the gun and then you'd learn to fire these guns at a drogue being

21:30 towed by another aircraft; so you'd learn to try and hit another, well, a drogue in those days but that was the idea if you had to try and fire at another aircraft in the air.

Could you tell me what the drogue was?

It was about 10 or 15 feet of canvas being towed behind another aircraft, like a cylinder, and it used to

22:00 go out. You had to try and hit this drogue with the other chap flying. The other pilot he was only a trainee as well, most of the time.

And you say a gas operated gun. What kind of gun was this?

Machine gun, yes, it was the gas; when you fire one bullet kind of thing it gives off a certain amount of gas and so that helps to operate

22:30 the gun. It was the old type of machine gun from the First World War I think.

And how did you go with your score against the drogue?

Reasonable, reasonable. I had a few hits.

Must have been quite difficult?

Well, it was fairly difficult, you know, and you didn't get a lot of practice at it. You only had a couple of flights kind of thing. We might get one, two flights a week

23:00 so you had know, do your best anyway.

Now at Kingaroy and Maryborough and at Evans Head were there any particular instructors that stand out in your memory?

No, don't think not really. There was one chap who had been in the Middle East; he come back. He was

a pilot. He'd been shot down a couple, once and I think he got burnt on his face. That was the thing that struck me. He was a

23:30 pilot; he was. We went onto Fairey Battles. We used them at Evans Head; they were an old World War II fighter bomber.

A World War II fighter bomber?

Yeah, they were used in the early part of the war over in Britain and we got these Fairey Battles out here to use

24:00 when we went to learn at gunnery school.

So this was also at Evans Head was it?

Yes.

Could you describe the Fairey Battle for me?

They were a single engine, a lot faster plane than the earlier ones we flew in and as I say they were used in the early part of the war in Europe. A fairly big engine,

24:30 a fairly big kind of a plane, you know, considering what we used before.

I think they were quite spectacular looking aircraft weren't they?

They were, yes they were, quite well; I don't know how to describe them. They were as I say a single engine, a very heavy fighter plane, fighter bomber and they were used in the early part of the war

25:00 and we used to have two gunners in the back, you know. There was room for two of us to have our turns to fire this gun.

So it seems to me that the role of the navigator was also to operate a gun from time to time?

Yeah, well, no, we were wireless operator/air gunners not navigators.

Sorry, wireless operator. So

25:30 **Okay, to go back to the wireless operator/air gunner, what was the full range of responsibilities of the wireless operator/air gunner?**

Well, the wireless operator is mainly to send and receive messages when you were flying and different to nowadays where it's all voice and long range

26:00 wirelesses, you know, but we were mainly just there to send and receive messages from when we went on operations and then become a spare air gunner, an assistant air gunner to, see it depends what type of aircraft you went onto on operations. A lot of our chaps went onto fighter bombers

26:30 up in New Guinea and that type of thing and whereas we went, when I finished up, we went over to Britain and we went onto the heavy four engine fighters; which we learnt to operate the turrets on the heavy bombers but only as a standby you know. Mainly we were there

27:00 for wireless in those days when we went back onto Halifax bombers and Lancasters and that type of thing but the chaps, some of them went up to New Guinea on fighter bombers and Mosquito's and that type of thing.

So it was a lot of variation depending on what?

That's right, and you were just learning the basics of the training kind of thing.

27:30 **Talking of training just to return to this pilot from the Middle East who, what, had a fairly scarred face?**

Yeah, fairly, yes, he got burnt and he got shot down over in Egypt over in the Middle East. He was a not an old chap but in our days you called them old if they were 25, 22 years old you know and that's about what he was but he'd been in the air force from the start of the war

28:00 and he was on fighters in the Middle East and apparently he had a bit of a run in with a German fighter over there and he got shot down and got burnt.

How heavily scarred was he at this time?

He had a pretty bad sort of a face; he managed to bail out but he got a bad burn on his face before he got out.

How had that affected him in terms of day to day,

28:30 **you know, personality?**

I don't know. I suppose it wouldn't be very good but we didn't see much of them. We only had them you know he would just come along and say I'm your pilot for the day and he'd just get in and fly and take us out on a trip but that's about all. I didn't have a lot of contact with them in those days. I mean we were just LACs or until we got our stripes we were;

29:00 he was a flight lieutenant or something like that, so you don't mix with them much.

Do you remember his name?

No, I don't, not now, no.

Sounds like?

I've probably got it written down somewhere in a log book.

You've kept your log books have you?

I had it for a while but I don't know where it is now, at the moment; I was looking for it recently but I don't know where my log book's gone now.

Now to what extent were there accidents

29:30 **during training? We've heard stories about, you know, the very high percentage of accidents during RAAF training?**

Well, there was accidents but we never, ever come across them at that stage. More accidents later on when we got to England because of, you know, bit more flying over there but we had no accidents as far as I remember in Australia.

30:00 **Now you were training of course under the auspices I think of the Empire Air Training Scheme weren't you?**

Yeah, Empire Air Training Scheme, yes.

What was your understanding of what the Empire Air Training Scheme was?

It was formed to just to give everybody in air crew about the same type of training; there was from South Africa and

30:30 New Zealand and Australia and Britain. They all had air crew had come under this training scheme and a lot of the chaps from England went out to South Africa and did their training out there. You know it was just a way of combining all their technology and that type of thing to bring everybody together and you could

31:00 be flying with different nationalities when you went to England. We did; we had all different nationalities flying there and they all come under the same scheme.

The name implies and from some of the stories we've heard it implies that it was very much for the defence of Britain that people were being trained? Was that correct?

Well, mainly, yes. Well, when we were here we didn't know where we were going in the first place. I mean

31:30 more than half of my school went to New Guinea or went north but they just sorted you out in a funny way. They sorted us out by alphabetical order. There was people whose names started from A went to M, they went to New Guinea or up in north and from M to R they sent them down to South Australia.

32:00 I don't know what for, but then from S to Z we went to England and that's how they were sorted out.

That's extraordinary?

Yes it is.

I didn't realise it was that simple.

Well, that's how they worked it out. I don't know whether what happened to the chaps that went down south. Eventually I think they went to New Guinea as well, but they only wanted a certain amount at that stage.

That's good. I'd heard

32:30 **it mostly spoken of in terms of the British war effort, be it at home in Britain or in Europe or wherever else but obviously home defence for the various dominions was part of that as well, yeah?**

Yeah well, that's how they sorted us out anyway.

Now just getting back to the machine gun, were you instructed in how to pull the machine gun apart for instance?

Yes, we had to try and pull them apart and put them back together in the air and on the ground and

33:00 blind folded and that type of thing as well.

Why blind folded?

Well, so as you could do it at night time in the dark, but you know we managed to do it eventually. They weren't that complicated but it took a little bit of doing. It took a while to learn how to do this type of thing.

What was the purpose of having to pull a machine gun to pieces?

Well, if you got

33:30 jams, you know, you got a bullet jammed in the breach or anything like that, it had to be pulled apart to try and free the jamming.

And would any of the crews include armourers or would the armourers be involved in helping to set things off before the takeoff?

Well, they were always usually set up before by the armourers and we just have to go over and pick up a gun

34:00 each day when we were to go out and they'd all been tested by the armourers before we went out but you just had to be able to pull it apart if you had to but we didn't usually have that much time to do those.

Right, so from Evans Head what was the next step for you?

Well, I wasn't 19 when I finished

34:30 with the training and we'd become sergeants by then so they couldn't send you overseas until you turned 19, so two or three of us, we went from there to Parkes and they called us staff WAGs [wireless air gunners] and so we had to fly as an experienced sergeant wireless operator when they were training navigators

35:00 out at Parkes and so we had to have a wireless operator on every plane that went out in case they got lost kind of thing, you know, and then at least we had the wireless to try and get you back home.

So at Parkes you were involved in training?

No, I wasn't, I'd finished training. I'd become a sergeant then.

But were you training other navigators?

Yeah, we were training navigators.

Navigators?

Navigators yeah that was Parkes training, Parkes aerodrome was a

35:30 navigation school and the ones who'd become navigators, they used to carry two of them and a wireless operator in an Avro Anson.

You used the term staff WAG, what did that mean?

Well, they called you a staff WAG because you were trained as a wireless operator so you went on the staff at that station.

What did WAG stand for?

Well, wireless

36:00 operator air gunner and so at that stage we were supposed to be fully trained.

So you were fully trained as a wireless operator air gunner and yet you were also teaching navigation?

No, no I wasn't teaching navigators. We just went there as a wireless operator on the planes that the navigators were learning to do navigation on in case they got

36:30 lost or we got into bad weather and we were looking for direction home kind of thing.

For how long did you do that?

Three months and then from then they sorted us out to go to England. We got embarkation leave and we didn't even know where we were going at that stage. We just went on embarkation leave and then when we went back to Bradfield Park,

37:00 that's when they sorted us out; went to England.

How keen were you to go overseas?

I enjoyed that part of it. I thought that was going to be good but we didn't know at that stage we were going to go to England.

I was going to say at the point when you didn't know, what were you hoping would happen?

Well, we hoped we would be going over to England; New Guinea didn't appeal to me and that type of thing, going up the Islands. For

37:30 some reason or other, I don't know why, but it didn't appeal to me to go up there but I was pleased we went to England.

You must have been thrilled, yeah, you must have been really thrilled when you knew?

Well, being, my parents coming from England you know I think it and they used to always be telling me a bit about England in the early days and I always wanted to go there so I thought well, that's a good opportunity to go anyway.

What was your parents' attitude to your enlistment

38:00 **in the first place?**

They didn't particularly want me to go into the air force, well, didn't want me to go into anything, I suppose but there was a war on so I managed to get my father to sign the papers because you had to have permission from your parents to join and if you didn't go into the air force, you were just put into the army anyway. You were just called

38:30 up, you know.

Did any of your brothers and sisters see war service as well?

No, no my oldest brother was six years older than me but he'd had an accident on a motorbike and his leg was very badly injured and one leg was shorter than the other so he didn't go, he worked at the steelworks all through the war.

I imagine that was a protected industry?

Yes.

39:00 **So how did you first hear that you would be going abroad?**

How did I?

How did you first hear that you'd be travelling to England?

Well, when we were down at Bradfield Park they sorted us out and just said, "All on this end of the line step forward." and that's how we went to England. Then there wasn't much

39:30 technicality, just they just sorted you out in numbers or wherever you happened to be in the line but I think most of the chaps that went over there come from S to Z.

Tape 3

00:31 **Okay, so what was your understanding of what the Empire Air Training Scheme was?**

It was set up to coordinate all the training for right around the British Empire at that stage. It was just a way of bringing together all the facilities for training

01:00 different air crew. They hadn't sorted you out into different categories and it was just a way of sorting them into different getting all your young people who were interested in the air force to learn to do the training. That's all I can remember about it.

01:30 **Can you recall the reasons why there was a need for the Empire Air Training Scheme?**

No, I don't know of any reason for it but it just a convenient way to bring all the young people together I think to do their training. It was you know they sent people over to Canada in the early

02:00 part of it from Australia. They mostly went over there and did a lot of the training because that's where it first started, I think, and they were set up to do more training over there than they were here but eventually by 1942 when I went into it, we did most or all of our training out here before we went when the Pacific war was at its peak.

02:30 **Now of course it came for you to leave Australia and go overseas. What do you recall of your farewell from Australia?**

Well, we were surprised at first. We just were told that we were going overseas and we got seven days embarkation leave so we went home on leave for that seven days, then we went back to Sydney and to

03:00 and next morning we were all assembled at a bus and down to the wharf and the next thing we know we're onboard the Mariposa which is an American boat which was out here at the time. It had just brought a lot of Italian prisoners of war back from the Middle East and it was on its way back to America with a lot of American

03:30 soldiers, troops who had finished; they'd been in the islands and they were on their way home. So then we went across from here. We were put onboard the Mariposa and we didn't know where we were going. The next thing we know, we're on the high seas for 14 days and we landed in San Francisco.

What was the Mariposa like as a ship?

It was quite a big ship;

04:00 around about 20,000 ton. We weren't impressed with the food onboard because it was all American type of food and two meals a day. You only had a breakfast and a dinner kind of thing but it was all type of American type of food and you had to eat everything with a spoon nearly.

What sort of food was it? I mean you say American food but what were you served?

04:30 I don't know really; I can't remember now but it wasn't very good. You know like stews and that type of thing. It was all mushy type of food. Breakfast and we had just ordinary kind of porridge and that type of thing but it wasn't, well, we weren't impressed with it.

We've had a few men

05:00 **talking about how they were on American ships as well, and they put maple syrup on their bacon and things like that so I'm imagining, yeah?**

We didn't get any bacon I'm afraid, but there was that type of food but I mean it was wartime. We expected that type of thing and it wasn't, well, we had enough of it but it wasn't really impressive type of food; scrambled eggs

05:30 and well, it was only powdered egg in those days. It wasn't eggs, mainly all that type of thing you know.

And what about other conditions onboard the ship, what were they like?

Well, we were very crowded. Most of us were in tiered bunks on the decks, on the open decks, but the decks had canvas blinds down the side

06:00 just to protect from the wind. I suppose the American troops they were inside but Australians spent most of the time on the decks outside. We had one scare on the way over too; we didn't know where we were going at the time and we were out in the middle of the Pacific and we had a scare. We thought there was a submarine;

06:30 all of a sudden the boat went flat out doing its 30 odd knots and we found out that they'd had a scare, that there was a submarine in the area and they were just trying to go all out to get away from it but whether it was there or not we don't know.

When you heard that, what went through your mind?

Well, everybody just a bit

07:00 apprehensive but they didn't broadcast the fact; it was only the fact that somebody found out and surmised that that was the problem, that there was a submarine in the area.

Now while you were onboard the ship what duties did you have to perform?

There were some people were put on watch just to help

07:30 the crew; just for looking for aircraft and that type of thing but we didn't do anything in particular. We just kept out of the road of the crew.

And so how did you keep yourself entertained? I mean this was a two week trip?

Just used to have to walk around the deck and keep yourself occupied. They had a few exercises they

08:00 used to do every now and again; we used to have to do physical exercise on the deck and just generally keep yourself occupied.

What kind of exercises?

Just walking and physical exercise with your arms and that type of thing but when there's a crowd onboard there's not a lot of room.

And what

08:30 **was the mood like onboard the ship?**

Very good; very jovial at the time. Although we didn't know where we were going, we got on all well together. There was no fights or any of that type of thing onboard. You know, we just kept ourselves occupied. Some people played cards and others

09:00 just gathered together and talked.

And what about seasickness, was that a problem for you?

No, not really. At first, when we first got out, the first night, the first day, people were a bit sick but most people settled down.

We heard a wonderful story the other day of there being a chain reaction of seasickness.

09:30 **One person would throw up –**

Yeah.

– and then the rest of them would?

Yeah, that's quite possible, but I didn't see a lot of sickness amongst us, including myself; when you first got onboard you were a little bit queasy but most people settled down all right.

Now what was it like when you arrived in San Francisco?

It was very

10:00 exciting at first. When we got across there and we sailed underneath this Golden Gate Bridge they talk about and it was quite exciting at the time and when we landed in San Francisco they took us to a big army camp and it was a very impressive kind of a place. There was all brick buildings

10:30 and not what we were used to out here. We had proper beds and sheets, everything, so it was quite impressive at first. We only had how many days? We had about two days there. That's two days there and then they took us back to the

11:00 coast again. We went inland a little bit to this big army camp and then we went back and they put us onboard a train, one of these big Pullman trains with all these big Pullman carriages and porters what you were, you know you're not used to that type of thing out here and they had these porters and we spent five days on the train going across

11:30 America; we finished up in New York.

Okay, well, just before we do go onto New York, you mentioned that there were other American soldiers onboard the ship. What were they like?

We didn't see a lot of them because mostly they kept to themselves. We kept to ourselves. They were chaps returning from the Pacific fighting in there mainly and they were just going

12:00 back home. We didn't mix very much with those; a lot of them had been wounded or been sick or something like that out here in Australia.

Of course there was quite a stressful relationship between the American and the Australian soldiers, not all the time but

12:30 **we've heard of other incidences where that was the case. What was the general attitude toward the American soldiers?**

Not too bad. It was worse when we were back in Australia here because there was a big riot up in Queensland just before we left. That was between the army that had just come back from the Middle East, our army. I think it was the 6th Division and the American

13:00 troops that were already over here and you know what went on between Americans in those days weren't very popular with our type because they were out here pinching all the girls and the 6th division which had been in a lot of action in the Middle East, they came back here and found Americans boasting as they usually do.

13:30 But anyway the ones onboard, on the Mariposa, they seemed to be all right. They'd been in action in the islands and any of the ones that we met were quite reasonable nice blokes.

So what was your first impression of San Francisco as a city? Could you describe it for us?

Well, we didn't see much of it actually because we just landed

14:00 there and then were taken by busses to this big army camp and then we had to go through another medical inspection over there. Although we'd had medical inspections before we'd left here and all our needles, when we first arrived over there we had to go through another medical inspection before they would allow us to land, so we went into the army camp and all the doctors inspected us all from head to toe

14:30 and then we spent two days, I think, in this camp. As I said it must have been a permanent army camp because it was big brick buildings and beds and sheets and everything like that which we weren't used to in those days and anyway then we were put back on a train, on busses and taken back to the railway yards

15:00 and then we went on this train, the big Pullman carriages, and went across to New York. On the way across we had a few stops on the side of the road and we were allowed to get out and stretch our legs and at one stage we were walking around these carriages and we heard these girls talking. They said, "Oh these Australians,

15:30 I wonder what language they speak?" So anyway we didn't get much time to fraternise with them so back on board again and the train went on its way merry way. We finished up in New York but on the way we stopped at Niagara Falls and we were allowed to walk around there and have a look at Niagara Falls.

What was that like?

Lovely, it's a beautiful spot and you know we weren't allowed to

16:00 wander very far because the train was just getting serviced there with food and water and we just had time to look at the falls from where we were and then back on board, then on to New York.

Now you mentioned the Pullman carriages. Could you describe the Pullman carriage to me?

They were just big sleeping carriages;

16:30 they're fairly big carriages, much like the ones we have on our trains over here now but they were more advanced than we were in those days and we used to have a Negro porter come around and he'd make all our beds up every night and then put them back again in the morning. We were treated like kings onboard the train. It happened to be Thanksgiving Day,

17:00 in November I think it is, when we were on the train and we got a lovely big Thanksgiving dinner. What do you call it? The turkey and all that type of thing which we weren't use to at that stage.

Now you mentioned you had a Negro porter. What was your observation of what race relations were like in America at the time?

17:30 Well, as I say we didn't mix very much at all with them but we got on all right with the porter. There was two or three porters in each car and we got on all right with them. They used to talk to us and we'd talk to them.

Were all the porters black?

Yes, yes they happened to be on this train anyway but I suppose they have their various ones on other ones but all the ones that we

18:00 come across were black.

Yeah I mean I'm wondering if there was anything else that you observed about how the African Americans were treated in America at the time?

Yeah, well, they were all right; we didn't have any problems with them. You know we were treated very well all the way across and so

18:30 if you're treated all right, you respond. So by the time we got to New York then; it was a good trip right across. It was five days so that was quite good and then we got to New York and we got five days leave. They gave us about 10 pound in American money. I think it was; what did I get? About 20 dollars I think, so

19:00 we went round. We went to different places, Radio City and Empire State Building and different places. Like we went to the Stage Door Canteen which was a big area, a big building where all the troops used to gather and they were entertained by the film stars of the day who happened to be in New York; so we had a good look around New York

19:30 in five days.

It must have been quite an amazing experience to arrive in New York?

It was very exciting you know.

What was your first initial reaction to New York City?

It was very exciting. We wanted to see as much as we could in the time that we had because we didn't know how long we were going to be there. Eventually it was five days but we had, as I say, we went round all these

20:00 places and had a trip on the harbour and across to what do you call it? Statue of Liberty. Went up to the top of that. Went up to the top of the Empire State Building, just had a good general look around New York. Walked around the streets and

You mentioned Radio City. What did you see at Radio City?

There was just the big studios where

20:30 all the people of the time, celebrities who would go there and it was just a nice big fresh, you know, a new building to us, kind of thing. We'd never seen anything like that before but we didn't see a lot of it. We just went in, had a look at the thing and come out again.

21:00 **Now tell me more about the Stage Door Canteen. What was that like?**

Well, that was a big a fairly big building where any actors of the time would entertain the troops and we went in there. It was pretty well packed the time we were there. Australians, American troops, British troops, everybody, and people had a bit of a dance there and we were entertained by Maureen O'Hara. Have you heard of her?

21:30 She's an actor, a very good actor in those days, 1940s. She sung songs and generally entertained the troops around and we were given cups of coffee as usual and that's all. People were just looking forward to seeing the actors.

So was it like a dance hall situation or an auditorium?

Yes, it was a dance hall, yeah.

Right, so?

And girls

22:00 used to come there and dance with the troops and anybody who was available.

So I imagine you had a few dances?

Yes, we had, yeah, had a few dances with some of the girls there and it was quite good. At 19 years old I wasn't too bad; I was a fairly good dancer in those days.

Now what about going out at night? Were you taking any girls out at night while you were in New York?

No, no, no we didn't, we kept

22:30 to ourselves a lot. We didn't go out much at night because New York was a strange city and you could easily get lost in it and we were warned never to go through Central Park in New York at night time because it was a very dangerous area for some reason or other so we just kept to ourselves but really only had four nights in America, so even though we had five to six, five and a half days of leave, we only had about four nights

23:00 so we usually just spent the nights in the camp.

And where were you staying in New York?

I can't remember now. I don't know exactly where we were. I think we were in a kind of a hotel, billeted in a hotel somewhere in New York. We could see the harbour from where we were. We saw the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth and we thought well,

23:30 maybe we're going to go on one of those, which we did.

Now I believe that there was an organisation in New York that would look after Australians when they arrived there. I think it was called the Australia Club or the Anzac Club. Did you have any association with that?

No, no, no I had nothing to do with – I never went to any of those places.

24:00 Other than what we did, we just wandered around together, you know your group of friends that you made in the air force and we just wandered around different places together. Went across as I say went across in the boat to the Empire, no, to the Statue of Liberty. That's about all as far as I can remember about it now.

24:30 **So what happened when it came time to leave?**

Well, we just got taken by bus again down to the wharf and we were on the Queen Mary and you know the Queen Mary's a huge, well, the biggest boat in the world at that time and eventually we were about a thousand Australians and a whole division of American troops

25:00 on board so there was about 12,000 Americans and a thousand Australians and quite a few British that were going back to England. They'd been to the Middle East and they'd come with us all the way across too; was a lot of British troops and I suppose there'd be about 15,000 bodies onboard, on the Queen Mary when we went across and it was a four day trip

25:30 across to England.

Now what were conditions like onboard the Queen Mary?

Very crushed and two meals a day. Can't remember what they were but it was a bit better than the American meals but we went four days on board there but I just can't remember what sort of meals they were,

26:00 but as long as we got fed that was the main thing, I think.

And what was the trip like across to England?

Very good, very good. The Queen Mary travelled on its own because it was a fast ship and there was no convoys. Most ships went in convoy but the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth went on their own because they were very fast boats you know and if there was any chance of submarines around which there were

26:30 in the Atlantic, they could usually outrun them.

And were there any such scares?

No, we were pretty good there. We only had four days and we went across pretty good, no problems. Landed at Greenock in Scotland, so from Greenock we, they called for volunteers to do the baggage so

27:00 myself and a few other boys volunteered to take all the baggage out and put it on trucks because if you did you usually got a little bit of leave, so we got did all the baggage and then we got two days leave. All the rest of the crew were taken down to Brighton but we got two days leave and in Glasgow I had an auntie

27:30 who lived in Paisley, so I took myself down to Paisley from Greenock and met my auntie for the first time.

And what was it like meeting her?

Good, yeah, she was my mother's sister and was very good.

It must have been lovely to meet with family after being away?

That's right, yeah, it was good to meet with her and Uncle Bob. He was

28:00 in the First World War and he took me around. Well, as I say we only had two days so he took me around, showed me a little bit around Paisley. We didn't get into Glasgow at that time but I went back eventually to see them afterwards when I had leave and then he took me all around Glasgow and that type of thing but it was an experience to meet them.

28:30 I took them some chocolates and that type of thing from America and they were very happy to get something like that as a present. You know we managed to buy chocolates in America, which was a very scarce commodity in Britain at that time of the year.

It sounds like you were quite close with your uncle and your auntie?

Well, we'd corresponded. I hadn't corresponded but my mother used to correspond

29:00 with her sister quite often and it was a bit of a thrill too, cause she used to tell us all about her life in Scotland before the war you know, when she was younger and it was a thrill to meet the aunt and uncle over there at that stage. They'd been through a lot in Scotland and they had a fair bit of bombing. They were quite reasonably close to the docks in

29:30 Scotland around Greenock and where they built all the ships. You know, that's where the docks, I forget the name of the place now, but anyway that's where they built all the big boats, the Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth.

What was the mood like of amongst the people in Scotland and England when you first arrived?

30:00 Well, it was quite all right you know. They had their ups and downs and right in the middle of a war. They were adapted to it fairly well. It was a very big change for us to be going over there and the food was pretty scarce and it was pretty basic so we, you didn't expect

30:30 a lot of different foods when you got there and was just very basic kind of food, spam and potatoes and that type of thing.

Would you say they had a pessimistic or optimistic attitude?

No, they were fairly optimistic in those days, even in 1943 which was one of the worst parts of the war. They'd been through a lot of bombing in that area as well,

31:00 down in London, but they were pretty good.

What sort of things did they have to do because of the war?

31:30 **What did you observe that the English people had to go through because of the war?**

Well, blackouts was the worst things to start with and there was shortage of food and that type of thing but generally speaking they were pretty cheerful. You know they'd had their worst days I think by 1943 and I found them pretty good.

32:00 It was hard to understand a lot of Scotch people. You know when they're very broad Scots. When we first arrived it was a bit hard to understand a lot of them but we managed.

So what happened after Scotland?

Well, then we caught the train. We were down to Brighton. That was where all the rest of the Australians had arrived and

32:30 they were in two big hotels right on Brighton waterfront called the Metropole and the Grand and they're still there as a matter of fact and they were the two biggest hotels in Brighton and they were taken over by the Australians and New Zealanders and that's where we were billeted.

And what

33:00 **were the hotels like?**

They're lovely big old hotels, they were, in their grand days but after two, three years of war all the fineries and furniture and things they'd taken out; we had good rooms but just an ordinary bunk in there and a bathroom down the hall kind of thing, so

33:30 you know, we were well provided for considering it was wartime in England; it was quite good there. We thought it was, we thought we were well-off as a matter of fact and we were on the waterfront overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, watching all the fighter bombers going out over to France. They used to come across the top of us. Everybody was looking

34:00 to see when it was going to be their turn.

And how long were you in Brighton for?

We arrived there in early December. Then we got leave at Christmas and I went back up to Scotland and had a couple of weeks up there with my aunty and then when we come back from leave we

34:30 used to do drill and that type of thing. We just didn't do anything. It wasn't a holiday camp. We had to do schools and we were taught different – you know, we went back to school and also drill marching and we had a Scotch sergeant major in charge of us too; he was a pretty

35:00 strict sort of a bloke and also later on we had an Irish chap and he said he'd spent so many years in the British army and most of it with undetected crime, knowing these Irish chaps. But anyway it was quite good at Brighton and then after we left—we had two months there, I think—and then we went, we were posted up to Whitley Bay

35:30 and we did a commando course up there. Something just to fill in time I think it was mainly.

Well, just before we go into the details of Whitely Bay, describe your first Christmas away from home?

Well, it was actually the second Christmas because the first Christmas I come home on leave and second Christmas I was in, we just went up to my auntie's place in Scotland

36:00 and they took me around and showed me around the different places. My uncle used to take me down to the pub and we'd have a beer and that type of thing; it was enjoyable and different.

How was it different?

Well, you know, I'd never been away from home before so

36:30 quite a good exciting kind of thing from my point of view.

How was the Christmas meal different to what you might have had at home?

Roast spam, you didn't get much to eat really over there except it was a very basic food and spam was one of the basics of it. Everybody, the English, the British didn't seem to like it but

37:00 I liked it. It was quite good and you know you get plenty of vegetables. There was plenty of potatoes and carrots and that type of thing and but it was just basic food so you just thought, well, if you get fed that's the main thing.

I'd never heard of a roasted spam before?

Yes, oh yeah, they used to put it in, just heat it up as a roast kind of thing.

And what about, I mean, were there any

37:30 **treats special treats for Christmas that year?**

No, nothing special, no. Well, they were only just ordinary people and my uncle worked in a factory over there. It was a big co-operative too. He was the accountant in charge of a tobacco factory. They had a big tobacco factory in this co-op and he was the accountant. He was a very nice

38:00 chap too, but as I say he was a First World War soldier and he knew what it would be like to be travelling overseas so I enjoyed my little stay there.

Now how much were you missing home at this point?

I didn't miss it at all at that stage. It was all an adventure so, no, not at this point.

And were you

38:30 **corresponding home?**

Yes, yes, yes I used to write to my family at least once a week and used to have an air letter. You know it'd be about that big a page and then they'd photograph it and send it home and when they got it, it was about that big. It was just a little – I don't know whether you've ever seen one or not? I don't know whether I've got one but everything was photographed and it was only the film

39:00 sent home, just the negative and that was sent back to Australia and then they'd develop it out here and send the letter back out to your parents so we go through a bit of a process before you got it.

Yeah it's an amazing?

Well, instead of carrying you know hundreds of letters, all they'd be carrying was a little cartridge of film.

Yeah it makes, it's quite sensible?

Yeah.

Tape 4

00:31 **Now during this time, were you communicating with any girls back home?**

Yes, I had one girlfriend at the time. We started going out together when we were 14. I used to write now and again to her back home and I'd get a letter every now and then; mail wasn't very plentiful in those days;

01:00 it's not like it is now, 24 hours and it's in England but it was probably weeks, a couple of weeks in between, but I used to get one or two letters from people.

What was her name?

Her name was Marjorie as well.

And was Marjorie later the woman that became your first wife?

No, no, no, Mavis was my first; we used to go to Sunday school together when we were 12, 13

01:30 kind of thing but Mavis went into the army about the same time as I joined the air force and I spoke to her once or twice but I didn't get many letters back from her. She was too busy too.

Yeah well, it sounds like she was working very hard?

Yeah well, that's right well, she was in various places in the army during the war but she spent

02:00 the last 12 months over in Alice Springs. She was in the headquarters of the 2nd Army I think they used to call it.

That would have been interesting?

Yeah well, all the correspondence used to come through this, it was a fairly big area in Alice Springs. That's what developed Alice Springs after the war. You know it started off as a very small town I think

02:30 and then it developed because the army spent a lot of time there during the war.

Now you mentioned that you went on to Whitley Bay. What happened at Whitley Bay?

It was just a fill in course to keep us in peak condition. We did a commando course as they call it and we learnt to well, we did a lot of marching and

03:00 drill and learnt how to fire rifles and spent a bit of time learning unarmed combat. As I say it was just

about a month to fill us in, in the meantime, so that's what they spent it on. We had different British army sergeants in charge of us and they just used to teach us

03:30 in case we were needed as troops you know. Sometimes you had to go on guard duty. You had to learn how to use rifles which we hadn't used much before and so we learned to do unarmed combat against a rifle, a chap with a rifle attacking you.

What was, could you talk us through what was involved in unarmed combat?

04:00 You just have to learn how to use a rifle and then you'd have somebody trying to take aim at you with a bayonet and charge at you with a bayonet. You had to try to learn how to evade his thrust and take the rifle off him so he had to it was just

04:30 an exercise in unarmed combat, that's all. You had to try and learn to take these rifle off him when he charged you; you would grab, step aside, and take the rifle off him, if you could.

And what other training did you do at Whitley Bay?

Well, that was all mainly, it was just

05:00 a way of keeping you fit. They did exercises and marching and it was in the middle of winter I think when we got there. Ice was on the ground and we had to try and march on these icy roads which, you know, Australians, we weren't used to and that was all we did there. We just spent time there and then we had leave

05:30 at night time and there used to be the local dance hall; meet some of the locals and that's about basically what we did there.

How were you treated by the locals?

Pretty good yeah, yeah well, you know just the way you treat them and we used to get on pretty well with all the local people and

06:00 well, the only time we met them is when we went to a dance hall of a night time or went into the pub and had a beer or anything like that but we got on pretty well, and they were all either chaps home on leave and they got on well with us and or just the old chaps who were in the home guard, so we used to talk to them and

06:30 find out how they got on and what they did.

So what happened next after Whitley Bay?

We went back to Brighton again for a couple of weeks down there and just the usual. We spent time at Brighton and then from there went up to Dumfries in Scotland and that's where we did an AFU [advanced flying unit].

07:00 We went on to Ansons then, Avro Anson, and we did about two months there, flying all out over the Irish Sea, cause Dumfries is on the west coast of Scotland and we flew out over the Irish Sea and did usual exercises. You know wireless and it was also a place where navigators would be learning to operate in;

07:30 different climate type of thing you know. It was a different way of operating than it is out here, well, no different but a change you know, different conditions.

And what were you learning here?

At Dumfries we were just learning to do work on the wireless and to do radio direction finding and that type of thing.

08:00 **And what is radio direction finding?**

Well, you'd go to a spot and you'd have your radio on and you'd have to find your way back to base by using your radio and it's like a signal that you've got to pick up and you follow this signal back to base and if you get of course the signal changes.

08:30 You get a different note for the port and a different one for starboard so you've got to be able to fly down the middle of the signal.

So it's like a, is it a beeping signal? What sort of signal is it?

Yes, it's a beeping signal and it beeps on one side and it's a different beep on the port, and the starboard side and when you get in the middle it's a continuous note so you've got to fly down this and that takes you back to the base.

09:00 **So when you're on course it would be like one long note? Is it a high pitched frequency or a low pitch frequency?**

It's fairly high, a fairly high pitched frequency. It's not a piercing noise but it's a general standard note of where you could put up with it in your ears cause you've got to, this is why it can

09:30 send you deaf if you get too much of it but that was the general idea so you could find your way back cause they had what they called air radio stations all over Britain and these would be sending out these signals all the time for aircraft and we'd use the ones who were around the area of Dumfries and the Clyde and as far up as Glasgow.

And

10:00 **so once you received this signal from the base where you were trying to get back to, what would you then do to communicate to the pilot?**

Well, you'd have your mask on you know with a little radio, a little speaker on and you just tell the pilot whether you were north or west like east or west of the signal and he'd have to

10:30 come back, just follow that back to base; but it was just a help for the navigator actually. It was mainly the navigator who wanted the signal.

Now you mentioned that you were on Avro Ansons here? Describe the Avro Anson for me?

Avro Anson it was a twin engine plane that was

11:00 well, that's about all I can think, it was just a twin engine plane; it could carry about five people and pilot and we used to have about two navigators and two wireless operators onboard and we'd be all doing our turn to learn how to use the equipment, that's all.

And what was the work space of the wireless operator like?

Just a little area

11:30 on the side of the plane with a wireless in front of you here but then when you took your turn you'd get up and sit on the other side of the aircraft and the other radio operator would take your place and the same with the navigator. Navigator had a little table up the front and they'd take it in turns to do the navigating. That was when we were training.

12:00 **So what were the essential tools of a wireless operator?**

Essential tool? A radio mainly and the Morse code key, that's mainly what we had so you just have to learn; had to have a bit of knowledge about changing valves and that type of thing. In those days there was valves

12:30 not what they have in these latest ones, tiny little resisters and diodes and all those things. If you had a breakdown, well, mostly it was a valve that went on you and you just had to try and replace those.

Is that like a breakdown in the wireless itself?

Yeah, yeah.

So you had to know your?

Well, had to yes, you had to try and

13:00 pick if you had a breakdown, very, very, very rare that you had problems, but if you did, well, that was the idea of it. You had to try and pick the one that was having problems with it and change that one if you had a spare. If you didn't have a spare you just had to try and replace one, an essential one, with one not so essential.

How would you record

13:30 **the information you were receiving?**

You had a log book and you had to write down any messages you sent or received, that's about all, and it would be handed in at the end of the flight for the flight commander to check over.

And what were your work clothes like?

Work clothes? We just had a flying suit

14:00 used to have a battle jacket in those days. We had an English battle jacket, battle uniform and a flying suit, a fairly bulky one; you put it over the top of everything so that you could keep warm. In the middle of winter up there wasn't very good flying. You didn't have air conditioned aeroplanes in those days.

14:30 **Would you know about headwear or hand wear?**

Yeah we had a helmet with your earphones on and a plug that you could plug into your wireless.

And on the suits that you would wear was there any indication of your rank or name or what was there anything?

Yeah, on your uniform you had your sergeant's stripes and Australia written across the shoulders

15:00 and your badge of whether you were a wireless operator or air gunner or whatever you were.

So how long did you do this special training on the Avro Anson's for?

How long? We were there for two months and then from there we went on up to Forres up in the north of Scotland and that's when we did more advanced type of training

15:30 and we picked up our crew there. That's where we crewed up, like in those other places you were just an individual but when we got up to OTU that was up at Forres, operational training unit, that's when we picked up our crew. We had to get together in; if you were compatible, you made up a crew.

16:00 **So can you talk us through, cause crewing up is actually quite an important and big moment I imagine**

That's right, yeah.

Because you're essentially going to be working with these men and your lives are going to be in each other's hands?

That's right, yeah.

So can you talk us through step by step like the environment you were in, how many people were there. Just talk us through step by step what actually that process of crewing up was like?

Yeah well, we got to Forres and we went on to Whitleys then.

16:30 They were a twin engine plane a bit bigger than the Ansons. They'd just come off operations in those days. They had become redundant when they started to use Halifaxs and Stirlings and the Lancasters; and Whitleys were used to be operational aircraft so we went onto these

17:00 Whitleys and to crew up you just had to walk around and talk to people on the base and if you thought you were compatible you'd say, "Well, would you like to fly with me?" and we picked a pilot. He was a very young sort of a bloke. Well, we were young too but this fellow,

17:30 he wanted to be a fighter pilot and he was put on bombers and he didn't like it, so anyway, we thought, "Well, he'd be a good pilot." because he was a very daredevil sort of a chap and I'm talking about we because I got friends with another chap called Stan. He become our navigator, a very nice chap and Stan and I wandered around and we come across this pilot chap

18:00 and we thought he'd be all right so we decided we'd become a crew with him and there's another young chap called Alec and he was a very quiet sort of a chap and he become our bomb aimer so there was four of us together then so we started flying together and this chap the pilot as I said was a real daredevil sort of a bloke and he didn't want, as I said,

18:30 he didn't want to be a bomber pilot. He wanted to be a fighter pilot and he used to treat this Whitley like a fighter and when we used to go flying and we used to have to do fighter affiliation which means that you had to go flying and they'd have a fighter attack you, you know simulate an attack from a fighter; it might come in from the starboard

19:00 side or port side wherever it was, but this chap this pilot of ours, instead of just doing the evasive action that was appropriate to these type of aircraft he thought he was in a fighter and instead of just going into a dive he would pull back on the starboard engine and push the port engine up and we'd go down like a rocket and these planes weren't designed to

19:30 take this type of thing and he used to put the wind up all of us you know because they weren't designed for this type of thing and we weren't designed to go through this type of thing. We'd never done this before and we didn't like it, the other three of us and so we had words with him but he didn't take any notice of us. He was the pilot and he was going to do what he wanted to do so we finished up we went to the

20:00 CO and asked could we change our pilot and it was a bit of a controversy because this has never happened before. So anyway we eventually changed pilots and we got another chap, a very conservative type of chap who had been a staff pilot over in America training navigators in America. He was an Englishman but he'd been away in America for a couple of years and he come back and we got him as a pilot.

20:30 **Well, he sounds a lot, a better choice?**

Yeah he was a better choice eventually. He was a very conservative young chap and he was older than us. He was about 22 I think, 23. He just got married.

What was his name?

Bob Harrison.

Bob Harrison. Well, look just before we go on to Bob I'm just getting back to your initial pilot that you had, when he would do this crazy flying what would your reaction be at the time?

21:00 Well, we didn't like it at all. We considered it was dangerous flying. It wasn't just evasive action, it was dangerous flying and he eventually killed himself and the crew by doing that. I mean he had to go and get another crew then and by that time we'd moved on and eventually we found out that he'd killed his crew doing this type of thing. You know it was just an aircraft accident. He never even got onto ops

21:30 and he just finished up killing himself and his crew, so we considered ourselves very lucky.

What happened when you approached the CO about this problem pilot?

Well, it was unusual for things to happen and they considered it, once you've picked your pilot and your crew that that's the ones you'll stop with because they didn't like all the problems of changing

22:00 so we were talked to by the CO but we still wanted to change our crew. We weren't happy and we weren't satisfied, so eventually we had to wait a little bit longer and we got this new chap that come out, back from America. He'd been as I said flying over there.

What was the pilot's

22:30 **reaction of being replaced?**

He didn't like it at first but he accepted it. You know he was not bombastic but he was a very adventurous sort of a joker, did things that he thought was all right but we didn't consider was appropriate to the times we were flying, the type of aircraft we were flying.

23:00 **So how did you choose your new pilot?**

Well, we didn't have a lot of choice there, because they brought this feller in, as I say, he come back from America and he was looking for a crew too so when we got together, he was a very nice quiet conservative sort of a chap so we got on quite well, together.

And what planes

23:30 **were you flying at this point?**

Whitleys, Whitworth Whitley.

Now you mentioned that the Whitley was similar to the Avro. In what ways was it different?

Well, they used to call it a flying coffin because the fuselage was just like a coffin with two big wings and to get into the Whitley, when you got in, you had to crawl through this little long

24:00 tunnel about 18 inches wide square and crawl through right through from the back of the wing to the front of the wing to get into the cabin in the front and it was considered a very dangerous aircraft, particularly for young crews because we hadn't done any flying much in that type of aeroplane but it was very dangerous because if you wanted to get out you had to

24:30 do the same thing. You had to crawl back through there and if you had to get out in a hurry there wasn't a lot of chance of getting out again.

Now how long did you train on the Whitley's for?

We were there for about two months I think yeah, yeah. Everything went in about every eight weeks there; you used to do about eight weeks in different places. I think we were up there for about eight weeks and we were a bit longer because we had to

25:00 wait an extra week or two for the pilot, but we were about 10 weeks altogether up in Forres. That's up near Inverness and we used to fly out over the North Sea and at this time it was a fairly cold winter. You know it was the middle of winter; we were flying up there and used to fly out over the North Sea and

25:30 do exercises, learn to navigate and just the same thing as you did in other places, only a bit more advanced.

Yeah you seem to be continuously training?

Yes, yes that's right. Well, to start with, in the early days they didn't do as much training because they didn't have as many people but they had a fair amount of

26:00 reserve at that stage. We had Canadians and, not Americans, Canadians and New Zealanders, Australians, South Africans and Islanders, some people from the Islands, Fiji and that type of thing and they were all in air crew and they had to be kept busy so that's why we were put in different stages of training. So from then after we finished our training there in Scotland

26:30 we went back down to Riccall.

What nationalities made up your crew?

Well, at that stage, everything, where did we pick up our gunner? Yeah, we picked up our gunners there too towards the end of our training so we had an English pilot. He came from down Bury St. Edmonds

and Stan the navigator come from

27:00 Sheffield, the bomb aimer come from London, just outside of London, and I was Australian and then there was mid upper gunner was Scottish and the rear gunner was Irish so we had a bit of a mixed crew you know; so we had four, five, four different nationalities.

How did that work?

It was pretty

27:30 good. We got on pretty well, together, yeah very good and the Scottish bloke was funny, he was, when you could understand him but he was good.

Now you mentioned before that the first pilot that you worked with was later killed?

Yes.

In a training accident. How common were training accidents?

Fairly common. I've got a list there, not of all the accidents but

28:00 of people that were killed in training accidents. There was a terrible lot. A lot more than there should have been and I don't know whether it was the weather or whether it was inexperience or like our pilot, he was a bit of a daredevil you know but these things happened and even some of the chaps I went across to England with, at least two of them I know of got killed in a training accident. The ones I joined up and trained with, they were killed in training

28:30 accidents so it was not really; it wasn't an uncommon kind of thing.

Did you ever witness any of these accidents?

No, no, no, no.

What would happen at this point when a plane did go down and its crew were killed or injured? Would there be, what rituals would there be to help with that?

There'd be an inquiry into why it

29:00 happened, whether it was a fault in the plane or a fault in the crewing of it but I never had any details of it but there would always be an inquiry into it to see what caused it. It may have been the weather or something like that, you don't know. The weather wasn't the best for flying over there, not like out here.

What about death or to do with death like religious rituals? Was there anything

29:30 **like that that you would do when someone died?**

Well, no we never experienced anything because it never happened when I was there. You know we never, ever had an accident where we were but I mean when it happened with that other crew after we'd left the station. We'd gone on then to Riccall by the time we found out about this.

When you'd heard

30:00 **that that first pilot had been killed and had killed his crew what crept into your mind at that point?**

We were very relieved it wasn't us because that vindicated us that we weren't just trying to change – our reasons for changing pilots, we were vindicated because we thought that if we didn't like him

30:30 how anybody else would like him because he would do the same thing again and I think that's what happened.

Yeah it's very unfortunate that lives were lost?

Yeah, it was, that's right you don't like to hear these things but that's what happened I suppose fairly often, reasonably often anyway.

Now you had just talked about how you'd moved from Scotland down to England

Yeah.

What

31:00 **happened; where were you and what happened there?**

Where did we go?

Where were you, yeah where did you go?

We went to Riccall which was a small town in Yorkshire down the south of York and that was when we converted onto Halifaxes. Then we had to do more training because we had to train on a Halifax and that was called a

31:30 conversion unit; and we went onto those the Halifaxes, a four engine bomber which was the one that they use on operations so we had to learn to fly those and that's where we picked up our flight engineer. That was another member of the crew then. He was a chap from London as well, so it was an all British crew except me. I was the only Australian.

32:00 **What was that like being the only Aussie?**

Good, yeah, well, we got on pretty well together but as I say we had an Irishman, a Scotsman and an Australian and about five, four Englishmen.

Now what did you think about the Halifax bomber?

It was pretty good. I liked it. Well, most people used to like the Lancaster but the Halifax was a good plane. It was a very strong kind of a plane. It was used a lot

32:30 for towing gliders and different other, various jobs that they allotted to it but it was quite a good plane; we enjoyed it.

Could you describe the exterior of the plane?

Well, a four engine plane with twin tails and almost as big as a Lancaster. We used to carry almost the same amount of bombs;

33:00 a very robust and strong kind of a plane. We liked it.

How long was the wing span?

I don't know. It was much the same as a Lancaster I've never really taken much notice of it; we just flew them.

And where were the guns situated?

Well, it had a mid upper turret and

33:30 a tail turret and four guns in each turret. We didn't have any at the front. In the early days they used to have two guns on the front but they took them away for some reason. The bomb aimer used to, in the early part they used to use the guns in the front, then we had a mid gunner and a rear gunner. They had four guns in each of their turrets but they took away the front one because it

34:00 probably wasn't needed. The planes never, ever used to come in from the front, you know. It was always when you got attacked, you'd get attacked from the rear or side on.

Now could you talk us through what the interior of the Halifax bomber was like, because I've never been inside one, I've seen one

Yeah.

But only in pictures and models

34:30 **of them but could you like be a camera for us like from entry into the plane, what it looked like on the inside?**

Well, from the front where the bomb aimer used to be—he didn't have much of a position cause he used to have to lie down on the front of the plane and have the bomb sight in front of him there and he had a kind of a little seat that he could pull out from under the navigator's table. The navigator's table was on

35:00 in the nose of the plane and the navigator had a seat there and the bomb aimer had a little portable seat; he used to be able to sit beside the navigator and help him if he needed but most of the time he would be lying on the front there observing through the front perspex cause the navigator would be asking him for pinpoints. "Can you pinpoint this for me?" "Can you see this?" Whatever it was supposed to be

35:30 we were flying over, so the navigator was in the left hand side in the nose and right behind him was the wireless, little cabin about that square and I had my wireless in front of me with me Morse key next to it and I was right underneath the pilot. The pilot used to sit above me and the pilot had another seat beside him,

36:00 they used to call them a second dickie kind of seat and anybody that used to be free would go and sit up beside him as an extra lookout and then behind me was another panel. That was the flight engineer's panel. He's in charge of all the engines and fuel and all this type of thing and then the mid upper gunner

36:30 in the turret there in the mid and then the tail gunner.

And where were all the bombs kept?

They were all underneath in between the wheels. Had two opening doors like that that used to open and the bombs would be from there.

How many bombs could it carry?

They could carry up to 10,000 pound of bombs, much the same as the Lancaster. A little bit

37:00 different but not much. 10,000 pound was about the normal bomb load, made up of different size bombs, 500 pounders or there was a big 4,000 pounder or something like that.

Now how long did it take do you think for the crew to really become a team and to earn each other's trust?

We were pretty good together. By the time we got onto these

37:30 Halifaxes, we were a fairly good team. We liked each other, which was the main thing, you were compatible and we got on pretty well together and we'd go home on leave or go down on leave together and you would get to know the chaps and they were very good. Irish, Scottish it doesn't matter which you were, we got on very well together.

Now you mentioned that you

38:00 **had your friend Stan?**

Had?

Your friend Stan?

Yeah.

What role did he?

He was the navigator.

Navigator right. What was Stan like?

Stan was a very nice chap. He was about a year or so older than me. I mean he'd be 20 when I was 19. He was very good and he was a very good navigator. You know sometimes you

38:30 get them just mediocre but Stan was very meticulous with his work. He was a very good navigator and we never got lost all the time we were with him which made a difference.

What was his personality like?

He was a quiet chap, but he was engaged to a young lady that lived down where he lived in Sheffield and

39:00 he was a very quiet and conservative type of feller.

And I mean you mentioned other members of the crew. We've talked a bit about the pilot and we've talked about Stan. What about the new member of the crew the engineer, what was he like?

The flight engineer? He was quite a nice chap but he come from London and a cockney and a very tall chap and tall, thin.

39:30 We got on well with him even though he was the last member of the crew; we got on pretty well together. We didn't have any upsets or anything like that. He just did his job and we did our job and

And what was his name?

His name was Dick, Dick Hales or Richard. Dick we called him, Hales, yeah, so he was a cockney, come from London.

Tape 5

00:31 **Jack, just talking further about members of the crew. We've spoken about Harrison the pilot and Stan the engineer. Who were the other members of the crew?**

Alec, he was the bomb aimer, did you mention him?

Not yet?

Alec was the bomb aimer. He came from Reading that's just outside of London. Nice chap, gingerly kind of a complexion, very quiet sort of a bloke, and we've mentioned Stan

01:00 and Jock, our Scot, he was the mid upper gunner, Jock McGill or Tom McGill is his name. He come from Aberdeen and the rear gunner was an Irishman, Paddy, oh, I can't think of his other name. It's written on there. I can't think of his name at the moment. Anyway he was only a little chap and he was our rear gunner

01:30 and they were all quite a nice crew. We got on very well together.

What was Harrison's first name?

Bob.

Bob Harrison, yeah, right, good, thanks for that. Now at what point did you join the 192 RAF Special Duties Squadron?

Well, when we finished our training at the conversion unit, when we first went onto Halifaxes we did so many hours there and so many

02:00 a month I think, six weeks at Riccall and then we went onto the squadron down in Norfolk not far from Norwich and that was 192 Special Duties. We didn't carry any bombs. That was one job we – cause we carried a special wireless operator. I didn't even know this chap's name. I didn't get to know him that much

02:30 because we only had one, one day, and one another day, and we didn't get to know these chaps because they were very special. They had all their own special equipment that was in the plane and I, even though I'm a wireless operator I couldn't even look at it. I wasn't allowed to. It was under the Secrecy Act and he had all this special equipment and he just used to come in, switch that on, get in the plane.

03:00 **Was he in any kind of special enclosure?**

He was in the body of the plane right down towards the underneath almost near the mid upper gunner and he had all this equipment installed in there.

Was it hidden in any way? Was the equipment hidden or concealed?

Well, yes, he had a kind of a blind he could pull down over it so no-one could see it if you walked past it. We weren't even allowed to look at it at all.

03:30 **So you're saying that –**

I don't know this chap's name because we only had him once but he was a special wireless operator.

So you only had him the once and you said that on other occasions it'd be one one day, another another day?

Yes, that's right, yes.

So did you work with a succession of separate special wireless operators?

Well, we only had two with us. We only we had two, three trips altogether with these chaps but on two other trips that we went on we didn't carry them because

04:00 we only we went out over the Channel. I'll tell you about those in a minute.

Now just before we go into the detail on that, what was the special duty squadron?

Well, there was various special duties. We were an electronic one you know because, as I say we didn't carry any bombs. We only had all this special equipment and we used to carry 'window'; have you heard of window?

04:30 It's various lengths of silver paper in big packs and we used to have to throw them out of the plane at a certain time when we were over Germany or France or wherever we were and this was to confuse the German radar and it used to; it was just like acting as another signal and it would jam the radio and the radar on the German equipment.

So at what point would you throw that out?

05:00 At certain times, it just depended where you were. If you were over the target you might throw out lengths about that long. If you were somewhere else you might throw out smaller ones. You know it depends, that was the intelligence that we were given. We were just given a list of times and where and that'd be the time we'd be over a certain part of France or Germany and we'd throw this out. It was when you were near the German fighter stations

05:30 actually; you know the fighter squadrons.

What was your understanding of what 192 RAF Special Duty Squadron actually was?

Well, that's what it was. It was an electronic jamming kind of station you know but as we were saying before there was so many different special duties squadrons. Some dropped parachutists over in France and others used this type of equipment and others

06:00 might have travelled over and put parachutists down or these secret agents and that type of thing; so that's why we were called special duties. We all did different special duties and we didn't carry bombs because we had so much other equipment on board.

Did the squadron have any connections with special operations executive?

No, we didn't have it; as far as I know we

06:30 we didn't have anything like that but maybe they had their orders from them, I don't know. I mean you were only told what you were needed to be told in those days which come in handy when we finished up in Germany because they – when I'll get to that part I'll explain why.

Now what was the role of this other wireless operator aboard the aircraft?

Well, he used to be able to speak fluent German to start with and

07:00 he was also a wireless operator and a radar operator. He was well trained in all aspects of wireless telegraphy and part of his job was, when we got over Germany or France, he used to be able to talk or speak to the German pilots that were supposed to be coming up to intercept and he would try and

07:30 redirect them in another different direction and he also had jamming equipment that he could jam their radar and wireless and that type of thing so that was his main job and he was very fluent in German.

It sounds like his role was absolutely crucial to what you were doing?

Yes well, that's all really what we were there for. We only went with the mainstream

08:00 to jam the radar and jam all the electronic stuff that the Germans used to have, and that was part of our job to do that.

How much were you told about the purpose of your job at that time?

We were told nothing, nothing as far as we were concerned. Only this radar operator, his special wireless op, he was the one that knew all what was going on. We weren't even allowed to look at the equipment.

Surely you were given some sort of briefing as to what you were supposed to be doing?

08:30 What we were supposed to be doing? We were only just a carrier kind of thing for him to try and jam these, keep the enemy aircraft away from the mainstream.

And what was the mainstream?

The mainstream? That's the main bomber stream; you had four, five hundred bombers going out over a certain time; it might have been half an hour, an hour all over a different route but you

09:00 had to be at the target at a certain time.

So where would you be or where would your aircraft be in relation to those four or five hundred bombers?

We'd be in amongst them, we'd be just like any other but whether we would be able to be picked out amongst them or not I don't know because of all our electronic equipment. See if we had secret equipment the Germans probably had it too but we didn't know at this stage.

Yeah, it seems to be that special operations really had

09:30 **a big leap forward during World War II?**

That's true, yes.

So what were your aircraft's duties initially when you first started to fly with, let's put it this way, what was the first operation you went on?

Our first one we went to was Koblenz. It was bombed. I think there was about four hundred aircraft on that raid and we just had to go along with the mainstream, carry this special

10:00 operator to try and jam all their radio equipment.

Could you describe for me or take me through what happened on that flight to Koblenz?

Well, we just took off about four o'clock in the afternoon and we rendezvoused with the mainstream over Reading which is just outside of London and then we set course for France and Germany and we got to over the target around about seven o'clock,

10:30 between seven and seven thirty, but we had a special time to be over the target and that was about all we had to do, just fly there and jam the German radar and that was a reasonably quiet sort of a trip. I mean considering what we were doing; when we got over the target there was plenty of flak, ack ack guns probably fired at us but we didn't see

11:00 any that time.

What could you hear at that time when the flak was coming up could you hear anything?

No, you could just see it. You know you saw these lights coming up like that coming towards, well, wouldn't be coming towards you exactly but they'd be coming up somewhere and then they'd just explode and that type of thing. You just see the explosions. You couldn't hear anything because of the noise of the engines but it was just like fireworks

11:30 in reverse.

So the noise of the engines were pretty well dominating, were they?

Yeah, they usually drowned out most of the noise outside.

How difficult did that make communicating within the aircraft itself?

Well, we had our intercom; we could talk to each other on our intercom but when you're over target didn't talk much at all, cause you had to concentrate on what you were doing. The gunner's looking out for fighters and the pilot was too busy

12:00 with his course and all this type of thing. Navigator was inside, he never looked out at all except he just had to set his course and that type of thing. Wireless operator, I'd be listening in on the radio in case we had messages to get.

So apart from the anti aircraft fire what other specific memories do you have of the bombing of Koblenz itself?

Well, it was a first the first time we'd been

12:30 over. It was very spectacular, looking at the target getting bombed down there. It was fires and explosions going on all around the place and other than that there was hardly anything else you could explain. Just bombing and that's all.

Did you have any sense of connection with what was happening on the ground?

No, not really, not the first time. On our

13:00 second trip it was a bit different. We were flying, no that was the third trip, our last trip when we got shot down. The first and second trip were just more or less routine, which although we hadn't expected them, but they turned out as you really expect, just flying over and dropping bombs; but we didn't have bombs. We only had radar. We just watched the others.

What was your

13:30 **own personal reaction to the fact that you were bombing German cities?**

Didn't worry us actually, not at the time, I mean you don't think of those things. That's what you went to do, that was your job so I don't think it affected us much that way. I mean, we only did a couple of trips like that; maybe if you'd done 20 or 30, you may have had

14:00 more time to think about it but we'd only done the two and then we done two other trips out, if you want to hear about those I'll –

Yeah, I'd just like to stick with the first trip for the moment. I mean obviously you'd heard about Germans bombing and strafing English cities as well. Would that have been in your mind at all at that time?

No, don't think so, wasn't in mine; I never thought about what they'd done. I mean we knew what they'd done but it didn't

14:30 make any difference to us. We were there just to do the job and that was what we went to do.

So as you look down can you just be a little more specific about what you could see at the target area?

Well, over the target area it was just a flame; the pathfinders had been over and dropped their flares and then the bomb aimers in the other planes they take aim on these

15:00 flares when they're coming in their bomb sights, then they just drop their bombs so actually you're not aiming at any specific target on the ground, you're aiming at these flares that are floating down onto the target because the pathfinders have already marked the target so we only actually bombed the flares.

So the pathfinders identified and lit the way to the target?

Yes they

15:30 identified the target and the rest of the bombers just go over the top of it and when they're over it, got them in their bomb sight, that's where they go.

What could you see from that high altitude of the results of the bombing?

You couldn't see much, all the fires, that's about all. You'd just see the explosions and the fires but you

actually you're not really looking at these. I mean you do look, you glance at them but your

16:00 main idea is to keep your eyes looking out for fighters because you know if you're looking down there at the fires, the fighters are up there behind you and this is maybe what happened on our next trip or the last trip we did, because this fighter came in from the starboard side and they had upward firing guns. They'd developed, the Germans had, developed this type of gun. It was on the front of the aircraft it was an upward firing gun and

16:30 they come up underneath the bombers and just let 'em go.

With this first trip, what were you doing at the time that the bombing was happening? Were you at your radio set?

No, I was up sitting next to the pilot looking out and keeping my eye out as an extra lookout because I didn't have anything to do at the time. We don't take broadcasts when you're supposed to be over the target so I was up there as an extra pair of eyes.

17:00 **How close were you, how close to your gun were you at that time, how close to your machine?**

I'd be a long way from the nearest gun. The nearest gun's on the mid upper gunner and you've got to go right back through, past the special wireless operator, to the gun, gun turret and he's right up on the roof.

So if you'd been called to man one of the guns, which gun would you have gone for?

Probably the mid upper gun, yeah, it depends who'd been hit see. If the tail gunner

17:30 well, I'd have to go down there or either that or the upper gunner would go down there and he'd be the more experienced and then I, the other, I'm only just like an assistant and I'm just as a wireless operator mainly but if I had to, well, you just have to try and man the turret.

I see, so your role was really as a back up gunner?

Yeah.

So if somebody else was hit or had to relocate, you would go and occupy their position?

As a gunner, yeah, I mean but

18:00 my main job was a wireless operator.

When would you get back into wireless transmission? How long after the bombing would you be back in transmission?

Well, you really wouldn't go, you wouldn't do any transmission when you were on a job, not on that type of job anyway but when we got onto the other, the next two trips that we did out into the Channel, well, I'd be on the radio most of the time because that was a different

18:30 type; we didn't go over any target. We just flew up and down the coast; do you want me to explain that now?

I'll just stick with this first operation for a moment. What I mean, you'd been training for this kind of activity for quite a while, you'd been wanting to fly for quite a long time. What sort of things ran through your mind as you took off and then took part in this first operation?

Well, it was pretty exciting to start with but

19:00 you know, you're aware of the fact that there's always a chance that something can happen, but not for the first hour or so until you got over the target. That was the time when you had to be more aware of what was going on, but you had to keep your eyes open at all stages.

So the initial excitement gave way to what in terms of feelings?

19:30 Yeah well, yes it does, I mean it's more just flying the first part of it until you got quite near the target and then you'd be more aware of it and even more apprehensive in case of problems but you know it was probably more excitement in the first trip, first and second trip than anything else.

20:00 After that you'd probably be apprehensive.

What was your reaction as you looked down and saw the flames and the results of what the bombers had achieved?

Just thought, well, we've done a good job here, we've hit the target. That's the main thing but you know, we tried not to think about, well, we didn't think about, well, I didn't anyway. Didn't think about what's going on down below. I suppose it's not very nice for the people down there but I mean that wasn't our concern.

20:30 **And flying back to England what sort of things were running through your mind?**

Sense of relief when you're on your way home, but just the same you've always got to be careful

because they used to have these long range fighter planes that they'd put in the mainstream. The Germans would try and get into the mainstream and when you were on your way home you were more or less a little bit more relaxed and that was the time when they had a chance of attacking you.

21:00 **You've just used the word the mainstream. What was the mainstream?**

That was the main well, all the planes are going in the one direction and they'd be all within fifty, a hundred feet, no, wouldn't be that, a hundred yards of each other and they'd all be going in the main direction all heading for the target and the mainstream itself might be about a mile wide

21:30 and you have these bombers, there'd be 400 of them all one after the other, all heading down this one course so that was called the mainstream.

That one course was called the mainstream, or the flight itself?

Yes, yes.

The flight itself was called the mainstream.

Yes.

On the way back would you stay in the same formation?

No, well, you just make your own way back. I mean you if you'd been attacked or anything like that you might have been lagging behind the others or

22:00 you might have been higher or lower but you were all given a course to go out and that was the course you go on until you got to the target and then coming back you were under your own steam.

Now you mentioned that during this first trip you were not using the Morse code very much. Did you use it at all?

No, only when we got onto these other trips, onto these other Channel ones.

So what was the purpose of your being there as a radio operator on that first trip? Where might they have needed

22:30 **you?**

Well, only on the way home perhaps. We might have been looking for a direction finding and that type of thing. I mean the navigator had to have his – you know he'd be busy all the time with his navigation equipment and giving the Captain the course but sometimes he might need a signal from back in England, a radio signal, to get to make sure that he's on course. So

23:00 he'd ask for a bearing, so we'd take a bearing on the nearest radio station; it's a radio that they provide, it's not a normal radio station, and you'd get a bearing on this radio station and he would use that to get back to base. If you were flying in cloud or in England it's a lot different to flying out here because of the air, like the climatic conditions and

23:30 there'd be lots of cloud and that type of thing so sometimes you could get off course.

And I imagine the weather could be fairly turbulent as well?

Yes, yes, it can get pretty soupy up there.

You referred to a radio station. Who operated that radio station?

They were just radar; radio stations are more or less automatic. They

24:00 used to send out a signal I think. I'm not quite sure but I think they had just radio, it sent out a certain signal from a different part of the country. You know there might be one over here and one over here and they'd be sending signals that way. Well, you'd pick up the signal and know where you were from when they joined together kind of thing.

So this is part of the direction finding you were talking about before?

Yes that's right.

Now the second operation, can you tell us about that?

24:30 Well, much the same as the first one. That was Kassal, we went to Kassal. That was another big town in Germany and much the same. I don't know how many aircraft. They're usually around about four to five hundred aircraft on each target until they put these thousand bomber raids on. I wasn't on one of those but they'd all be around about that mark and it was

25:00 just much the same type of thing and we were very happy to be able to return from that one as well.

What time did you leave to go on that particular one?

All much the same in the afternoon, around about 4:30, between 4:00 and 4:30, by the time you got

across France it'd be getting close to, well, I mean this was winter time so it was getting dark earlier so we by the time we got across to France it'd be around about 5:00, a bit after 5:00 or something like that, 6:00 maybe

25:30 and by the time we got to the target over Germany, well, might have been six, seven o'clock. We were due over there on the last trip at Aschaffenburg, that was our last trip over. That's just near Frankfurt and it was a big marshalling yards.

Well, I'd like to deal with the last trip in a moment but just to ask a couple of other questions. What was the average duration of these flights from England and then back to England?

26:00 About five hours, six hours. Yes, it took off about seven, ah four thirty, and we'd be due back about – we were over the target at seven thirty so you know it's about three hours out and three hours back roughly between five and six hours on most of them.

We've heard of people talking about superstitions and luck charms. Was there any of that kind of thing aboard your crew?

No, at the time no we didn't have anything like that,

26:30 well, I didn't anyway.

Nothing like a piece of chewing gum stuck to the fuselage?

No, no, I don't think so, no, no.

And what about basic things like you know bodily functions, going to the loo etc.?

Well, there is an 'elsan' they used to call it. That's down in the back of the aircraft, right down towards the tail but nobody, as far as I know, nobody ever had to use it. We were just – you made sure

27:00 you didn't drink a lot before you took off or anything like that and we were younger in those days.

And so the elsan was what, a portable loo of some kind? What was the elsan?

Elsan, yeah, it was a kind of a portable loo, a chemical kind of a thing, they used to put chemicals in it to, but they were very

27:30 seldom used as far as I know. I don't know very many people ever used 'em, but it probably got used some time or other.

And what about religious beliefs? I mean we've spoken to some people who talk about saying a bit of a prayer before they went on an operation. Did that ever come into your way of thinking at all?

No, no, no, no we didn't have any peculiarities, as far as I know.

I mean

28:00 **saying a prayer can be a very personal thing of course?**

It would, yes, well, I'm not sure whether any of the others did but at the time I didn't. Anyway because we were probably too excited about going. I mean it was only our first and second trip and we didn't, hadn't had much, any experience actually, and so maybe later on if I was getting near my last trip I might have

28:30 been a bit more religious.

Yeah, I think there was some other people for whom the fear factor built up after a certain number of operations and prayers probably became a little more relevant.

Yeah, up till that point we hadn't done anything like that and I don't know whether Stan or anybody was that religious either; I don't think we were a religious crew.

29:00 **Now just getting back to this little latrine at the back of the plane, what did it actually look like?**

What's that?

What did the elsan itself look like?

It was just like a chemical pan, that's all. Just a small pan in the rear of the aircraft and just made of galvanised iron and that type of thing and that's all, just a pan

29:30 with a surround around it. I don't know whether they've ever had to empty it. It's got chemicals in it and everything dissolves, I think.

I think modern day Port-a-Loos [portable outdoor toilet] probably operate on the same basis.

Yes, Port-a-Loo, something like that.

Back to more elevated things. Did the second operation was, you were saying, it was very similar to the first operation,

30:00 **once again where were you when the bombs were dropped?**

I was in my wireless cabin because you just take broadcast at a certain time. It might be at half past seven, eight o'clock or whatever, so at the time I was probably in my little humpy underneath the pilot so I didn't take any part in looking out over the thing because

30:30 probably just stay in your own position.

So how aware were you on that second operation, how aware were you of what was going on outside and down below?

I wasn't aware that much what was happening on the outside but you're on the intercom at times or listening, you're not speaking but you're listening all the time so you know what's going on, what's around the place you know. You only speak when you've got to speak. The gunners,

31:00 they don't talk all the time except when they've got something to say, like to tell the pilot what's going on or anything like that but you just mainly kept radio silence.

Now it seems to me that if you hadn't been sending or presumably receiving any signals on the first flight over, you certainly were on the second flight over. Why were you not doing it on the first

31:30 **flight and why were you suddenly in a position where you had to do this on the second flight?**

We just stayed in our own position and listened in to the radio at times, see in case there is a message come through but if you're over the target well, it's too late to get any change. You might have to, sometimes they abort the flight kind of thing and if you're over the target well, it's too late for that so that's when, the first time, I got up there

32:00 to look out but the second time, well, I'm sitting there with the radio with ear phones on just listening out to see if there was any messages.

And presumably the messages that you're expecting would have come through in Morse?

Yeah, that's right. You get a call, you know a general call, if there's a message. They put out a general call.

To the entire flight?

The entire flight yeah, if it's a recall

32:30 or anything like that.

And were you transmitting at all did you have cause to transmit?

No, no, not on those two flights. On the next one, on the Channel ones.

Now okay, so this brings us up to the third flight. How much time was elapsing between these flights?

Couple of days, a day sometimes, only, they were on every night but I think we had two days,

33:00 I just forget the date. It was the end of October we started and then we missed a night and then we went on the next one and then we had – I think we had a couple of flights then on the Channel and they were two or three days apart sometimes. It depends how many planes they had available see cause

33:30 they'd only send one plane out.

Now by the time of the final flight, I believe you'd met Marjorie?

Yes, I met her before I went to the squadron.

Could you describe for us how you met Marjorie?

Well, we were still at Riccall, doing our conversion course onto Halifaxes and Stan and I and bomb aimer Alec and Jock,

34:00 instead of going to York where we used to go on leave, we decided we'd go to Leeds and we hopped on a train and went across to Leeds and wandered around there for the afternoon. Then we found out there was a dance on at, don't know what it was, the Town Hall or something like that, so we went there and that's where I run into Marj.

And what was your first impression of Marj?

Very good, yeah.

34:30 I thought I'd like to get to know her; she'd just gone in the door and we were walking up these stairs

and I could see her from where I was and we walked in there and she was just inside the door so I asked her for a dance and we've been together more or less ever since.

How much were you able to see of her before the final flight?

Only two or three times, because we'd only get leave at the weekend and

35:00 this is from the conversion unit, we'd get a leave at the weekend and then we went down the squadron but I never saw her again from the time I left Riccall until we went to the squadron. We didn't get any more leave from there because we were flying.

Did you keep in touch with her by letter?

I wrote a couple of letters from the squadron but I don't think I ever got any reply because, I'm not sure, I think I might have got one letter but as I say we went on ops and then

35:30 pretty quick we got shot down. After we got shot down, no more contact because they don't get any, you don't get any letters from there.

We've heard of people exchanging letters, prisoners?

Yeah well, we were allowed to

36:00 write to your parents. You were only allowed one, I've got a letter there as a matter of fact I wrote to my mother and which she kept over the years; you were only allowed one or two letters, probably only one a month. I think so.

So one or two letters per month from behind the wire basically?

Yeah wouldn't be more than that, probably only one a month I think you were allowed but

36:30 I only sent the one or, they give them an official communication. I've got the card there that they sent to my mother to say there'd been – see, they didn't know back at the squadron whether we were dead or alive at that stage because it took about a month or six weeks before we were, we went through the Swiss

37:00 Red Cross, you know. The Germans had to notify the Swiss and then the Swiss had to notify the British, who was alive and who were dead.

Well, we'll come back to aspects surrounding this in a short while. I was asking you about briefing before and although you didn't really have the fine detail about what you were supposed to be doing, to what extent were you briefed before each operation?

Well, we used to go to a briefing. Each part of the crew was

37:30 separate. The pilot and the navigator and the bomb aimer went to a special briefing themselves because they were given the route and the bombs and the load whatever we were supposed to be taking you know. We didn't take any load but that's what generally went on and then the wireless operators went to a special briefing by themselves and we were given call signs and that type of thing and

38:00 what time to take broadcasts and what time if we had to send any broadcasts back and that type of thing.

Would the route of the journey be described to you?

Yeah, yeah, it'd be put up on a board, just the general route but we wouldn't go into details of that. That would be the navigator and the bomb aimer's job and the pilot's.

So would various members of the crew go to different briefings?

Yes, to start with and then we all come together later.

38:30 **So how many people would be at each briefing session?**

Well, depends how many was on the squadron you know.

I was going to say, if you've got four or five hundred planes?

Yeah, but you know that was from different dromes. We were as I say we were special duties squadron and sometimes we only had one or two planes going out from this squadron on that raid so there'd be only maybe one or two crews, three crews at the most so

39:00 like I say, we weren't a bomber squadron. We went on special wireless business so we just got briefed on what we needed to know.

Tape 6

00:33 **Could you take us through what happened on the third operation?**

Third and the fourth operation were much the same. We had to go out along the Channel and we used to fly up and down the Channel along through from Belgium and Holland backwards and forwards for eight hours

01:00 looking for the V2 launching sites and we were on our own. There was you know just a lone aircraft but flying up and down which might not sound dangerous but when you're on your own like that in the middle of the day, it was daylight. It wasn't a night time trip, these were two daylight trips and we'd say fly I don't know how many miles up and down the coast

01:30 and we were looking for where they launched these V2 rockets from and all you saw from this V2 rocket was the kind of a 'schhh' going up and you couldn't hear it but you could see the trail from this rocket that was being launched towards England, so the idea was if we saw one of these we'd radio back to England

02:00 as quick as possible, give them the position. The navigator had to work out the position and I'd send a message back to England and they'd send fighter bombers over to get it but you had to be fairly quick. I don't know what time lapse there was because they used to move them; they were mobile sights so the idea was to try and send a fighter bomber out there with a few rockets and bombs to try and catch them before

02:30 they disappeared.

Ideally how long on a maximum basis did they have?

I suppose about an hour, that's about all, not much more because they would pack up and go and might move them 20 miles away or 10 miles away to the next site but that was the general idea. I mean we only saw them once; I think it was where they were firing because you had to be in the right place at the right time

03:00 to see them.

So what did you actually see on that occasion?

Just this trail of smoke kind of thing taking off from the ground, we didn't see the actual launching pad itself because we were way back; we couldn't fly over the sites. We were out to sea a little bit from the coast and we just had to

03:30 point the spot and then the navigator had to work it out to exact latitude and that type of thing, longitude and send it back to the fighter squadrons and they'd try and get out there with a fighter bomber.

Now this was obviously 1943 still?

1944.

1944. What had been the month and year of your first operation?

We didn't start ops till the end of October

04:00 and then we went through to the 21st of November when we got shot down, so we actually were only about a month on the squadron altogether.

So that's 1944?

Yeah.

Yeah, now you used the word 'apprehensive' before, in terms of what would be running through your mind as you approached the target. I imagine that there must have been a fair degree of apprehension throughout these third and fourth operations?

Yeah, there was because I mean we were on our own

04:30 just cruising up and down the coast and we were fortunate that we never encountered any German fighters or anything; it's quite possible they could have sent out some fighters to do it but towards the end of the war I think they were tied up a lot. See the invasion had been on for about five months by then and they'd been pushed back a bit into France and then towards Germany by this time so all their fighter squadrons would be

05:00 further back towards Germany.

Now the occasion on which you saw this rocket taking off, was that the second or the third operation? Sorry, was that the third or the fourth operation?

It was the third and the fourth one. We did two of those, two day trips.

But in terms of actually sighting a rocket taking off was that the third or the fourth trip?

That was on the third one, yeah; we only saw the one because by that time the Germans

05:30 were starting to get pushed back and this was towards the north of the Belgium border kind of thing; so they were still there at that point but from then on when they started to get pushed back, well, they didn't need that type of thing there. They didn't have the closeness to Britain to launch these rockets from.

Now when the aircraft or when your

06:00 **crew spotted this V2 rocket taking off, did you actually see this yourself?**

Yeah, we saw the actual the trail of the rocket where we were. We saw this trail and then the navigator had to plot it and find the spot and then I sent back the position but we didn't stay around to find out whether the fighters come out or not, because we were still

06:30 doing our cruise up and down the coast.

When you sent back the position via Morse presumably was that in a special code or was that in?

No, just have to send it in plain language because if you had to put it into code it would take more time so we just have to send the position back in plain language.

And can you describe the section of coastline where you saw the V2 going up?

Not really. Was just in the south part of Belgium I think it was.

07:00 **Was it inland or was it on a beach somewhere?**

On the coast, yeah, on the coast itself so they used to keep these rocket sites as close as possible to the coast.

Now with the fourth operation can you describe what happened with that particular operation?

That would be the last one, Aschaffenburg. Yeah well, we took off about 4.30 again in the afternoon and went across the coast and crossed. We met the mainstream down

07:30 at Reading, usually the same spot most of the time, the same area and we went across the coast there and then we got to Aschaffenburg a bit after seven o'clock, about seven thirty, seven twenty five I think actually it was when we went over the target and we were just turned and on our way home and it was the same type of operation

08:00 no bombs, we just did the same as we did on the first two trips and we were just heading back towards home when the rear gunner come on the intercom and told us to dive starboard. You know that was what we had to do. He used to say just, "Dive starboard, go." and the pilot had to go into a dive

08:30 and try to evade these planes because the enemy aircraft must have been on our tail but coming in from the starboard side so you'd try and dive away from the way he was heading but we didn't get away very far because the cannons blew both our starboard motors out; they both caught fire. I don't know whether there was anybody hurt at the time because I mean this was a strange

09:00 thing. I'd just got down from where I was up near the pilot and I'd unhooked my intercom, like took this off and I was getting down to my own seat when all of a sudden we went into a dive and that's what I should imagine happened and I hadn't even plugged in my intercom by this time and we were in this dive going down and as I say we were hit in both starboard motors. Whether anybody else got hit or not, I don't know, but

09:30 they just blew up; we caught fire and we just kept going down and down.

Sorry, the plane itself caught fire did it?

Yeah, the plane itself caught fire. Both starboard motors blew up and caught fire and the flames were onto the wing and the skipper was already in a dive, so with two engines not working very well, it was a bit hard to pull

10:00 out of a dive so it just kept going down and down and down and he must have given the order to abandon the plane because the next thing I knew Stan was opening the hatch underneath his seat. He had to push his seat back and open the hatch. So Stan had opened the hatch and he put his parachute on and the bomb aimer put his on and they went through the hole and we're still going down and

10:30 my parachute was on the other side of the plane, you know was on a rack on the other side of the fuselage so I had to reach across there and get that and you know in a dive, you were having a little spot of bother; I managed to get it but by this time the flight engineer could see I was having a bit of difficulty so he pushed past me and he went out, he dived out the hole

11:00 and by this time I managed to get my chute on. When I went to get out of my seat the ripcord got caught on the handle of the seat because we're still going down and the parachute opened in the

aircraft and it fell down like a pillow in me feet kind of thing, so funny things went through your mind. I thought I'd better get out of here

11:30 shortly.

What funny things?

I just picked it up and held it to my chest and then I had to get down towards the escape hatch in the front of the aircraft and get my feet down through the hole and then I went out through the hole and by that time, as soon as I got out the slipstream took me parachute out of me hand, me arms, you know I had it to me chest like that and it took away and away I went so, and by this time we were down to about a thousand feet,

12:00 I reckoned about a thousand feet and the plane was – he just managed to level it out by then but a minute or two after it was going away from me. I could see it but my parachute had opened and I'm floating down and the plane was heading away; it was on a level course, then all of a sudden it took a dive to port and went straight into the ground so what happened I don't know. So

12:30 there was only the four of us got out of the plane as far as I know; I mean I've never heard anything about the two gunners or the special operator, but the pilot must have been in the plane still. I never got any information about this at all, so that's what happened. There was four of us got out.

Now while all of this was happening, I mean we've spoken before about what your feelings were and what

13:00 **your reactions were during the previous operations. Can you recall how you felt, you were reacting to these circumstances as the plane went into a dive and you were struggling to get out of the aircraft. What was running through your mind?**

Well, at first I didn't know what was happening. As I said, I wasn't connected to the intercom but when they went out and Dick went out the hole before me which in actual fact

13:30 I should have had gone out third and then the flight engineer should have followed me which become a crucial thing eventually.

Why was that crucial?

Well, at that time it wasn't. I mean it wouldn't make any difference as to who got out but eventually it did make a difference, because I got out fourth instead of third. Now jumping myself a bit further forward,

14:00 when I landed, I landed probably a couple of miles away from where the others landed and Dick, he was the flight engineer, he took my turn and the bomb aimer landed somewhere quite near a town and they were picked up by the home guard, the Volksturm, the German equivalent of the home guard and they were

14:30 shot, so that's why I'm always thinking how lucky I was that I didn't get out when I was supposed to, because Dick and the other were both shot.

Were they shot on the spot?

Yeah, yeah well, they weren't on the spot. They were taken out into the countryside and they were shot, they were picked up by a platoon of home guard and

15:00 the bloke in charge must have had some reason to do it and he got them to shoot these two. I've got the record of their shooting. There was 12 men in the squad and they were all tried after the war and convicted and some of them got 12 years jail, others got about five years

15:30 but some of them were killed eventually in the fighting before they even got on trial.

How did you react when you ultimately heard that those two had died?

Well, I didn't know see. I didn't know till after the war. I didn't know at all but

What was your reaction then when you found out?

Well, I was very upset about it and thinking how lucky I was because if I'd taken my turn, that could have been me.

16:00 There was only Stan now, and Stan, when he landed—he was the navigator—when he landed, he injured his leg and he crawled up to this farmhouse which wasn't far away and the lady in the farmhouse took care of him. Looked after him and then called the home guard. Well, he was all right. He was treated fairly well, and I was still out in the bush at this stage. I landed

16:30 near a little clump of trees, so I landed fairly well. I wasn't hurt or anything like that but my parachute got tangled up in some of these trees, so I managed to free myself and this was about half past seven, twenty five to eight at night and pitch black, and so I just got myself out of the parachute and wondered where the hell I was. So then I decided

17:00 I'd just sit down here and wait till daylight. See what was, no use walking around in the middle of the night.

Now before we advance the story on from there I just want to go back to a statement you made where you said that you should have gone out in a certain order at a certain time. Was this standard procedure that you should have gone out?

That's standard procedure. The bomber, the navigator, the bomb aimer and then the wireless operator go out

17:30 in turns and then the flight engineer because he's got a little bit further to come from, but me being tangled up with me chute and couldn't get out of my seat and as I say my chute got hooked up on the side of the wireless somehow or other. The ripcord got caught on something so I pulled the ripcord out and then the chute opened. It just fell down in a big bundle, so Dick the flight engineer

18:00 could see what had happened to me so he wasn't waiting around, I mean he decided he'd just go out in my turn.

Just returning to a question I put to you a moment ago, throughout this crisis situation what was going through your mind?

Well, the plane's still going down at this time and I could see the nose of the aircraft and I thought if I don't get out of here shortly, I'm going to

18:30 hit the front of that aircraft, that nose, any old time. We were down to a thousand feet, I estimated. I don't know exactly when I got out and the plane had been still going down and then just levelled out when I got out; then it did a dive to port and straight into the ground.

While you were still on board the aircraft could you describe your state of mind?

My state of mind? Well, I was pretty calm,

19:00 I wasn't panicking or anything. The only thing went through my mind, "If I don't get out of here shortly I'm going to hit the front of there." That's the only thought I had so I just went out, got myself hooked up in the parachute and went out.

You said that when the parachute dropped at your feet some funny things ran through your mind. What were the funny things?

Yeah well,

19:30 that was the only funny thing that went through my mind. Didn't have much time to think of much about anything else. I just thought, "Well, I'd better get out of here smartly and if I don't I'm going to hit the front of the aircraft." so I never thought about dying or anything; that never even crossed my mind. I just thought, "Well, I'd better get out of here." so I did.

Were you aware of the skipper up ahead fighting the controls or anything like that?

Yes, yeah, yep.

What could you actually see of what he was doing?

He was just

20:00 above me, we were just underneath. We couldn't see what was going up above him. He was sitting on top of where I was and you can't see from where I am to him, you've got to go out to the side of the aircraft or the starboard side and then this other seat was there, an extra little dickie seat and that's where the flight engineer, he had to duck down underneath that seat and come down into

20:30 the front of the aircraft; (it) was a kind of a step down.

Can you recall the noise that was going on around you during that descent in the aircraft?

No, no noise that I knew of at all. All I knew was that the plane was on fire and the engines were just making a bit of a screaming kind of a noise but I still had my helmet on; it wasn't plugged in.

21:00 Then I had to rip my helmet off and get out through; I could show you a picture of it if you like. I looked like a real golliwog.

Now I mean you had the most amazing luck in surviving in the way that you did. Has this ever made you dwell on fate or the lottery of life or anything of that nature?

Yeah, I always believed in fate, that if you're meant to go, you're meant to go and that's it,

21:30 because I mean those chaps were no different to me, they were only 19, 20 years old and it's just the same with me and I'm the only one that's alive now out of the eight bodies that were in that plane.

When you saw that plane disappearing, did you actually see it crash?

Yeah.

You did see it crash?

Yeah, it was about a couple of miles ahead of me from where I was floating down.

22:00 As I say me parachute opened immediately I got out because the slipstream took it away and I'm floating down and I could see the plane going away. It was only flying about a minute or so, then all of a sudden it just took a dive into port and down to port and straight into the ground and then boom, blew up, burst into flames.

I mean at the very least you'd lost two people that you'd been flying with?

Yeah.

Do you recall what your reaction

22:30 **was to that realisation?**

The two that were with me? Yeah well, I didn't know at the time these other two got shot.

No, I'm referring to seeing the plane go in and clearly there were two people?

There was still four onboard the plane. There was the two gunners and the special operator and the pilot.

So how did you react when you saw that plane go down?

It wasn't very nice but I didn't know at that stage that they hadn't got out, see, either of the gunners. "They

23:00 may have got out." I thought, "they might have got out." but they didn't apparently. That's why I don't know whether they'd been hit by cannon fire or anything cause nobody told us any of these things when we got picked up; I just assumed that they'd gone in with the plane.

You've just given us the most incredibly vivid account of being aboard that plane and parachuting down so that's been a very,

23:30 **very strong account. So what, once you freed yourself from your parachute, what happened to you next?**

Well, I laid down under the trees and went to sleep. I've often wondered why but they tell me it's a reaction that you get. I don't know why it is. I just laid down there and went to sleep and then morning

24:00 come along and I tried to figure out what I was going to do because you had a little escape pack, a little plastic pack with a map in it and a few little malted milk tablets and different things, concentrated food, so decided that I'd try; and there was nothing much that I could do because I was miles inland. I thought, "I'll head west anyway." so I

24:30 got my little compass out and headed west. That's all I could do as far as getting back to your own lines, but when you're in the middle of Germany it's not very good.

What was the nearest town or village relative to where you were; where exactly were you in relation to towns and villages?

Well, we just left the target at Aschaffenburg

25:00 and we were around some small villages but I can't think of their names. I've got them written down there but from the biggest town Frankfurt, we might have been about 10 miles out of the town itself. 10 or 15 miles away.

So you'd just left the target and you'd been part of a flight which had released its bombs?

Yeah.

And you were on your way back to England at this point were you?

Yeah, yeah.

Okay, so we've got you waking up and having

25:30 **your rations. Where does the story take us from there?**

Well, I started off in a westerly direction and I walked until about lunch time before, yeah I walked along a side of this road and never saw anybody at all for a while, then come to a bend in the road. I went around, I wanted to cross the road and go down to the other paddocks and then just as I was getting across the road, this patrol of home guard came around the bend;

26:00 they could see by the way I only had one flying boot on—the other one had gone, it had fallen off when I was coming down—so they could see me limping and hopping along the road and they called to me to

halt, so I thought, “I better, I might as well do that.” because they had their rifles and things. So anyway I stopped and they took me into the nearest town. I can’t remember the town’s name now but it’s

26:30 all written down there if you wanted to get the names of the towns. So took me into there to the Burgermeister’s [mayor’s] office and they questioned me and they were mainly concerned about me parachute. They wanted to know where my parachute was, so I said, “It’s out there in one of those trees somewhere, that’s where I left it.” so probably they went and got it. This was about lunch time and they just put me in a cell

27:00 in the lockup in the bottom of this town hall and for tea that night they give me a lump of black bread and a cup of ersatz [fake] coffee. I hadn’t eaten anything for about 24 hours but it wasn’t very palatable, little piece of black bread wasn’t very nice. Anyway they kept me there overnight and the next day

27:30 I was taken by couple of guards down to the local railway station and I’m sitting in the railway station and they brought Stan in and, as I said, he’d been injured. He injured one of his legs and so they put him in a dogcart. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen a dogcart? It’s about five foot long, four, five foot long. Shaped like a just a little billy

28:00 cart kind of thing and they put Stan in that and I had to pull him along the road to the hospital. So they had a look at him in the hospital and said, “You’re all right.” He’d only sprained his ankle when he hit the ground so they put a kind of a bandage around it and then they took us back to the railway station and they put us on a train, an ordinary suburban train

28:30 and we went into Frankfurt which is the main town. It wasn’t very far away, 10 or 15 miles away, and we were taken to a place called Obrerusal. That was the interrogation centre in Frankfurt and that’s where we were stripped of all our clothes and anything valuable they took off us. They took my flying suit

29:00 and they gave me back me flying boot as a matter of fact. Somebody found it, must have fallen in their yard and they gave me back me flying boot so I had two boots then.

And what was the attitude of everyone up until now? I mean two of your mates were shot by the home guard.

Yeah, but we didn’t know this. We had no idea.

But clearly there was a bit of belligerence there?

Yes.

What was the attitude of the Germans towards you?

29:30 It weren’t too bad. The only time I come across any problem was when I was being led out of this Burgermeister’s office when we were going to a railway station and a little Hitler Youth kid was there too. He was listening in and when we were going down the stairs he booted me down the stairs. He let fly with his boot and I went down these stairs. That was the only act of violence there was towards us.

How

30:00 **did you react to that?**

Well, I couldn’t do much about it. I just had to take it, you know. I wasn’t very happy but he was just about a 10 or 12 year old kid with this Hitler uniform on, Hitler Youth uniform, brainwashed for how long I don’t know, but anyway then we were taken to the station and went to this Obrerusal place.

Okay, so you were stripped of your gear, you were given a flying boot back?

Yeah.

Were you only clothed in flying boots at this point?

30:30 I still had my ordinary clothes on. They were taking me flying suit; I still had my battle jacket and trousers on. They didn’t strip me right off, but we were taken there and then, we were searched properly at this Obrerusal and what happened then? We

31:00 were put in a kind of a small, very small room. About as big as a bathroom you know, with a bed and that’s about all and a little opening up at the top of the roof where you could see a little bit of daylight and that was all that was in the room, just a bunk, bunk bed and nothing else.

What had happened to Stan at this point?

Well, he come along too. We were separated

31:30 then; we were searched and separated and he was put in another cell and I was put in this other one about as big as a bathroom, about nine by six and that was the first night we were there and then we were taken out—we were there 14 days in these, might have been 15 days, but anyway we were taken out at various times of the day or night and interrogated by

32:00 a German intelligence major. Normally they used to process air crew in about two or three days and

then you'd be sent on your way to prison camp but we were this special duties squadron and they found all this smashed up equipment in the plane and they wanted to know what was going on see, what this special equipment was for.

32:30 That's why we weren't told anything because if you were in that position, if you didn't know anything you couldn't tell anything but they didn't believe me so they this is what they did to Stan and I. We were both taken in and out of our rooms at different times of the day and night, two o'clock in the morning and all that type of thing and interrogated for 15 days.

How,

33:00 **so how long was the average interrogation session?**

Usually only about two or three days as I said. They'd usually process you in two days then send you on to a prison camp.

But when you were dragged at all hours of the night?

How long actually? Might be an hour, hour and a half and threatened with Gestapo and that type of thing. You'd better tell us this, if you don't tell us this we'll have to get the Gestapo in and all this type of thing but there was nothing I could tell them because I didn't know.

33:30 **What techniques were they using to try and get the information out of you?**

Well, they just sit down there and first of all the major would try bullying you. "If you don't do this, you do this." this type of thing. "You won't be able to go to prison camp until we find out all about this." and then the next day you might get somebody else who was sympathetic; one of them pretended to be a parson or like a churchman and he tried

34:00 the soft touch and he would try and interrogate you in a more quieter way and that type of thing, but this went on for 15 days. We couldn't tell them anything because we didn't know what it was all about and they were concerned about all this radio equipment that was in the plane.

Was there any threat or was there any actual physical violence at all?

No, only threatened. We never had any

34:30 physical violence at all, either of us.

Were you able to communicate with Stan throughout this process?

No, I never saw Stan for 15 days and eventually you know at the end of that time, when they were convinced that we couldn't tell them anything, apparently they'd found part of Stan's log. You know he had to keep a flying log and that may have convinced them

35:00 that we were just an ordinary crew, that the other the special wireless operator must have been killed so they couldn't get anything out of him.

Did you hear at that stage anything about the fate of the other four?

No, nothing, nothing. Nobody told us a thing so that's why Stan and I, when we eventually got let out into the compound, we couldn't understand where the rest of the crew were, particularly the two,

35:30 the bomb aimer and the flight engineer, they hadn't shown up so we didn't know what had happened to them.

That must have been quite a worrying time?

Yeah, it was, we just didn't know where they were. We knew they'd bailed out and we didn't know what had happened to them at all.

How was Stan reacting to all of this?

Not too bad, much the same but he still had this sore

36:00 ankle and he was limping around the compound. But he was a lot better by then than when we first got picked up.

He must have been in complete agony?

Yes well, that's right, it wouldn't be very good.

So you were let out after the 15 days. What happened next?

Well, we were let out into a big compound outside this building where we were put and then the next day we only spent

36:30 a few hours there and they rounded us up with – how many? Maybe 30 and we were taken down to the railway station and put in a cattle truck and there'd be about 30 in this cattle truck and then that was hooked up to a train somewhere and we finished up over in Poland. We had about four days or roughly

four days, four and a half days

37:00 in this cattle truck.

What were conditions like aboard the truck?

Not the best. We were just sleeping on a bit of straw on the floor and we got a bit of food every now and again. When the train stopped they'd pass us in a bit of food, black bread and potatoes and things like that and we finished up over in Poland near a town called Bancou. I don't know whether you've heard of it at all but it was a fairly

37:30 big town in those days. Might be a different name now but that's where it was, a town called Bancou, and from there we were marched about five miles to the prison camp and we went into this prison camp Stalag Luft VII. That was at Bancou.

What was your

38:00 **first impression of that camp?**

Well, I suppose it wasn't a bad camp actually. It was a fairly new one because we went into different rooms in the big hut; we were allocated a room where there was about four other prisoners but they called themselves 'kriegies',

38:30 and they were already there. They'd been there a while. One chap that was there had been there from the first air raid in 1939. He got shot down over Dresden on one of the first air raids in 1939 so he'd been there four years by then.

What nationality was he?

He was English, going a bit nutty.

In what way?

You know getting a little bit,

39:00 a bit silly in his head. I don't know how, but he'd be singing off to himself all the time and that type of thing but we just thought he was a little bit strange that's all, but I mean, after four years in there anybody would be strange I think.

Yeah I'm not surprised.

Tape 7

00:31 **So we were in the camp and you were just about to describe the Canadian who was sharing your room with you?**

Yes as I say there was about four others who had been in that room before we got there and one was a big Canadian chap, had a beard, real bushy, had a beard right down there. I don't know how long he'd been there and he was covered in hair. He was like a big lumberjack but a very nice chap, chap called Vic Herrick

01:00 was his name. I can remember some names, and then we had another one, a chap, a Royal Marine. He was captured at Dieppe and he'd been there since, Dieppe was in 1942 I think, or '40 and then there was another chap, another English chap. He'd been on one of the first bombing

01:30 raids; can't think of his name. And then there was one other; I can't think who he was now, but those two stood out in my mind because they were different characters, very nice chaps just the same. Yeah well, that was our first initiation into

02:00 prison camp and it was about mid December and they were making some Christmas cakes out of Red Cross parcels and they'd had an issue of Red Cross parcels, so they were getting ready for Christmas. I don't know how they made these things but they used to mix up all this

02:30 fruit and bit of flour and all this type of thing and they used to call it a 'glop' and that was our Christmas pudding.

Where were they making the cakes?

In the room; we had a little fireplace in the centre of this room. It was one of those like a combustion burner thing. It had a chimney that went up through the roof, much like that one that was shown in The Great Escape

03:00 but we used to be able to cook on the top of that stove, just like a boiled Christmas cake. And anyway we spent Christmas there and

Well, just backtracking a little bit to when you were captured, what was your state of mind after your capture, because you showed us a photo,

03:30 **during the break, from your records and you looked like you were in a state of shock. What would you say was your state of mind during that time?**

Well, I don't know. We just spent 14 days, 15 days in the Obrerusal interrogation centre and I probably settled down there a bit because first of all, when I first had that photo

04:00 taken, I probably was a little bit upset but eventually we settled down and as I say we were in and out of these interrogation rooms for 15 days and after that, then we were pretty settled in. We knew what was, at the time we were a bit worried about that, but we weren't hurt or injured in any way so we never had any problems with

04:30 the guards. In this little room, there was a handle. If you wanted to go to the toilet you used to pull this handle and a little arm would fall down outside the door and the guard would come along when he had nothing else to do and he'd take you to the toilet down the end of the hall, so if you had to wait too long well, you

05:00 were in trouble, but other than that we spent time in and out of that room getting interrogated at different times; up till then we weren't too bad. We settled in all right.

Now getting back to the Bancou camp, could you describe the camp for us. Like as you walked in what did you see?

Well, there was barbed wire

05:30 all the way round actually and inside the barbed wire fence there's another wire about ten yards or five yards inside the wire and that was a warning wire and you weren't to go over that warning wire. You couldn't go anywhere near the fence. You had to keep back from the main fence. If you went over that wire the guards would shoot you.

06:00 **How high was the warning wire?**

The wire was only about knee high. You had to step up to go over it but it was a warning wire. That's what we were told and we were told that as soon as we got there. If you stepped over that wire the guards would shoot you, so we naturally we did our best not to step over it.

So you were just describing the camp and you got up to the warning wire.

06:30 **What else was there at Bancou?**

Well, there was huts, quite reasonable huts, all the way around there. We had about, suppose might have been 20 or 30 huts, big huts and the camp held about twelve hundred I think it was, twelve hundred altogether, Australians and every nationality you can think of, mainly all air force. As I say there would be New Zealanders and Australians, Canadians

07:00 South Africans, English, Poles but it was a fairly new camp so it wasn't too bad there. The huts were reasonable and the beds were in bunks, three high. You had bed boards to lie on with a kind of

07:30 palliasse full of straw so we weren't too bad and it was coming onto winter and getting very cold and we had about two blankets I think to throw over us so everybody slept in their clothes. You didn't have to bother putting pyjamas on.

So how many huts would there have been?

About 20 or 30 I think, you know it was a fairly big camp but

08:00 yeah, there'd be about 30 huts, I imagine.

And what about other facilities; what was there?

At the end of each hut there was an ablution area; you could have a wash. You didn't get showers, you just go and have a wash and toilets and that type of thing but we were taken out taken one day after Christmas

08:30 to another big camp called Landsdorf and we were deloused there. We were taken into a big shower complex, hundreds, dozens and dozens of showers and we were allowed to go in there and have a shower. That's the only time we ever had a shower in six months, but anyway it was a bit cold to be showering at that stage of the game.

09:00 **What about getting back to the camp, the other camp, Bancou, what was the cooking facilities like?**

Well, you just had to cook in your room but we didn't have anything to cook. We only had Red Cross parcels, if you were lucky, we only got about two of those in the – how long was I there? Six weeks, we only got two Red Cross parcels at that stage

09:30 in there and they were all just tinned stuff so you didn't have to cook it, just opened the tins, but the only other food we got was potatoes. Every day, every night a team of chaps would go down to the cookhouse at the end of the camp and they'd have a big, you might have seen the picture of it, a big boiler and they'd have a boiler full

10:00 of potatoes and maybe some cabbage, cabbage soup, sauerkraut, so that's what we got to eat. That was all. You didn't get anything else.

No dessert or – ?

Well, other than the Red Cross parcels, but when they stopped, that's when we were having a little bit of trouble.

Now I believe that you wrote a letter home to your mother around this time

10:30 **and I've got it here and I was wondering if you'd like to have a read of it cause it's quite a, it's good timing so I'll give that to you there?**

This was written on the 24th of December

11:00 1944, that was Christmas Eve. "It is cold and clear tonight. At present the rest of the boys are making cakes. We have

11:30 three Christmas cakes and two puddings which are being made out of Red Cross parcels and some bread. We are going to eat like kings tonight. I am well, so there is no need to worry. I hope you have received my other cards. I am looking forward to hearing from you so please write soon and as often as possible. I hope you have had a nice Christmas and New Year.

12:00 I never expected to be in this position." I can't read the other bit. "You would be surprised at the things that we have made. I'll give you a lesson in cooking when I come home. I'll send a card to Aunt Mary tonight. Remember me to all around and tell them I can't write as we aren't allowed. You are allowed to send parcels with chocolate and clothing, so will you

12:30 send me some if you think it worth while? I haven't had a letter for two weeks before I came over here but I am told all mail from England is forwarded on. I hope everybody at home is well, also Dot and George. I come over here on Gordon's birthday." That was to let her know what date I arrived over there. "Well, cheerio for the present. Don't worry, I hope I will see you all again soon,

13:00 lots of love too, from your son Jack." Yeah, that was the only letter I was allowed to send and I didn't get any more after that because things hotted up after that. That was Christmas time and we had New Year in the camp and they'd had a bit of a Christmas party, the ones that had been

13:30 there for quite a while had organised a party and a New Year thing where they had people on the stage and, you know, dressed up as different things and they had a bit of a concert kind of thing.

Did some of the men dress up as women?

Yes, they did, yeah and they had quite a good concert and that was for New Year.

Cause that was actually quite common wasn't it?

Yes it was,

14:00 you know in all of the camps they had to try and do something to break the boredom. The only other thing you could do was walk around the perimeter of the camp and keep yourself active as much as possible. There was a football field I think on that, I showed a photo there, there was a football field but we didn't get much chance to get out and play football.

Just

14:30 **getting back to that letter that you wrote home to your mother, it sounds like you really wanted and needed to hear from your family at that point?**

Yeah, we hadn't had any correspondence at all at that stage. I mean I'd only been in that camp a fortnight but I'd been shot down over a month by then and, you know, just to let them know. I didn't know whether they knew what had happened to me by then because

15:00 we never got told anything much.

Were you homesick at this point?

I suppose so. We were thinking of people at home, particularly at Christmas time; that's the first Christmas we'd been actually over there.

So how did you alleviate the boredom?

Couldn't do much, as I say, we just went to went for walks around the perimeter and

15:30 there was a few books the Red Cross had managed to bring into the camp and if you could get hold of a

book to read it'd be all right. They used to play a bit of football but we hadn't been there long enough to get involved in that type of thing. Then it was getting very cold then. Ice and snow was on the ground;

16:00 we were in the middle of Poland so it was very cold there.

So what was the mood like in the camp amongst the POWs?

Not too bad considering the position you were in. They were quite cheerful. You'd make your own fun. Well, you don't have any fun but you just talk to people and whatever, wander around see if you know anybody and that type of thing.

16:30 I didn't find anybody I knew but I knew there was a few other Australians there. They'd been there for a while.

And did you link up with them?

Well, we stuck mainly with our own hut at that stage. I mean I might have had time later on but see we weren't in that place very long, only about six weeks altogether, and then on the 20th of January, if I can go that fast we'll get through it.

17:00 **Well, just before you do I just have one more question just about the concert, the Christmas concert party. Can you go into a little bit more detail about what happened at the Christmas concert party?**

No, I don't think so, can't remember that now. It was just like a sing song and they were putting on skits and even the Germans come to it, you know the German officer in command, he sat down the front and I think they had

17:30 a few laughs, you know, at them, at the Germans. They didn't pull any punches. They used to say what they thought. I think there's a book there somewhere. It's got a few little puns in it; they'd have a bit of a shot at the Germans, but they laughed, they thought it was just fun. It wasn't anything

18:00 too outrageous.

And how were you treated by the Germans in this camp?

Not too bad at that stage, not too bad at all. You know we were in a reasonably good prison camp and considering the position they were in and we were in, we were not too bad at all.

Okay, so you were about to, before I took you back to Christmas again, you were about to talk about the events of January the 20th?

Yeah well,

18:30 January moved on and about the 20th of January we got word through the camp radio, people, they'd made a radio in the camp you know out of material that they managed to get the Germans to bring in for them. These people that had been here a long time, they had a radio and we found out that the Russians were on the move,

19:00 so on the 20th of January we were roused out of bed about four o'clock in the morning, told to get all our gear together and we would be on the move. So we packed up as much stuff as we thought we could carry, Stan and I, and out we went on the parade ground; (it) was blowing a blizzard. There's snow and ice,

19:30 it was a terrible night, and so we marched out of that camp and we marched for four weeks across Germany in the night time, day time and it was blowing blizzards and sometimes we marched 20, 30 kilometres a day and we were heading back for Germany. We were in the middle of Poland we when

20:00 started but we were in a doing a bit of a zigzag course and we marched miles and miles; probably only went a few miles from where we started from anyway.

And this is in the middle of winter?

This is the middle of winter in one of the worst winters, it was a bad winter 1945, early 1945 this was and you might remember this Battle of the Bulge on the

20:30 TV, have you heard of that? Well, you can see what the weather was like in there. That was when the Americans were in trouble in the Battle of the Bulge and this winter was a very severe winter and we didn't have any food, we didn't, we only had at the end of the day you got a handful of potato skins, which I did one night, I was on the end of the line and I got a handful of potato skins. That was my ration for the day so we were a bit chilly

21:00 then, a bit hungry.

What did you do when you got a handful of potato skins?

Well, we just had to eat them because that's all there was and then we were bunked down; they took us into some of these kind of farms and they were a kind of a collective farm and had houses all the way around a square with big gates at either end and we were marched into these and we were put in the

barns in there.

21:30 At least it was out of the wind and the rain but it was pretty cold and we were soaking wet with rain or snow, whatever we'd been in there today but it was pretty tough for about four weeks and we were marching right across Poland and into Germany again.

I imagine that there might have been quite a few fatalities along that march?

Well, there could have been,

22:00 there was a lot of people, there was some missing at the end anyway. The Germans used to say, "If you don't keep up, you'll be shot." that was their initial instructions we got, so everybody tried to, but I mean this was – the snow was two and three feet deep and we were trying to plod through this snow and

22:30 well, you just tried to keep alive. By the end of the day you were that exhausted, you didn't want to do anything else.

How did you keep alive?

How did we keep alive? Well, we just had to keep going that's all. The snow was a couple of feet deep and we were marching along these back roads right across Poland and into Germany and we just tried to keep each other's spirits up.

23:00 We had a particular one, one particular chap was English, I think he was a Catholic priest and he was going up and down the lines encouraging everybody and you know he must have marched twice as far as we did because he was trying to keep everybody's spirits up and I always remember him. I don't know what his name was but I remember

23:30 him. He was very encouraging to everybody on the march. He was an officer, an English officer.

He sounds like an amazing man?

He was, I think he was. He kept everybody's spirits up and he tried to keep them going all the time because when you're marching all day and every day for weeks on end and particularly with no food to keep you warm or to keep

24:00 you fed, it's pretty hard.

What sort of things would he say to keep the morale up?

He'd just encourage you. "Come on, get going." that type of thing. He'd just talk to everybody who he thought was lagging and didn't feel like carrying on but it was just words of encouragement that's all.

How would you support

24:30 **each other? I mean obviously there was this Catholic priest who was being supportive but how would you support each other amongst your own group of friends?**

I think it was every man for himself because we just had to plod along and if you fell over, they either give you a kick in the ribs and tell you to get up or they'd leave you there, that was all it was.

So did many get left?

I should imagine there was because there was quite a few were missing at the end of the trip. I don't know just how many was missing, whether they

25:00 got picked up later on or not I don't know but we just did our best. I remember one night I must have fallen asleep on the side of the road; it was freezing cold and the snow was two or three feet deep and I must have just—we'd have a rest every hour or two—and apparently I must have went to sleep and Stan told me, "If you don't

25:30 get up, you're going to stop there, you'll be, you know, so you'd better get up and get moving." so we had to and it was pretty hard four weeks march.

It sounds like you and Stan by this time were developing an extremely close friendship?

Yeah, we did, yeah. Yeah we're very close, we were very supportive of each other and he was a nice chap and we got on well together. We

26:00 helped each other wherever possible.

Do you think that day when you laid down on the road and he told you to get up, that if he hadn't have been there, you might not have gotten up?

That's right; I probably would have stopped there. Well, you know I probably dozed off or had gone to sleep because it was the middle of the night and it was freezing cold so should imagine it'd be, once you lie down there

26:30 that's the end of it.

How did you keep warm at night?

Well, we didn't; you just had to lie down in the clothes that you had on. I mean I had that American overcoat on, with me battle jacket but that wasn't enough. The temperatures were miles down below freezing point. It was somewhere at about 10 or 20 degrees below freezing

27:00 all along this road and when you walk through the snow and the slush, your feet was just like ice blocks.

I imagine at night you must have used each other's body heat to keep warm?

Yeah, if we in together in the barns, wherever they put us, let us lie down, everybody just huddled together and got as warm as possible. But the Russians were pushing, coming closer

27:30 behind us all the way and that's why they were trying to keep us moving. So eventually we got into Germany and, I don't know exactly where we were, but they put us on another lot of cattle trucks. I don't know how many trucks there were but there was about a thousand to twelve hundred of us on this road and they pushed us into these cattle trucks.

28:00 And they took us about probably about a hundred miles by rail and we finished up in a place called Luckenwalde, which is south of Berlin and that was another big camp there and that had thousands and thousands of prisoners there, Russians, everybody that you could think of.

28:30 It was a terrible big camp and the conditions there weren't very good compared to where we come from but it was a lot better than being on the road.

So sorry, that was Luckenwalde was it?

Luckenwalde, yeah, that was.

So can you describe that camp as you walked into it?

That was a very old camp. It'd been there, I don't know, right from the beginning of the war I should imagine, maybe before but it was very, very dirty, very

29:00 basic and we slept on the floor there. We didn't have any bunks; they gave us a palliasse with a few bits of straw in it. It wasn't very much and we had to bunk down on the floor and that's where we stayed for the next five months and that's where we were liberated when the Americans liberated us. Yeah that

29:30 wasn't a very good camp that one.

Why was it, tell us why the camp wasn't a very good one, what went on there?

Well, there was so many people there and so many of different nationalities. Every nationality you could think of and the food wasn't very – we didn't get much to eat, just a few potatoes. As I said before if you didn't get to the top of the

30:00 queue well, you just got what was left at the end of the potato ration.

You must have been getting close to being like a skeleton at this point?

Well, we were, yeah, we were pretty weak and particularly at the end of the march, we were pretty well knocked about you know, most of the blokes were thin and weak after walking for four weeks and with no food other than that

30:30 we survived, most of us did anyway. I didn't hear what happened to everybody but I suppose we had casualties amongst them.

So I imagine that, I know that this was the case in other POW camps, that there was a black market trade that went on. Was there anything of that sort?

Well, there was in the first camp. They had a market in there and if you

31:00 were a smoker, or if you weren't a smoker and you had a Red Cross parcel that had some smokes in it, you could trade them for other things and they were the premium things. You could buy anything nearly with cigarettes and chocolate. If you had chocolate out of a Red Cross parcel you could trade that for lots of things and me not being a smoker I always had a few cigarettes. You could buy a

31:30 loaf of bread nearly for about four, two or four cigarettes depending on how many, what you know the market and so I used to be able to buy a piece of bread nearly every day or two with my cigarette ration but we didn't get many of them, just the same. You only got cigarettes when the Red Cross parcels come in and in the second camp there wasn't a lot of them either.

So in the second camp

32:00 **what, was there any kind of a black market there at all?**

Well, there must have been amongst the ones who had been there before cause we were only

newcomers at this stage and after a few months you got to know what was going on but if you didn't have any cigarettes or you didn't have anything to trade with, well, you just had to put up with the rations that the Germans gave us which is mainly what we did. You know we didn't get any Red Cross parcels from nearly

32:30 the time we arrived there because everything was in a state of flux. There was the Russians were pushing from one side, the Americans from the other and British of course and so there was we just had to put up with the German rations.

Now just getting back to the march from the first camp to the second camp, what was your morale like, your own personal morale like during that time because it sounds like it was just an incredibly tense time?

33:00 Well, at first it was all right but as the time went on and the weather got worse you know as I said we were marching through snow and ice and that type of thing that our morale used to dropped a terrible lot. We just but you just had to try and plod along because there was nothing else you could do.

And what was your morale like at Luckenwalde?

33:30 Not too bad. When we got to the camp we were a lot better off but it still wasn't a very good camp. But at least we were getting a little bit to eat and we weren't on the march all the time. We were under cover in the huts even though we were sleeping on the floor.

So what could you describe your living quarters for us there?

Just a big hut with about a hundred

34:00 people in it a hundred men and you slept side by side all the way along the floor so whatever you had over you to cover whatever you'd brought with you well, that was all you had to throw over you, overcoat or if you had a blanket you were lucky but that's how we spent the rest of the winter.

That's pretty

34:30 **remarkable?**

Yeah, it was a bit rough at the time.

Did you like ever rely on any kind of faith to help you get through?

Well, you just relied on yourself, I think. You just had to try and carry on the best you could. As I said, the food wasn't very good but we got a little bit every day,

35:00 at the end of the day. But that was our main topic of conversation, you know, whether we're going to get anything to eat tonight or not and being frozen cold you relied on food to try and warm you but mainly we had just potatoes or a little bit of cabbage.

You mentioned the Catholic priest who was an officer who really helped you and the rest of the men on the march with morale

35:30 **and keeping people going. Was there anyone like that in the camp, in the second camp, that helped to keep the morale up of the men?**

Not that I know of. I mean everybody just relied on themselves and talked to each other. That's about all we could do. You know we were coming into a strange camp. You're just another number.

Were you ever

36:00 **at any point a religious person, did you ever try prayer?**

No, I don't think

Cause a lot of people did and I'm curious that you didn't need that?

Yeah, well, we didn't get down and pray or anything like that but I suppose everybody thought that you've just got to do your best and hope that you get through all right.

Now what about,

36:30 **I believe that Luckenwalde was very close to Berlin?**

Yeah.

Could you tell us the location where it was?

Well, we were about 20 miles south of Berlin I should imagine, anyway about 20 miles and we could see from the camp every night the Mosquito bombers would fly over and bomb Berlin. We could see that and hear that from where we were, so we weren't that far away. You know, Berlin was being

37:00 bombed by the British nearly every night and the Americans every day. Yeah, they did all the day bombing and the British did the night bombing.

Was there ever a bombing of the camp?

No, we got strafed one night by a fighter. We don't know whether it was a Russian fighter that made a mistake or a German fighter but anyway nobody was hurt actually. They come up the centre of the camp where

37:30 there was a main road kind of thing and they just strafed the centre of the camp. I don't know why but as far as I know nobody got hurt which was very lucky because there was thousands of people there.

How were the Russians treated in the camp?

They were terrible, they were treated terribly. They got less food than we got and they had to work all the time outside on the roads and the Germans,

38:00 made them fill in all the potholes whenever the bombing was and that type of thing and yeah, they had to work very hard but we didn't. We didn't have to work at all actually which was very lucky cause I don't think we could have managed it. We're too soft.

How important was humour during this time?

I don't know. I don't think there was much humour going around at that time. I suppose everybody just tried to do their best and manage the best way they could. We just talked and laid down most of the time in the camp because you didn't have the energy to go

39:00 wandering around too much.

And how was your physical condition around this time?

Wasn't too bad but it wasn't too good either. I had lost a lot of weight. I wasn't very big in the first place. I was a pretty skinny sort of a kid in those days but I was down to about eight and a half stone I think when I come home so I wasn't very fit

39:30 but when I got back to England I soon put on a bit of weight again.

Tape 8

00:31 **Okay, we'll just continue on with what you were going to say?**

Yeah well, we just carried on as best we could in this new camp at Luckenwalde and this in about the middle of February by the time we got to this camp. We settled in after a little while and it

01:00 wasn't very good food and there wasn't a lot around. Nobody was getting, even the Germans weren't getting much food at this time and –

If you wanted to continue on?

Yeah, from February, March and April towards the middle of April we just carried on and did the best we could. We weren't getting a lot of food but

01:30 we were getting enough to live on and then about the middle of April, I think it was about the 21st of April, that's when Hitler committed suicide. Yes, he got killed anyway and one day we woke up and we found that all the guards had gone. I think that was about towards the end of April

02:00 that the camp was all completely free of Germans, there wasn't a soul.

That news of hearing that Hitler had killed himself, how did that affect you and the camp?

Well, we didn't know what had happened to him at the time; we didn't know he committed suicide but we got word that Hitler was dead, we didn't know what was going on at all and by that time the camp was free of Germans and Stan and I, we thought we'd have a look

02:30 around the German quarters, so we decided we'd go through the wire into the German quarters and that's where I found all those identity cards. We come across a whole big pile of these in the German headquarters so I got mine, I think Stan took his. We were very lucky to find them because I mean there'd be thousands of those things around and this was in a big pile in the corner we just happened to look through and I come across them.

03:00 **Okay, so the Germans have left the camp. Essentially you're free to do things now aren't you?**

Yeah well, that's right, we were.

Had the war ended at this point?

The war ended? No, it hadn't ended by then. See the Russians were attacking the town of Luckenwalde just outside of where we were and apparently the Germans had packed up and gone overnight and the

next morning

03:30 the Russian tanks come flying up the street and knocked down all the barbed wire fences with their tanks and we were virtually free then but we were told we better not – the Russians had spoken to the officers like more or less we had an officer in charge of the camp. They had to have some discipline so the senior officer in charge, he put out word that

04:00 nobody should leave the camp yet because it's too dangerous, you'd get shot, the Russians would shoot anybody that's moving and you can't blame them either because they'd gone through a terrible lot in the war, so the best place, the safest place was still in the camp and the Russians, the Russian officer in charge, promised us that we'd get some food; so they eventually got some food. They took it all, what

04:30 they could find, off the Germans and brought it into the camp and in the meantime all the Russian prisoners that were there, they just packed up. Well, didn't have anything to pack. They just went straight out of the camp and hopped on the nearest Russian tank and started to fight the Germans because they'd had enough of them. So this is towards the last week in April.

What was the Russian CO's opinion of the camp?

05:00 Well, we didn't have anything to do with the Russians but we know the treatment they were getting, they were terribly, as I said they got worse food than we got and we didn't get much and they were working all the time. They had them out on the working parties filling in trenches and filling in bomb craters and that type of thing so as soon as the Russians had liberated us they got on

05:30 the first tank they could find and were off, they were going to fight Germans. So by this time it was getting towards the end of April and I think that was the date that Hitler was killed, 21st, or he died 21st of April, but we stopped in this camp. We were told that you better not leave the place because it's too dangerous outside. The Russians would shoot anything that moved and

06:00 Berlin hadn't been taken by then; the war was still going. They had moved through us and up towards Berlin. Well, that was a few, quite a few days or a week before Berlin fell and when Berlin fell to the Russians, well, then that's when the war was over but that didn't happen till the 8th of May, so we were told if you go out, you go out at your own

06:30 peril, so we all stopped in the camp. The Russians thought the conditions were pretty bad and they were going to try and shift us to another camp called the Adolph Hitler Lager [camp] which was a very good camp; it was there for the German troops and officers but we didn't go because a lot of refugees had already taken over the camp,

07:00 Polish refugees and women prisoners and the Russian—there was lots and lots of Russian women prisoners too because they were fighting with the Russian army as well, and they'd taken over this Hitler camp so we stopped where we were.

So you mentioned that the Russians organised food for you. What sort of food did they bring?

They brought in everything they could find. It had meat and

07:30 vegetables and you know they just stripped the nearest towns and brought in everything that they could find and handed it over to the Americans cause we had Americans and everything in our camp this time so it just went into a communal pot kind of thing and we got a bit better food from then on.

So you mentioned that there was someone

08:00 **organising and leading the camp at this point once the Germans had left. How was that arranged with so many different nationalities?**

Yeah, well, there was a colonel, I think a British colonel, and he was the senior officer at the time so he just took charge, but there was quite a few officers. See normally in a prison, in most of these camps, we were just 'other ranks' and officers

08:30 had another camp but in this camp we were in, there was everybody cause they'd come in from all over Germany. There was thousands and thousands of prisoners there and there was officers amongst them, even American flyers and they had rank of major and all this type of thing, so we had a very conglomerate sort of a camp there.

And how did the different nationalities get on?

09:00 Not too bad considering, but I mean we more concerned about having food and as long as we got some food everybody was happy, so this went on till about the 8th of May when apparently, we didn't know at this time, but this is when the peace was signed. The Russians had taken Berlin and so when the peace was signed

09:30 we were there for another two days I think it was and we decided that we we'd had enough of this, so Stan and I packed up our gear and we left the camp and headed for – well, the Russians, not the Russians, the Americans had let word know that there'd be a fleet of American trucks on the other side of the Oder River which was only about five miles away from where we were and if we could get

10:00 to the Oder River and get across the Oder River they would take us back to the civilisation; so that's what we did. We walked down to the Oder River and across this bombed out bridge and we got across to the other side and American trucks picked us up and took us back to Schoneberg I think it was Schoneberg.

What went through your mind when you realised that the war was over and you were free?

10:30 It was pretty good. We thought, "Well, we've made it." but they put us in these trucks, took us back to an American camp and we got some nice food there. We had a bath and it was quite good and we got some white bread and something to eat. That's what we were worried about, what everybody was concerned about.

And when you first got picked up

11:00 **by the American trucks what was that like?**

It was pretty good. As a truck got filled up and loaded it took off back towards the American lines and we finished up in a big American camp. I think it was called Schoneberg, somewhere like that, and that's where we they give us plenty to eat and

11:30 we had a shower and then we spent the night there and from then on we went to an airfield. The British had arranged some transport for us, so we were put on a DC3 and flown back to – no we flew back to Belgium and we spent the night in Brussels. They give us a night's leave and we went to Brussels,

12:00 had a night on the town in there.

What did you do that night?

We went to a dance, met a Russian, not a Russian, a Belgium girl there and we had – and she was quite nice. She was going to write, I think she wrote to me after the war but I didn't keep in contact with her and we only had one day in Brussels,

12:30 one night, and then from there they flew us back to England. We got back to England and I think it was about the 11th, 12th of May which wasn't long after the war had ended but we'd missed all the celebrations. They were all over.

What was it like arriving back in England?

It was good. They took us from the air field to a town called Wing, W-I-N-G, and that's where

13:00 we went to a camp there and had showers and that type of thing and got cleaned up. Replaced some of our clothing. It had just about fallen apart by then and then we went from there down, by train I think it was, yeah, down by train back to Brighton, so we got back to Brighton somewhere around about the 14th or the 15th of May, so

13:30 was pretty good. We were re-kitted; we got all new clothes and all the food that you could think of. Australia had sent a lot of food over to help us recuperate, real

14:00 Australian food that we hadn't had for many, many months.

Like what?

We even got asparagus and proper, real good, really good food. You could have jam and proper bread and good food of meat. You know we got plenty to eat as far as that was concerned and we were

14:30 told, "You can stop here for a couple of weeks if you like or you can go on leave." so we stopped there for about a week Stan and I; we separated then before we left Wing. He went home; he went home on leave and it was the Australians that went down there to Brighton.

We were just talking about how you and Stan separated. What was that like

15:00 **to say goodbye to Stan after this incredible experience that you'd had together?**

Yeah, we were sorry to part like that but he had to go, he was going home to his family and he was quite happy and we were happy to go back down to Brighton and as I say we got a lot of good food and we built ourselves up a little bit and then we were given –

15:30 **So what was your physical condition when you arrived in Brighton?**

Not the best. We were pretty thin and very – a bit weak up till then because we hadn't had much food for the whole six months or so we'd been in prison camp, but it didn't take long to recuperate because you could have as much as you liked. It was laid out on the tables and you could just, like a buffet, go anytime and get something to eat if you felt like it.

16:00 So anyway, we had about a week there and then I took some leave and went up to Glasgow and saw my uncle and aunt and had a couple of days or a week with them and then I went down to Dover. I had a cousin you know was in the RAAF and I'd never met her before because

16:30 she wasn't home when I first went there to England. So I went down and met her and we went up to London and had a couple of days up in London to get to know each other and she'd been in Dover working on all the radar and that type of thing all through the war.

Did you have a chance to catch up with Marjorie during this time?

Yeah well, then after I

17:00 left Dover, I went up to Marj's place in Leeds and Marj at this time, she was just about to join the air force. She was just turned 19 by then and I was just over 20, so Marj I went to Marj's place and her parents; we stopped there for a few days and went about and had a bit of a

17:30 look around Leeds and I had a few days with her parents and then Marj had to go to camp up in a town up in north of England right on the border. Can't think of the name but she was due to go into camp so we caught the train up to there and she went into this camp in north of England and I stayed in a hotel just nearby

18:00 for a week while she was getting acclimatised to being in; she had just joined the air force so then it was time for me to go back to Brighton after the week and I went back down there and what was it? October, yeah, October, middle of October we were told to pack

18:30 our bags and taken by train over to Liverpool and onto the boat and this was about, this was the 5th of August, that's right, and on the 6th of August they dropped the bomb and we were just moved out into the Channel in Liverpool on our way home and then that's when they dropped the bomb on Japan, so then we went

19:00 up through, out to sea and then the war ended on the 15th of August so we were out in the middle of the Atlantic; so we missed VE [Victory in Europe] day and VP [Victory in the Pacific] day.

How did you hear the news that the bomb had been dropped on Japan?

It came over the radio on the boat. We'd just moved out on the [English] Channel and the skipper, the captain in charge of the boat, put out the news

19:30 over the wireless on the boat, the tannoy [public address system].

And what was your personal response to that?

Well, we thought it was great, cause we didn't know whether were going to go back home and have to go up to Japan or anything like that so it was all over by then, so we were quite happy and that was the 6th of August and then the second bomb was dropped I think the 8th or 9th of August and

20:00 then the war ended on the 15th.

Was there any, despite the fact that you were out in the middle of the Atlantic was there any celebrations at all?

No, nothing. We couldn't celebrate, nothing. There was no liquor onboard or anything like that so we just had to wish each other the best, that's about all.

Now before you did leave to go back home on the ship did you get a chance at all to say goodbye to Marj?

20:30 To Marj? No, not after I left where she went into camp. I had a week there and she used to have leave at night and she'd come out and we'd just go to the hotel there where I was staying and have a drink and talk there and then she'd have to go back to camp that night.

So were you able to tell her that you were leaving?

No, I didn't know when I was leaving. I just had to tell her that I was going back to Brighton,

21:00 so I went back to Brighton and then I wrote her a letter from there just before we left and posted it but where she was I don't know by then cause she was just into the air force and she spent I don't know how many years in the air force after the war. She become an officer anyway and she was a what? Flying – not a flying officer, but equal to a flying officer eventually;

21:30 forget what they called women, but anyway she spent a few years in the air force. We lost contact then because she was all over the place. I got back home here on the 10th of September and the air force had arranged for all our parents to come to Sydney to meet us all. They brought

22:00 us all, anybody from the family down, you know, paid their way and all this type of thing which was unusual for the air force and they brought them all down to Sydney and down to Bradfield Park and that's where we met our parents again.

And what was that day like?

It was good. It was a great feeling to be able to come home again and see all your family; and then we come back by train

22:30 to Newcastle and that was it, all over.

What was it like when you arrived at Bradfield and saw your family there?

Yeah, well, it was good because we had a bit of a problem trying to find them because there was so many there. I think there was about two or three thousand POWs had come back on the Orion, the big boat, and

23:00 they took us by bus to Bradfield Park and then we just had to get out and try and find your family. We knew they'd be there somewhere but was about thousands and thousands of people milling around in this the camp, but eventually we found each other so you know they broadcast if you were lost; well, they'd put a broadcast over but, you know, it was

23:30 good to be reunited.

I imagine that must have been an amazing experience to see the family?

Yeah, well, it was yeah.

Cause the other thing that I'm keeping on reminding myself as I'm talking to you is that you're you were only 20 at this point?

Yeah, I was only 20, yeah.

And you'd had this quite profound experience at the age of 20?

Yeah, I was 21 about a week after I

24:00 got home, two weeks. I'll be 79 next week, this week.

Happy birthday well, done, yeah. Well, look just backtracking a little bit, I mean were you and Marjorie quite close before you did leave to go home?

Well, we were good friends. I mean, we weren't kind of you know lovers or anything like that but we were very good friends

24:30 but when she joined the air force we lost touch for quite a few years after that. I wrote a couple of times but I don't know whether she got the letters or what happened but she didn't answer them. Then she was in the air force for a while and she went around different camps and that type of thing and then I met Mavis again one day when I was on leave in January,

25:00 was January I think, yeah, and we'd been good friends before, from the time I was 12 years old, 13 years old. We used to go out together when we were younger, church dos [events] and things like that, so we got together again and Mavis had just come out of the army. She'd been in the army three and a half years and so we just

25:30 got together kind of thing and eventually we married about 18 months later, so we were married for 51 and a half years and she died in about six years, five and a half years ago.

That's a pretty good innings for a marriage?

Yeah it was yes better than they are these days I think.

Yeah.

Yeah well, that's right but you know she had cancer there for a while but

26:00 she survived that for about 17 years and then she died of something different altogether, a carotid artery all blocked up.

And how many children did you have?

Four children, yeah. There's two boys, two girls. Keith's the oldest. He's 55 at the end of this year. Gary, he's about –

26:30 he's 52. Lorraine is the eldest daughter. She turned 50 just recently and then there's Jenny my youngest daughter. She's 44, so all getting old, anyway.

I mean how often would you in your post war life, would you talk or discuss what had happened to you?

Now and again,

27:00 it comes back, you know, and I don't think about it if I can help it, but sometimes somebody mentions something and it comes up into your mind and sometimes at night time it just comes into my mind and some of the things that you did or went through and, you know, I might not sleep for half the night.

What sort of things do come into your mind?

What comes into my mind?

27:30 **Yeah?**

Well, mainly the fact that it wasn't my turn to jump, you know. When it was my turn I couldn't get out the plane and I think about Dick who took my place and jumped out and he was the one who got shot first and Alec the other one, you know, they shot him cause he was the second one. As I say I didn't know anything about this until after the war when Alec's father wrote to me and told me

28:00 what had happened.

Is there for you a certain amount of guilt there when you think about that, that day?

I don't feel guilty but I feel, you know, I feel, I don't know what I feel. It's just that I think, well, if it wasn't him it would be me and that's all you know. I just

28:30 think, well, I'm very lucky. I've survived this long and I'm still here and the rest of the crew are gone; but everybody's got to have their turn, I suppose, but my turn hasn't come yet.

Well, when you described that story to us about jumping out of the plane, to me you just have to believe in fate at

29:00 **moments like that?**

Yeah, that's right. That's what I think, too; it wasn't my turn to go so it was just your fate, that he went in my place and I just – and the fact that me parachute was already opened. I mean when I think of it today what could have happened, and what might have happened, but

29:30 it didn't so that's the only thing I can think of because even though the parachute opened all right, there's always a chance it could have been caught on the back part of the aeroplane as I went out because it opened immediately I got caught in the slip stream and only the fact the plane was probably in a dive made me, you know, I got away with it,

30:00 so I just don't know what causes these things or who's to blame.

Well, it's enough to make you wonder if there's someone looking over you isn't it?

Well, that's right, yeah; it makes you think that, yeah.

How do you think the war changed you?

I don't know, I don't know. I don't know whether it changed me at all but I've always

30:30 just as I said, "It's just your fate." I think that's all. I always thought of that afterwards, that if you're meant to go, you're meant to go and that's about all.

How do you think the war or what happened to you and the things that you learnt about yourself during the war affected you later on as a person? How did it help to form you as a person?

I suppose it – I mean,

31:00 being so young kind of thing and the war's all over – I don't know, I just don't know whether it affected me that much, but I mean I just believe there's somebody up there looking after you but other than that, I don't know.

Did the war make you a better person?

Probably

31:30 more tolerant of different people and that type of thing. I think I'm fairly, I'm not a bad tempered sort of a person whereas some – you know you can get upset at times but I don't think I've ever been a bad tempered sort of a person so whether that's made any difference to me or not.

How did you keep in contact with

32:00 **any of your mates from the war, in particular Stan?**

Stan, yeah, well, I kept in contact with Stan right through till he died and the night he died I was sitting here alone. My wife was away in the caravan up at Nelson Bay at the time. I had to come home and go to work and I was sitting here alone watching a movie and I got a phone call and I thought it was Stan because it sounded like him but it was his brother-in-law was telling me that

32:30 he'd committed suicide; so that nearly – it knocked me.

Gosh.

I don't know why. I went back to England to find his family and to see his family and his brother. He had a brother, younger brother, but nobody could tell us why. I never, ever found out any reason why. You

know, it was terrible. He'd

33:00 lost two wives; he was married to a girl, he got married just after the war to a girl called Margaret and she died a few years later in childbirth and that affected him so he didn't get married again for a long, long time after that. He married another lovely girl and she got cancer from a melanoma and that

33:30 killed her, so poor old Stan didn't have a very good life, but he was a nice feller and anyway in 1984 when for some reason or other he decided he'd had enough –

Well, that's a very, very sad end to –

It is, yeah.

someone who obviously had a really big impact on your life?

Did, yeah, cause we were good friends, you know. I went over to see him

34:00 in 1977. I had a trip back to England and then I was going back again in 1984. I did go back again but I couldn't go to his funeral because the weather was so bad over there that you couldn't have even have got out of London and so I went back over later on in '84, in the summer time, went to see his family and try to find out the reason

34:30 but nobody seemed to know anything.

There must have been something, though, somewhere?

Something affected his mind, you know, but he was such a stable nice bloke and that's what I could never understand, why he would do those things. But I mean, he'd lost two wives and maybe he thinks, you don't know, likely what you'll think when these things happen to you.

35:00 **Well, it sounds like he had had in a lot of ways a very hard and sad life?**

Yeah.

Yeah, well, that's a very, very sad story because I know that, you know, from what you've told me about him he sounds like a remarkable man, especially I'm just picturing that day on that march when he told you to stand up and keep walking?

That's right, he kept me alive and I kept him alive;

35:30 we did things for each other and we were good friends, but anyway that's life.

Yeah. What about other friends, did you keep in contact with other mates from the war?

Yeah, now and again I've got a special chap down in Sydney, Alec, I've given Graham [interviewer] his name. We joined up the same day. We met

36:00 when we went to Bradfield Park and we have been friends ever since, since 1942. We went to England together and did some of our training together. Flew together in the Fairey Battles at times but then we split up at Dumfries and he went out to Burma; when I went up to northern England

36:30 he was sent out to Burma and they flew Liberator's out in Burma and he survived the war but there's not many others. The other ones, I don't know what happened to the rest of them, you know, the course that we all trained on together, but Alec's the only one that I know of.

Are you a member of any associations or RSL [Returned and Services League] clubs at all?

Yes I'm a member of the Toronto RSL.

37:00 I started off in the Hamilton RSL in 1940, the day I come home on my birthday, 21st birthday somebody gave me, I forget, I think it was my brother, arranged for me to join the RSL so I got a free year the first year. They paid my dues to join the RSL and I've been in it ever since. I'm in Toronto now. I'm in

37:30 different various clubs, workers clubs and things like that.

And what about your work, when you did leave the air force? What did you do? I mean I know you stayed in the one job for quite a long time?

Yeah, I went back to the co-op store for a while and worked there for a few years. After that I come out and got a job out here at Wangi power station

38:00 as a labourer there for a while and then I went to school and become an operator and operated the turbines and the boilers. I did that for 30 years which is pretty good, pretty good job. It was a fairly technical sort of job. You had to light boilers and put the turbines on the line and that type of thing; so that was I did that for 30 years and retired in

38:30 1986.

Well, Jack we're probably coming to the end of the interview now. I know that we're sort of in the last couple of minutes of the tape but before we do finish I'm wondering if there is anything else that you want to say?

I think I've had a reasonably good life; a good marriage for 51 years and since then

39:00 Marj and I got back together again. We're still very happy. I had four good kids that have never been in any trouble. They're not kids now they're nearly as old as me but, you know, I think I've been fairly fortunate in my life time that, you know, as I say, I've had a good family and

39:30 my daughter comes over quite often. She just lives over in Fishing Point and my other daughter in Newcastle rings me up every night so I go, you know, I'm quite happy. My son's away at the moment up in Darwin. He's visiting his two boys that are in the army. They've only had two boys but they're they both joined the army. I wanted them to join the air force but they

40:00 didn't; and my other son he lives in Newcastle and he's all right at the moment too. He's the tall one; so you know we've been pretty lucky as far as that's concerned. The family has stuck together and we're always in contact with each other sometime or other, each week or each fortnight, so you know a lot of people don't, they drift

40:30 apart and particularly after Mavis died, it was a bit tough for a while, but then Marj and I got back together again and we've been happy ever since.

Well, Jack, we're going to have to finish there cause I know that we're about to finish the tape but on behalf of Graham and myself and the Australians at War Archive we'd like to really thank you for a remarkable story and incredible honesty and we really appreciate

41:00 **your time today so thank you.**

Thank you very much for all your troubles and everything too, all your trouble to do this. It's very nice.

INTERVIEW ENDS