

Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Lake - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 6th May 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/88>

Tape 1

00:42 **Starting at the start, can you tell us where you were born?**

I was born about a mile and a half away from here on the corner of Kooyong Rd and Alma Road, in a little house called 6 Tennis Grove, Caulfield, which I went to see after the war. I said to myself, "How in the hell did we fit in there?"

01:00 Just before I went to the war I lived in the street for four or five years at the end of Glenferrie Road just over Dandenong Road. This is all familiar territory to me. Of course, I went to the local state school. Caulfield State Central School and I got an education with some difficulty because in 1936, I came off a bike, smashed that finger, split my skull, split my ear drum, split me eye and I was on

01:30 my back for six months. The next year we were isolated under a major polio scare in 1937. I don't remember how long my sister and I were at home, I think it was about three months. We were supposed to be doing correspondence lessons. You can imagine how much we done. And my mother was so concerned about it, my brother's going to town, she used to keep us separate in the house. It was very serious. Stonington up here, was the rehabilitation centre.

02:00 The poor little blighters'd be on the litters, the canvas litters. Anyway, it was suggested to my parents because of the lapses from school, that I should stay back. I didn't use rude words, but I used a lot of pressure. Now I went on to Trinity Grammar School in Kew, where I was always under the pressure of having missed the basic ground

02:30 work in maths. Now my three brothers before me were very bright. I was always fearful I'd let the side down, however I passed. Then my father had to come and tell me the exchequer had gone bad, and I had to leave school and go to work. I wanted to follow the footsteps of my second eldest brother who I adored, who was an engineer. So I got into the commercial engineering world.

03:00 Quite enjoyed it, but knew it wasn't quite what I wanted, then joined up. Well, before you went into air crew during the war you had the, if you were selected to do so, they gave you what they call the 32 lessons, which of course was a night study course, conducted in our case in the Spring Road Central School. And if you passed the 32 lessons air crew course then you had a great advantage when you went into training

03:30 because the training during the war, say what you will, was brilliant, it was intense and brilliant. And so I did the 32 lessons and signed on, on my 18th birthday and they called us up on the 10th of October 1942. I was 18 on the 14th August and went into Somers Camp. And immediately we were taken in on 33 course but those who'd done the

04:00 32 lessons were immediately graduated with 32 course, which was fine. We cut out all the drill. We never did any drills. I enjoyed that. And I was then sent to a number one flying training school at Benalla, I had bad hand - eye coordination. I'm not good at tennis or golf or anything like that and I failed the pilot's course. Not because I can't be taught to fly, anybody can be taught to fly, but the air

04:30 force said we got so many people who were talented we can't afford the time for those who haven't got it. It was a dreadful shock to me, I might add. I had been keen on flying all my life and aviation and wireless were my two passions before I grew up. They then put me before a re-drafting board. There were wing commanders and group captains and here's this 18 year old

05:00 LAC [Leading Aircraftman] shaking in his boots. And they said, "We see you've done quite a lot of work on radio." "Yes sir." "Well, we're going to make you a wireless air gun." I said, "I don't wish to be a wireless air gun." "I beg your pardon, what do you wish to be?" I said, "I wish to be a navigator." "But your school marks." "I passed them, sir." I dunno where this came from, but it came. "I would have thought a gentleman of your standing would know that school marks are no real test of ability." And I

05:30 became a navigator. Had to work very hard, I mean that, I did. Went though and graduated and we were

told while we were training that we were going to be sent up north to fly in two seater aircraft, either Beaufighters or Vultee Vengeance. Vultee Vengeance was an American aircraft which is about as useless as I am. I didn't want to fly in it. They were dangerous. And the night we graduated the CO [Commanding Officer] got up very solemnly and

- 06:00 he said, "Pulling a joke on us, gentlemen. I have to tell you, you are not going up north, you are going to England." There was a loud cheer you can bet, so off we go to England. They receive you in England in a reception depot and this was Brighton. We were in the Royal Albion Hotel, and the Group Captain in charge got up and he says, "I don't know why you fellas have been sent over here, there are five thousand RAF [Royal Air Force] trained aircrew at Harrington, there are three thousand Canadians down at Bournemouth and there are 1100 or 1200 Australian and New Zealanders here. We don't have enough aircraft for you to fly."
- 06:30 So I said, I won't use the word I used, what the so and so did they send us over here for, that's ridiculous. And we were to apply for a posting. So I met the postings officer. He was a decorated navigator. Strange enough as it might seem after the war he became a pal of mine because we worked in the same business. And I said to him, "Sir, I'd like a posting overseas." He said, "I can't give it to you." I said, "But you're the postings officer." He said, "I can't give it to you." Three days later he sidled up to me in the mess and he said, "Do you still want
- 07:00 that posting?" "Yes, sir." "The notice board at twelve o'clock." "Thankyou." So we put our names down. Now on the way over to England we obviously had some leave in New York. Now that was hard to take at Christmas time. And we'd been put on board a repaired liner, the Ile de France. It was the pride of the French merchant fleet and it had been done up in New York harbour. We sat on her
- 07:30 for two days or more and the American colonel called us all up and said, "Hello gentlemen, this boat has been sabotaged. You're all going to be taken off." Which we were, and we were given another ten days leave in New York, which was hard to take. I had a very funny experience in New York. Cut it out of the tape if you wish. I happened to be fond of music and you couldn't get tickets for anything because there were so many troops in New York. They had a thing called the officers service club and I went there,
- 08:00 and I saw Miss Panama Cooper, so I said to her, "Are you related to the author who wrote the deer stalker story?" She beamed and she says, "Yes." I said, "Well I've read every one of em." I told her I wanted to go to Radio City music hall, the Metropolitan Opera, and Carnegie Hall. She said, "Well that's a lot!" I said, "Well, you asked me what I wanted to do? Whether I can do it is another question." I got back to the hotel, she rang up. "Is that Lieutenant Lake?" "Yes." She said, "Mrs
- 08:30 Carnegie has donated her box." So I said, "You beauty." She said, "You can't have it, you've gotta get, we've gotta have six persons in the box, we can't have the box half empty." So I got hold of two of my colleagues and I said, "Come on you cretins, you're going to learn something tonight. Get hold of some of those girls we saw from the Morgan Officers Club from the school, we're going to Carnegie Hall." I asked the friend of Miss Cooper for 40 minutes and I won. Went to Carnegie Hall and I've still got the program and I enjoyed it. It was a Beethoven programme. Anyway, that's that, I thought you'd be interested to know
- 09:00 that. And over we go. Because we can't go on the Ile de France they slapped us on board the Queen Elizabeth, which already had a full complement of American troops going over to England. So our little addition, I don't know what the numbers were, it ended up we had eighty thousand two hundred bods [bodies, persons] on board the Queen Elizabeth. The Americans had three shifts sleeping, three eight hour shifts, 'you keep the bunk warm for me'. So I said to one of the British (and we were only allowed to move left and right so many
- 09:30 paces and two or three decks up and down), I said to one of the British naval officers, "What happens if this thing gets hit." He said, "About 2,000 get out." I said, "I'll be in front." So during the voyage over there, it was pretty rough I might add, I learnt that the Elizabeth had rockets, anti-aircraft rockets for the first time and they were going to do a test so I said to this tame Pom. He said, "I can't take you up there, I can't take you up there." I said, "Show me the gang plank to go up and I'll go up, you won't get into trouble." And
- 10:00 I did. And I saw this firing and they were the early rockets and I thought I'm never going to attack a target because one went up there, one went down there. They had no accuracy at all but they covered the sky. Anyway, we arrived in England and as I said, we applied for that posting overseas and we went to Liverpool and I said to my cobbles [friends], "Look it's out there, it's the Ile de France and", I said, "I bet we're on it." And we were. And we were sent
- 10:30 over to America and we were told by the officer in charge of RAF drafting that we were being sent to Royal Canadian Air Force station Dorval, Canada, which is near Montreal. And I shuddered because Dorval was the aerodrome from which they ferried aircraft across the Atlantic. I had no ambition to have a watery grave. Any rate when we got to Canada we applied for leave to go to New York. We arrived at the gate and the sergeant says, "The CO
- 11:00 wishes to see you." We went back. "Yes, sir." "Gentlemen, there's been a mistake, you are due at RAF Station Greenwood, Nova Scotia a week ago." I said "What's that?" OTU [Operational Training Unit]. So we did the OTU in Greenwood and we then went back to England and then we did another special OTU outside Oxford, at a place called Bicester. And from hence we went on to the squadron.

11:30 **It's an incredible wrap up of about 28 years. As we're rattling along can you tell me chronologically.**

Chronologically, it's all in the back of that log book over there. We left Australia on the 10th of November 1943, and it was obvious from those previous remarks, we landed in San Francisco. Went across the States on the train, that was fun to one

12:00 uninitiated 18 year old, 19 year old I think I was then. We were in New York at Christmas time, then in January 1943 we arrived in Scotland, and that's when I had the fight with the authorities when we came back. I'll have to have a look at the dates if you want dates.

12:30 We arrived in England initially in January '44. And because I had caused us to have a posting overseas we went back to Canada on the Ile de France and then we did this course at Greenwood, Nova Scotia, and back to England on the New Amsterdam and that was a sobering experience, because

13:00 that was a magnificent ship which went unarmed like some of the best ships did. And one evening at twilight, we sailed through a convoy, ships as far as the eye could see, ploughing along at the speed of the slowest ship, which was eight knots. I thought, I wonder how many of you fellows will be alive in the morning? We sailed right through the convoy. We got back to England, and went to the second OTU out at Bicester, outside Oxford.

13:30 I used to spend my leave at Oxford University, clambering all over the place. I'd get pulled up by some guard saying, they'd say, "You can't come here." I'd say, "Look I'm an Australian, I can do anything." And they'd let me go too. And then we were sent down to the squadron on the south coast of England on a place called Thorney Island which is near Portsmouth and it was a permanent Royal Air Force drome [aerodrome]. They had all the trimmings, they looked after themselves. We started operational flying from there.

14:00 **And how many operations did you do from there?**

Did about, it's all in the book, in total I did 54. I don't know how many I did from there, probably thirty or something. Then, after a period, in Christmas 1944, the weather was totally atrocious (by that I mean by that there was heavy snow, white-outs of fog) and for a period there was

14:30 no flying at all. And the Germans chose at that time very cleverly, von Rundstedt [German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt] to push through the Ardennes salient. As you kids know from your history, you're the history buff, you would know that's where they came through in the First World War. They did it in the Second World War because the Allies didn't learn, because they did it again at Christmas 1944. And we used to, they sent over a great sweep of fighter aircraft and they shot up 800 allied aircraft on

15:00 the ground, on the dromes and on the continent. We had not moved over to the continent at that time so we were sacrosanct, although on our aerodrome, I've got a photo there of it, rows and rows of fighters waiting to go to the continent. The day after that happened they just went, boom, the ground was bare. We moved to the Somme area of France, to be near the battle line because our job was attacking trains, troops and transport

15:30 in the battle line and... dreadful area. We went onto a German aerodrome which had been used by everyone and our aircraft are a bit heavy and the CO said, "Now be careful fellows, if you take the thing off the runway or off the rolling track, it would sink." And he was right. The weight of your foot would make it sink. It made you think back to the First World War, how those poor devils there with shell fire and a horse wagon and what have you. We had a

16:00 German cemetery up one end of the drome and an allied one up the other end of the drome and the CO came down one day in his 25,000 ton weight aircraft and he disappeared. The runway disappeared underneath him. A shored up trench had broken through. Prior to going to the continent we did a pretty important raid. On the 31st October 1944, the

16:30 Danish resistance movement were developed into the best resistance movement in Europe. And those are the words of Field Marshal Lord Montgomery, which I endorse. The Danes had been invaded in 1940 and they had an army of about 12 people, and that's the truth. The king rightly said, "Poof." But they developed the most wonderful resistance movement and they got in touch with the Danish authorities in exile in Britain

17:00 and asked could somebody come, commandos or someone, come and destroy the Gestapo headquarters at the university Arhus, Arhus being the capital of Jutland, Jutland being the peninsula. Straight up, half way down the right hand side is Arhus, the capital, the capital of Denmark is Copenhagen over on the island further over. The headquarters was in two blocks

17:30 of an accommodation block. It had been a tutor's accommodation block, so it had little rooms and balconies. And our chief, Air Marshal Basil Embry, later knighted, was determined that we would destroy as many Gestapo as possible and most particularly the records. If the records were intact they were going to cause members of the resistance to be crucified, it's as simple as that.

18:00 We reached the target at 11am in the morning and we went across the North Sea at nought feet, to stay under the radar. We attacked the target from 20 or 30 feet up. You threw your bombs into the target,

and they were delay bombs, eleven seconds, although the armourers would cut the delay back a bit, so as to make them explode as soon as they get in the building. And as we came over we went in.

- 18:30 When we went into the briefing I said to my partner, "Who in the hell is Wing Commander Smith?" Cause we were listed to fly behind Wing Commander Smith in the first play. He said, "I don't know." We found out next morning it was Air Marshal Embry flying as Wing Commander Smith because he escaped from a German prison camp earlier in the war. He wrote a wonderful book which I got out there called Wings of Victory and he throttled the German guard on his way out and he had a price on his head in Germany. He was actually forbidden by the RAF to fly, which he took no notice of.
- 19:00 So he adopted the identity of a real Wing Commander Smith. Not that the Germans wouldn't have known. Anyway, as we came up to the target, one of his bombs hit something solid in the building, and it did a parabola over our aircraft and I thought, by God I hope that fuse holds, and it did. In the same instant, a German, trying to win a VC [Victoria Cross] or a sorry, a Knight's Cross, was attaching a light machine gun to a
- 19:30 balustrade in one of the rooms in the building. And whisssssk, you go across like that so you don't have much time, you see. But the aircraft behind us was a mad New Zealander called Wing Commander Frank Denton, and Frank saw it for just that little extra split second longer, so he put the nose of his Mosquito down and fired the four cannon, and sent the German to his ancestors and pulled up and hit the building and ripped the tail wing off his aircraft
- 20:00 and distorted his flying services. His navigator told us when he got down that he had to hold the control stick in a different neutral position. Any rate, we had been told if we were damaged we were to fly to Sweden, which was just over the water, crash land the aircraft, burn it, send a message into the British Embassy. Do not approach the British Embassy, there are gentlemen with black homburgs and black coats who love Germany and they will spirit you out.
- 20:30 A Wing Commander Thomas did what he was told. Denton was a fool, he didn't. He formed on us all the way back, with bits hanging out of his aircraft. I was fearful he was going to drop into the North Sea, which he didn't. He did a crash landing on the coast of England and got away with it. Some weeks later, Thomas came back from Sweden. The BOAC [British Overseas Aircraft Corporation] had a Mosquito service to Sweden
- 21:00 in order to dodge German fighters and they would strap you into the bomb bay on a lattice of straps and you lie back there and you pray that the aircraft's going to reach England. So Thomas got back and he's telling us all about this one "Oh, I had a wonderful time. I went to night clubs and I got silk stockings and I got this saw that, did this." Denton was standing beside me and just turned and he said to me "What a blank, blank, blank fool I was, wasn't I."
- 21:30 That raid was a success. We didn't lose an aircraft which was marvellous. In the building, being tortured at the time we arrived, was one of the Danish resistance leaders, a Pastor Sanbaek, S, A, N, B, A, E, K, and that of course, our raid, stopped it. And Sanbaek ended up unconscious in the rubble. He had the presence of mind when he woke up, staring at a German in the face, to speak to the German in German,
- 22:00 and he got away with it. So that's a nice story. As a result of that raid, the Danish Resistance asked Embry if he would repeat the dose on the Shell building in Copenhagen which was the principal Gestapo headquarters. And Embry said (we were in France then, that's right) "I cannot take crews away from their battle job for more than
- 22:30 24 hours. That's the most that I can spare them." And of course as I told you the weather after Christmas 1944 was absolutely atrocious. Embry also said, "I cannot go and attack a target in a city unless I can get a clear shot at it. If for instance, as we approach the target there is snow, sleet, hail or rain or fog, we will never be able to do it again because the Germans will know." The Germans knew we were going to do it, so they put
- 23:00 38 resistance leaders on the sixth floor of the building as an insurance. And these poor devils knew we were going to come, brave men that they were. Any rate, a month went by and we were in France and it was decided that the raid would go on in March 1945 but Embry said to Owens, "I will not do this because bombs have a nasty habit of not doing as they are told. We are going to kill some civilians
- 23:30 and I'll only do it if somebody in the resistance movement goes into Denmark, comes out and tells us it's gotta be done because his friends are there and all the rest of it." A very brave man called Lippmann aged 29 went into Denmark and he tells the story, picked up a phone, rang a friend, Gestapo answered. Picked up another, rang a friend, Gestapo answered, and so on and so forth.
- 24:00 He realised that the movement had been totally riddled and he went then to the deer park to the north of Copenhagen, where we had been told to go if we crash landed in Denmark, and we were told to come into the park at five o'clock, smoke with a cigarette in the right hand, stroke our hair with our left hand, but no one did that. But he went and he said, "I spent forty five minutes walking around the deer park." Finally he came and sent the signal to England. "The raid must go on." Now he knew he was condemning some of his friends.
- 24:30 So, away we go, the first box of aircraft had in its complement a Group Captain Peter Kleboe, who had a brilliant record, but he'd been flying Mosquitoes at thirty thousand feet, he hadn't been flying them at 0

feet. We went across the North Sea, in very choppy weather, so much so that

- 25:00 the salt spray caked on the windscreens of the aircraft. It's very nasty trying to drive an aircraft a few feet above the water, you can't see. The pilots had a windscreen wiper, the navigator sitting next to the pilot didn't. And you had to peer out the perspex on this side and see what you are doing, so as we approached the target of course and the German Navy were in the harbour and they were firing. Nasty people, they were firing at us, the anti aircraft fire.
- 25:30 Kleboe clipped a lattice pylon in the railway yard, illuminated the railway yard, crashed his aircraft into a petrol station, with bombs on, both blew up, very, very, very loudly, next to a school. The rest of the story's not nice, but I'll tell you the rest of it. 87 children were killed. Now, because of the crash of Kleboe,
- 26:00 and the smoke and the bad visibility, some aircraft actually bombed his crash. Knowle [Flt Lt W K Shrimpton] and I nearly got ourselves a Court Martial, because I refused to do so. Went round three times, came round the third time and said, "The target's covered I'm not going to kill any more Danes," and went home. When we got back to England they had a party up the other end of the mess and oh God we're in trouble, disobeyed our orders and all sorts of things. And the chief intelligence officer came in, "Flight Lieutenant,
- 26:30 Flight Officer." "Yes, sir. "I want to tell you", and I thought this is it, we're in trouble, "You were right." He said, "Come down and meet Wing Commander Iredale." Bob [Wing Cmdr Robert Iredale, Royal Australian Air Force] had been leading us, had bombed the wrong thing. "Ah good", says Bob, "Let's have a beer." That was the end of that. All the way back across the North Sea, Knowle and I felt pretty lousy, but we done the right thing. Any rate, the Danes were absolutely magnificent over the
- 27:00 children being killed. I'm being very serious now, and I who love children,this concerned me all my life, these kids. Actually when I came back from the war, I bottled the whole thing, for forty years. It wasn't until the Danes started to write to me for historical information
- 27:30 that it came out. And my family learned a lot that they didn't know. Right, well when we were invited over to Denmark in 1995 to dedicate a memorial to the fellows who had been killed on that raid (and fortunately only eight of the thirty eight resistance persons out of the top floor, only eight were killed), Knowle Shrimpton and I were given the honour of laying the wreath on that memorial and we then went
- 28:00 round, and I've got a photo over there of it, to the memorial of the Jeanne d'Arc School, to the kids there now. The Jeanne d'Arc School wasn't there any more, but the memorial was there. I might add I stood outside with tears streaming down my face. And as the service was going on, I heard a voice, and I said to Lois, "That voice is on that BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] tape, I've got a tape of the film of the raid, about the raid." I said, "That's one of the students." And I
- 28:30 turned to look at this person. Of course she knew who I was because I was a foreigner. She came straight over to me and we've become the closest friends. And I kept saying to them, "How can you people talk to us?" And they all used the same line, it was a good line, they'd practised it, "We did not face the Germans in battle. This was our battle, you are our friend." There's a silver dish over there she gave me. She writes to me every year. So that overcame that terrible trauma
- 29:00 as far as I was concerned. That raid, as I said, we got out thirty of the resistance men and I met some of them when we went to Denmark. And their stories were magnificent, I can tell you. However, that's that. We then, Knowle and I, continued on. We moved up from France up to Belgium to Brussels where he and I have been once before when we had been damaged,
- 29:30 that was a funny night, and we completed our operations from there. Now what had happened whilst we were flying on operations, was that I was called up by the CO one day. And he said, "Peter we've just had some terrible news about Knowle Shrimpton's baby." He'd been an instructor in Canada and he'd married a Canadian girl. The baby had died of cot death. "Would you be willing to go with him to Canada and we can rig it so
- 30:00 that you can fly an aircraft back?" "Yeah, I'll do that", bang. So any rate, a week later, they called me again and said, "More bad news, his mother has died unexpectedly in Balwyn." And this is pretty terrible for Knowle of course. Any rate, tried to arrange what they had in mind, and that was, our chief, the doctor, and the chief of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] medical
- 30:30 services about whom I'll speak of shortly, but Air Marshal Wrigley rightly so when you think about it. He said, "No officer's going on leave from my operational command without my permission and I don't grant it." In retrospect I can see his reasoning, because if we had done it, there would be lots of other people concocting stories, so they said to me and then Knowle, "If you want to accelerate the rate at which you do operations under the guidance of Dr Rodman, the doctor,
- 31:00 we'll get Knowle to Canada as soon as we can." End of story, we did. Half way through, Rodman came into the mess one day. "I want to talk to you", and he said "I'm taking you off flying." I used an expletive I wouldn't use in front of a lady. He says, "You've got the twitches." I said, "You can't do it obviously." "Well look, if you do what you're told, I won't." So what he told us to do, was to go to England on a rest camp owned by

- 31:30 Lord Quiltie Thompson, of Quiltie silks, which was a property called Dorney Wood, Buckinghamshire, which had crofters colleges, a private golf course, a farm. We picked up at Windsor Station and this is the truth, you won't believe it, in a little Austin by the butler whose name was Jeeves. We got to the property, his lordship greeted us, "Take those off." The Dorney Wood uniform was jumper and slacks. Of course he had all the produce in the world and he used to feed us like stuffed
- 32:00 pigs. I put on ten pounds in ten days. But at the end of each luncheon, when your stomach was totally distended, he'd bring out two bikes and get you on them and you had to ride down to Stoke Poges, in a country churchyard, to be greeted by mine host the inn keeper with a foaming pint which you had to drink before you cycled back to Dorney Wood. I had a lovely experience there, just dwelling on it. I said to Knowle at the end of our ten days, "What could you give this lovely man?" He was a
- 32:30 bachelor. I said, "You know what, I didn't even know how valuable it was." I said, "I bought a bottle of champagne from over in the mess, it cost seven and sixpence, I think it's worth twelve pounds on the black market. Do you reckon we could risk giving him that?" You would have thought I gave him the crown jewels, he walked up and down, he caressed it, that was marvellous. Anyway, we went back onto operational flying. The end of our time, the chief medical officer got Knowle back to Canada.
- 33:00 Now what happened early on in Thorney Island, I said to the doctor one day, "Take me and introduce me to that group there." "What do you want to talk to them for?" "You're going to get a surprise." I walked up, and McLean Ball said "Good God Peter, what are you doing here?" "Same as you, sir." He said "Where did you join up?" I told him. He said, "When?" I told him. "I was CO of that unit. What did you tell them?" I said "Lies." I said, "What would have happened if I'd stood in front of you and told the
- 33:30 same lies?" He'd've suspended me for six months. That's that. And he got Knowle back to Canada. So I'm on leave in London and I went to see the postings officer and had an argument with him. He wanted me to be an instructor, and I said to him, "There are more people here available to instruct than there are persons to be instructed. I want to go home and fly with Dunkley in the Pacific war." "You'll do as you're told", so I went upstairs
- 34:00 to see McLean Ball and he said, "Hello Peter". I said, "I just came up to say thank you for getting Knowle away. That's wonderful and I'll see him in Australia eventually." He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I've just seen an idiot downstairs sir, and I've got to be an instructor." He said, "Flight lieutenant Taylor." I said, "You said that, not I". And he said, "What do you want to do?" I told him. He pulled this piece of paper out [and wrote] This officer must be repatriated to Australia immediately. G C McLean Ball Group Medical Officer. "Peter, they won't argue with that."
- 34:30 So Dunkley and I came home and we spent six weeks on a tub coming through the Panama Canal and all those sort of things. When we got to Australia we were sent on leave and Hirohito [Japanese Emperor Hirohito] heard we were here so he gave up. He gave up on my 21st birthday. So that's my short war history.
- 35:00 There were grim moments of course. We did not escape unscathed, we were hit several times. One of the most indelible pictures in my mind is in this Ardennes salient. We got off the ground ahead of a lot of other people. It was a moonlit night and it was drifting down through the fog and we broke down into a valley which had snow down either side and there was a line of tanks
- 35:30 bivouacking for the night. But the nasty people had put guns on the side wall. We went down the line of tanks, bombing. We got hit that time. But I think the worst thing that happened was not in enemy action. We done a very long op, it's written in there and we were coming back from outside Berlin. It was just breaking daylight and we were coming past the Goeree to get to our aerodrome.
- 36:00 We weren't bang in the middle of the Goeree, I looked up and I said "Gee, they're funny clouds", then I let out a scraaaaaaw. They were barrage balloons and we were flying through the middle. God knows how we got through but we got through. That was quite frightening, I can tell you. Wonderful. It was the most profound experience of my life as you can well appreciate. I was twenty one the day the war ended
- 36:30 and the RAAF did a wonderful thing, they said, "Air crew, United Kingdom. Tour expired, out." So on the 14th September (without any counselling at all, and I regret that) 1945, I am a civilian. And I meet my blokes coming back from overseas about six months later. Wonderful holiday in England of course, and all the rest of it, which I missed.

We are exactly at the end of the tape.

Tape 2

- 00:34 **So Peter, you had a very large family, seven children all told.**

Yes, seven children all told, one lost in 1930 at 12 years of age.

You're the youngest for a period of time.

For the next six years.

Could you tell me something about growing up in those times, the depression years?

Well, money was a very scarce commodity and neighbours helped one another.

- 01:00 For instance when my sister was killed, a neighbour quite a distance away with whom we were on nodding acquaintance only, came across and gave my father a ten pound note, which was gold, to help him over his problems. That was the sort of attitude that existed. There were very, very few cars and things were done with
- 01:30 manual labour. The estate 'Cantala' in Alma Road, Caulfield. It went from Alma Road through to Dandenong Road. It's Money Miller's [Henry "Money" Miller 1809-1888] estate, was cut up when I was a boy, oh this was fun. And fellas were climbing the pine trees doing what the lumberjacks had done. Not lumberjacks, that's an American word, what the tree fellas done in days of old, cutting tree slots in, banging a board in, jumping on
- 02:00 that, going, climbing right up. No mechanical devices, axes. Axes and muscle. But this was all fun, all entertainment and of course the kids of the day could play in the street because there were so few cars. Cricket, anything you like, we always played cricket in the street, flew kites in the street, and you made a kite.
- 02:30 Kids of the day well, there were very, very few manufactured toys. Families couldn't afford them so kids had to make their own fun. Fly kites. You made a kite by stealing a piece of paling off a feller's fence and using a slender piece of it and making the cross bows and using clag made of flour and water which you boil it on your mother's stove. Hopefully got some brown paper, cause that was
- 03:00 better than newspaper, make a triangular kite and of course the tail was made of old rags. Sporting equipment. My brothers had tennis racquets so I was able to pinch one of them when I wanted it. I didn't have a cricket set but the boy down the road had a cricket set. His uncle had given it to him. So this is what happened and you walked. I don't know why you walked, but you did, you walked. If you had a bike you rode it which I didn't have.
- 03:30 It was a very simple life and I think I illustrated to you in private conversation, the scarcity of motor cars. The distance along Kooyong Road from Balaclava Road to Inkerman Road would be half a mile and we as kids coming home from school, one day suddenly saw a car. We yelled out. "There's a car!" And I turned around and it was a car, and all
- 04:00 kids knew what make cars were, so therefore I said to them, "I think I know who's driving that car, I think it's my brother. He's driving his boss's car.". But that was one car, one car.

And your older siblings, working early in their lives?

My eldest brother won a scholarship to (UNCLEAR) and got his matriculation and he went to work and became an associate director of Myer

- 04:30 Emporium. My second eldest brother did his matriculation and went to work in the engineering industry as I told you. And he did very well. Quaint that he was, he rang me one day, and he was about 55 at this time, he said, "Pete, I'm giving up so and so." "What the devil are you doing that for?" "I'm going to run the churches homes in NSW." I said "You're mad, you won't eat." He said, "Oh, they give me a stipend." A lovely word, stipend.
- 05:00 Anyway, Alan did that. My next brother was very quick off the mark and he had a very tough war. He refused to carry arms and it took courage to stand up in a courtroom and say "I won't carry arms." And he won the battle. So he went in to the army medical corp as a stretcher bearer and first aid man. And he was in the mud and filth and slush.
- 05:30 He had a very hard time and he re-enlisted and he did his job and did it well and he was promoted and promoted after the war. Course he's now dead and my mother's dead. I'll tell a story. My mother said to me one day, "What are you doing after dinner?" She talked like that. "Oh, nothing, mum." "I want you to pick me up and take me down to see George." So I get into the car. "What are you going down to see George for? He's
- 06:00 an alcoholic," I said. "Well that's a nice thing to say." He's what you call it, leader of the brotherhood of the lodge. The chief worshipal officer or what have you. He's president of the RSL [Returned and Services League] and so and so and so. "He's out every night, he's an alcoholic," I said. "I'd be very careful what you say, mum." She went in firing from both hips and tackled George in front of everybody. And he was. She picked him, and he became a wonderful leader in
- 06:30 Alcoholics Anonymous. And there are several people, some of them, one who has just arrived in Melbourne who is a very famous man who was saved by my brother George. Freddie Asmussen who was a little queer put it that way. He was the man who did the wonderful Myer windows before the war. Came to me at my father's funeral, he said, "Peter, two men have saved my life." I said, "What is it Freddie?" He said, "Your father and your brother." Now George had the spirit that my grandfather
- 07:00 had and my second eldest brother had and I haven't got. George died a couple of years ago. When we had his service in Sydney a lot of people stood up and said some nice things, so I got up. I can't stand up

at a funeral and talk. I get too upset but I couldn't stop myself this day. I stood up and said, "In case the congregation thinks my brother is a saint, he wasn't." I told a story about him.

- 07:30 When I went to Trinity Grammar School, the master who was in charge of the class that I went into was a Mr Chips from the First World War. He was marking the roll, he said, "Lake." "Yes sir." "Did you have any brothers here?" "Yes sir, two." "Good God, George!" That's when I started school, so that's what I told them, against him. You can cut that out.

Peter were you brought up religiously?

I was brought up ordinarily, religiously, put it that way. I was a choirboy at St George's Church

- 08:00 up here in Melbourne. It was very handy for parents to steer you in to Sunday School. It was a different idiom, different idiom. Very normal, very normal indeed.

What about your father, who left school early, could you.....

Just twelve, and his father died and he had to try to support the family which he did by going into the post office. And succeeded. He passed all the post office exams.

- 08:30 He succeeded beyond imagination. He was sent over from Tasmania to Melbourne to be in charge, to be the electoral returning officer for the state of Victoria, which was a very high honour at the age of thirty. It wouldn't be uncommon today I don't think, but in those days you wouldn't have got there until you were forty. And he hated it and cutting a long story thin, my mother said, "All right Gordon, we'll try to help

- 09:00 you." He was very artistic and they opened a business in Melbourne here selling fabrics and little bits of furniture and design. And it didn't go belly up, but it went pear shaped, put it that way. And my father walked round each of his creditors and he said, "I will pay you." And he got two jobs and he paid 'em. He worked for 18 years night and day, and every public holiday. He paid em out, I don't know what time frame,

- 09:30 then he kept going for a long time to help us at school. The two jobs were interesting, contrary to distinction. In the daytime he was in charge of what was known as the Rock furnishing salon in Melbourne. Myers had bought this exclusive furnishing retailer called Rock. Dad was put in charge of it and at night time and the weekend and on public holidays, he was the manager of Luna Park.

- 10:00 My sister and I used to get free rides and tickets to the Palais Theatre, quite frequently. Kid's dream come true. He'd come home on Sunday, do his garden, then on Sunday evening, we'd have a musical evening. You asked if I was brought up religiously. I was brought up in that fashion. Religion was not stuffed down my throat. It wasn't religion in the house so to speak.

Can you tell us about those musical Sundays? What would happen?

Dad, dad had taught himself

- 10:30 to a relatively high degree to play the piano and he adored music. He used to have people, young conservatorium students, musicians, in fact, one man in the cathedral choir in St Paul's Cathedral choir with my brothers. And he was a very good musician and we would have these evenings. And dad had started a precious collection of records. Records were costly and equipment was costly,

- 11:00 but he got it. And we would play these records. And he gave me a love of music for which I am eternally grateful. Before you came today I was listening to Beethoven. Everybody loved my father. He was a man's man and a fine man. Everybody could look up to my father. For argument's sake, when he was in charge of Luna Park, some of the lads who were on the merry go round, in charge

- 11:30 of the merry go round, this and that, had usually had some sort of a brush with the law And this particular bloke had had a brush with the law, and his mother was worse than that and his sister was on the streets. My father went to court for him and stood up for him as his guarantor. I don't know what he was going to pay for him, he didn't have any money. And cutting a long story thin, when I was in England during the war, I went to see this particular man, who had risen to be a director of a subsidiary of Dunlop

- 12:00 and he just burst into tears when he saw me. He said, "By God I owe your father, Peter." Now practising at Kew golf club one day, in the nets, bang, bang, bang, bang. There was a fellow in the next net, he's got very strong glasses. He said to me, "Who have we here?" I said to him, "My name is Lake." He said, "Lake, I've only ever met somebody of that name once before." He said he knew a friend of mine, Don Winlow.

- 12:30 I said, "You mean my father." And this man knew the story and he said, "Your father is a wonderful man." And he was.

Seems to be a big community focus in your family.

Yes there is, particularly moreso than I've got. I've been in certain charitable things, but I don't have the application that some of my brothers have.

Tell me about your mother, having to run a household of about seven kids.

Well, she came from a very comfortable background in

13:00 Van Diemens Land [Tasmania]. Father owned a big drapery store, William Best and Co. In 1911 he took his wife and my mother on a grand tour of Europe to get her away from my father. And she was away for two years. They lived very comfortably. They had a Dennis car with a chauffeur, they had everything. When she got back to Hobart, there's

13:30 Gordon, on the wharf. So that was that, she married. My grandfather's business went belly up. Cox Brothers bought the remnants of it, but it went belly up. I don't know why, I wasn't there. But they did very well. Now, when I came back from the war I said to my mother, (UNCLEAR) the depression. I was just a whipper snapper [child] during the depression. I don't remember a lot of the economic hardship that she must have faced. I do remember

14:00 we had a phone installed. It was taken away about twelve months later. She said, "That's right." She held out her hand and there wasn't a ring on it. "They all went," she said. "The whole lot." But nevertheless, when fellas would come to the back verandah to our house in Caulfield, seeking something to eat, she would find something for them to do and give them something to eat, although we couldn't afford it. But that was the nature of life in those days.

Was that a common occurrence?

Yes, I think it was.

14:30 I think it was. Hardship does breed comradeship.

It seems to be this contrast in stories about the depression between economic hardship and the sense of an idyllic childhood as well.

Yes, well I didn't know any other childhood. It's the only one I knew. Well I suppose I know more about the economic depression now than I did then. Of course I do, because I was in that

15:00 business. Mr Montague Norman of the Bank of England came out to advise the Australian Government and he told them to value the pound much to England's favour and cost us a fortune, but that's another story. The depression, at the end of the depression in 1939, the war broke out. Of course hundreds and thousands of men went to join the army

15:30 to get a feed and a bed. I mean that is the truth and it happened and of course the war pulled this nation out of the economic depression. After the war, there was not a depression. Life was steady. Nothing was going upwards, it was going along on a nice level plain. If you think about it, in my lifetime,

16:00 if I could rattle it off, valve radio, flying, the moon, the whole lot, everything that you use now, computers. The thing I like about computers and I've always been interested in such things. They built one in England [located at Bletchley Park] Colossus One, then they built Colossus two, I made a few. Colossus by the way was exactly as they were, they were as long as this room or bigger. Thermionic valves and god knows what.

16:30 Thousands of them. I think they must have had a man going around every day to change the valves. And some boffin in England of high standing made this profound announcement. There would only ever be the need for five such machines in the world. There's one out in the back room. So what that said to me when I was in the business of forecasting. You can't do it, you just give it your best shot and back it up. One of Jules Verne's

17:00 wasn't bad, he was pretty good at it and so was what's its name, Clark. It was a funny world, and of course, sociologically, as you kids know, the graph was going like an exponential curve. From 30 years ago or 40 years ago.

Were you always interested in technology?

Yes I was, I am.

Can you tell us about your experiments with wireless?

Oh, aha. I'll tell you a funny story. I used to build radios

17:30 as a kid, within the limits of my pocket, which I used to have to go and earn the pennies, second hand parts. And one of the boys at school one day said, "Will you build me one of these?" "Yeah." He said, "How much will it cost?" Now I pulled a figure out of the air which was cruel. I said, "Fifteen shillings." "Right," said he and he bought it. And he bought one more, and he bought another one. Then one day Constable Plod [nickname for policeman] come to the door and said to my mother, "You got a son named Peter?" "Yes," said Mum.

18:00 "I want to talk to him." Mum's wondering what the hell I've been up to. He said, "Do you know a boy named Wilkins?" I said, "Yes." "Have you been selling him radios?" "Yes, I have." "Will you tell us about it?" "Yes, I would." What it was, his dad owned a pie factory and his dad used to come home tired with a bag full of money, put it on the ground, pour himself a beer, have his dinner. The boy'd get into the bag, grab a handful of notes, go up the lane and bury them. And Dad called the police in because he thought

it was going on in the factory. So that

- 18:30 stopped my sales of radio. Interestingly, I used to buy the parts from a place in Claremont Avenue just down there. And when Lois and I went to live in Perth we met the registrar of the, just cop this, the Princess Margaret Hospital for the Children of the Sick..Poor. How about that? That was the notice outside. I said to this fellow, "I know you." He said, "Where do you come from?"
- 19:00 I said, "Caulfield". He said, "I come from Melbourne". I said, "You had a radio shop in Glenwood Avenue". He said "Yeah." And so we got talking and his wife had said to him, he wanted to do medicine, and in those days this was a very big step. She said to him when he was 33, "Okay, you do medicine, I'll find a job", and he got through. So there was me radio factory gone. But I used to get technical magazines and I'd study them and I still enjoy
- 19:30 things technical.

Can you tell us of your first experience or memories of planes?

Well like every small boy I liked aeroplanes. I mean that. And this second eldest brother of mine was my hero. And he had started an album which I have still got to this day, of plane cuttings, of planes, and he handed it to me in 1934 or something and I kept it up to the first

- 20:00 of the war. And Alan used to build model aircraft and he was very skilful, which I am not. And he built a thing called the robin, rubber powered. He won a flying competition with it. He got a flying scholarship at the age of 16. He learnt to fly. Of course I'm all goggle-eyed and I used to go out to Essendon aerodrome and look at planes and study planes and what have you. They were fascinating things in those days.
- 20:30 That's how I became interested in them. So when it came to going to the war I wasn't going to foot slog [army], I can assure you of that. Aviation was the thing. The airforce was a brilliant concept. You will know of something or have heard of the Empire Training [Empire Air Training Scheme]Scheme. It was totally brilliant. They trained raw recruits to a
- 21:00 pretty considerable degree of skill, in a period of under 12 months. Used to take them two and a half to three years in peace time. Mind you, those fellows were more thoroughly trained than we, and when I met the RAF officers who were permanent chaps who'd had that training I've thought, you blokes are pretty good.

Did you feel that training prepared you?

Absolutely. The

- 21:30 training was, it got you through, there's no question about that. And in contrary distinction and on my way to England as a fully qualified navigator, officer, having graduated a fortnight before I met an American navigator in New York. And he of course was dressed a lot better than I. And we were chatting, and he said, "Flying training. Thirty hours."
- 22:00 I didn't tell him I'd done 120 to that point and I knew I'd be doing another 50 before I went onto operations. I said, "What are you going to do now?" "We're gonna ferry aircraft across the Pacific." I don't know which wave he hit, but I felt sorry for that bloke. Now when the eighth airforce, the American force got to England, they of course had these 30 hour navigators and they were totally hopeless. They borrowed navigators from our air force
- 22:30 and then they trained their own men properly. Now our training was very good. We did a lot of our flying at night for arguments sake. We had done an intense, you were talking about intense training, made me flash back in my mind to an intense fortnight. Night flying! Night blindness tests. They put dark glasses on your face on the day that you got there and you had to learn how to see out of your peripheral vision, and not look at things, identify
- 23:00 them that way, and it was marvellous, you do it. I do it to this day. Flying low at night, you'd see a movement out of your peripheral vision and you'd pick it up like that and get the detail. We were attacking trucks and trains. The goggles were only to blind us in daylight for a fortnight. And the last test, the instructors had a lovely time, they had us in the gymnasium and they threw medicine balls at us.
- 23:30 So if you didn't see the medicine balls, you were flat on your back on the floor. That taught you to look. But you ask me about the training, it was very good indeed. It was very thorough. Another example of that is this. At Greenwood, Nova Scotia, we had to do day flying and night flying. And the weather had been bad and Knowle and I hadn't completed our number of hours for night flying, so we're flying this particular night and we got up,
- 24:00 and had oiled up, plug in the engine.... We got down and the mechanics took 24 hot plugs out and put 24 new ones in and got us up and away. So that we could graduate from the course. It was very intense, and of course you could have done five more years training, but that was a very good course.

It's a massive operation in terms of scale as well.

It was. Incredible. It was brilliant stuff. I said to them when I was away

- 24:30 at the war, "As a matter of fact, if they could organise peace time like this it might be a good place." Which was true.

Can you tell us more of the details of the training, course work, things like that.

Well, navigation training, part of it is what you call dead reckoning navigation, drafting on times and things. Then low level flying, I'll tell you about that. Then the radio stuff. You can imagine, I was a whizz on a Morse key and I never used one in the war. I had one before the war, I made one up, and I could

- 25:00 send em all.

Do you still remember Morse?

Yes, I do. I go into a picture theatre and I see the x's and I go dit daa da de dit da, that's the x's. Morse is gone, they buried Samuel F B Morse. Any rate, the low level navigation is a distinct art.

- 25:30 You imagine, I've got a map over there, I'll show you, you're flying from point A to point B, at thirty or fifty feet. Your range of vision is somewhat limited. Now, you pre-plan it that you will go along in a straight line, but mother nature doesn't agree with that always and changes with the wind. Now you would naturally think that when you got out to the port or the left of track, you would then go from that

- 26:00 point to the target. You don't, because you've got to learn what is on your track, pre-learn it, and I'll tell you how in a minute. So you come back to your track and you fly along that all the time. Now for those raids on Denmark, Embry had scale models of a mile radius made of the target area and we had to get down to study them for hours on end so we understood every church steeple, every chimney on the way in. And I went into

- 26:30 the Imperial War Museum in London in 1985 or something, and there was the model for Arhus in plan view. So I called an attendant over and I said, "That's wrong." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "That's wrong. Get down on your hands and knees have a look." "Ah," he said, "that's how it was used. Get 'em to lift it up." So you did navigation at night at low level by your

- 27:00 watch and pre-planning and you would occasionally pick up a pin point, such as a railway line or a lake. Yes, became very skilful at it, and I can still do it.

And dead reckoning especially for bad weather?

Dead reckoning was, we couldn't plot in flying low level in a Mosquito because it's going like that and we only had a little board like that. In a bomber you had a table where you could plot things out, we couldn't do that, that's why we had to use this special

- 27:30 method. Dead reckoning is a matter of geometry. You took shots with the sextant of the stars and what have you. That's old hat, slow stuff. These days they've got a little thing in their hand. Where am I, oh.

And what sort of dials or readings did you have to

You had a calculator, I wish I'd snitched that,

- 28:00 had a calculator, what you carried. You carried your log, writing things up. You carried your maps of course, folded in a particular way that you were going, 'cause a map in a cockpit...you know. And you had a ruler and a pencil and a torch with the end of it blanked out by cardboard and a pin hole through it, using that to see your map, cause you couldn't have any light in the cockpit.

- 28:30 Air speed indicator, so you could calculate it better, and that, and that.

Amazing. And what else in the training did you have, defensive, evasive techniques?

Well, to answer that question, I think the best way, when you plotted your course to a target, you were told, you knew where the anti-aircraft batteries were

- 29:00 and you naturally tended to go around them, it's strange that. And the radio controlled searchlights, but of course they would pop on new ones every now and then. And one, we used to go over the North Sea into the hook of Holland, up the top of Holland over a place called Egmond aan Zee, turn right down the Zyder Zee, turn left up the railway lines in Holland into Appledorn,

- 29:30 go into Germany and then you can go that way. One night, a very loud raucous Australian voice yelled out...By the way, we would go out on individual patrols. We'd go out to cover an area from 30 minutes to an hour and then someone else would take it over, looking for movement. And this raucous Australian voice said, "Don't go anywhere near that rah, rah, rah so and so there's a flak ship off shore." It's only because we were stupid, we were going

- 30:00 over Egmond aan Zee ad nauseum so they thought they'd stop our fun. The weather was a very big factor. When you were flying low you didn't have the time to go over the top of cumulus thunderstorms and that was the first shock I got when I got to England. Being brought up in Australia, I thought thunderstorms were a product of the tropics. Not so and so

- 30:30 they were fifty miles long on the Channel [English Channel] and thirty thousand feet high. So you'd go under the damn things. You hear this intense static coming in your head phones, rurrururu and then all of a sudden St Elmos fire'd start on your props and if you held your finger up, it'd shoot to the frame of the aircraft, like a shot of lightning. That happened on several occasions. The weather was a bad factor. I dunno, good luck was a factor too.
- 31:00 **And during training, were there many accidents?**
- You may be surprised to know that whilst I was training on Mosquitoes, we did not have one accident but on the same aerodrome, there was an operational training unit for Hurricane aircraft. Three of em went in while I was there and whilst we were waiting. When you get to an OTU on a new aircraft, the navigators have to familiarise themselves with the surrounds.
- 31:30 The pilots have to be familiarised with the new type of aircraft. Whilst we were waiting to go on course, which I think was a period of ten days, I attended 12 funerals, in every religion in the land. I'm pretty good, cause they used to send us to them. But we didn't have an accident and we didn't have one when we were at the OTU at Oxford, Bicester.
- 32:00 We had them on the squadron, but I don't know, we led a charmed life. There was one action at the OTU at Greenwood, Nova Scotia. When we got over there, three specialist navigators were confronted by four pilots who had been flying instructors. That was brilliant, that was the airforce for you, three into four goes. So we made it a decision that if anybody
- 32:30 expressed a great personal preference well they could crew together and the rest could toss. So a fellow named Jim Vickers-Willis, famous man in this town and I expressed that preference and Jim went off, and the last day he was doing his conversion and he opened the right tap and not the left tap and shoooooooo, cartwheeled the aircraft across the aerodrome. So he shot back to Australia and he flew a Spitfire. That's how I got to fly with Knowle Shrimpton. I see Jim regularly
- 33:00 and he's got polio but he's still studying, he's 84.
- You were with the same pilot the whole ...**
- Yes. Jim said to me, "You were lucky to fly with him." I said, "I know I was. You would have killed me, you so and so." Shrimpton was a very good pilot. He was born here in Melbourne.
- Were you happy to be flying Mosquitoes?**
- 33:30 Yes, thrilled to bits. I don't know whether you want to put this on the tape, but I'll tell you the background to that. I told you I had bad coordination. My fate, as an air gunner, had I been silly enough to accept it at best, would have been a Lancaster. If I'd got there, because they had too many, if I had become a pilot, I would never have got into operations. There were too many bloody pilots and I would never have got there.
- 34:00 So here I was lucky enough to be channelled through. Best aircraft in World War Two it was. Its story is phenomenal and I won't bore you with that on the tape. So I was dead lucky as the only way to get on this wonderful aeroplane. It performed brilliantly, and brought my neck back.
- 34:30 **You flew with Knowle. You must have formed an incredible bond.**
- We did. It was a brotherhood. What happened was Knowle went to Canada as I told you. He and Jane came out to Australia so he could see his parents and what have you. Or, his father I mean, his mother died. They were here for a couple of years. They then stayed out here for a couple of years and Knowle then said to me, he'd been in the wool industry out here, he said, "We're going to
- 35:00 live in Canada." Which was understandable. Jane was a Canadian. And he went to Canada, where he had a brother, a very brilliant commercial artist who'd gone from Melbourne to Canada. So Knowle was in Canada. He was a terrible correspondent but we did send Christmas cards and what have you. Then one day, the Danes said to me, "We want to get in touch with Shrimpton." I wrote back and I said, "Well I do too but I don't know where the blighter is." So I went to his old school, Scots, and I said,
- 35:30 "W K Shrimpton. About so and so years." "They said yes, yes, yes, yes. We've lost track of him." I said, "That's two of us, but there's a Mrs Shrimpton here." I said, "But she's died." "No, no, no, no, that was her daughter. His sister in law, Molly Shrimpton." I rang Molly and I said, "Molly, a voice out of the blue." She said, "Good Go, Peter!" So she gave me Knowle's address and we started corresponding again. We met up, he came out to Australia
- 36:00 for a visit and we met up in the dark and we just fell on one another. And in fact at that dinner table people said, "Stop talking you two, stop talking." And he said to Lois in Copenhagen (he'd been to school with Lois' brother, which was quite an occurrence) "Oh, Lois, Peter and I were just like that." And I said, "We were in the air, but on the ground I used to tick you off." But that answered your question we were as close as close as. We
- 36:29 used to think alike, if you like. And that is part of the skill I suppose. I would have hated it to be any other way. Well I know of one case, a friend of mine had a navigator and they were not compatible one little bit. Eventually, having nearly lost his life once or twice, he had to say to the authorities, "Get rid of

that bloke."

And you could do that?

Well, he had rank, he could do it.

And did you used to tick him off on land?

37:00 Oh, no, I was acting the fool. We were very close, very close indeed. It was incredible how we could think together.

You'd spend time off operations together as well?

We did. We were walking down Bond Street London before we went on operations. Any rate, he said, "Jane wants me to get another photograph." I said, "Well, here's a photographer." I looked at that and I said, "I know that name. He's one of 'the' photographers", so we walked in. Knowle was fairly shy.

37:30 I said to the photographer, "Flight Lieutenant Shrimpton would like to get a photograph by Mr Hay Wrightson." He said "Right. " So he took Knowle in and he opened a book on the thing. And I said, "By God, that couldn't be true." When Hay Wrightson came out, I said, "Edgar Maticott gave you that book." He said, "How do you know?" I said, "He lived in our house in Melbourne for three months. He took my photo and

38:00 all sorts of photos and sent them home to my parents. He used to send me The Age [Melbourne newspaper] every Saturday over the continent so we could catch up." But that was an incredible coincidence. There were a lot of books on the thing, I could have picked up any of them. It was strange writing, I knew. But Knowle and I were as thick as thieves and when I got a phone call from relatives of his in Albury, couple of years ago, I knew straight away that something was wrong. And he had died, having his

38:30 whisky at night, sitting beside his swimming pool. So there. So what do you want now?

38:43 End of tape

Tape 3

00:39 **I just wonder if you could tell us about your experience with World War One veterans when you were growing up?**

Well, I met a number of them, fathers of chums of mine. My own father wanted to enlist but couldn't because he had terrible eyesight. And the only really close contact I had with them

01:00 was to watch the Anzac march. I didn't talk to any of them except the fella who used to always come to school around Anzac Day to tell us all about Anzac and the Gallipoli landings and what have you. I did have an interesting experience. My mother knew very well the woman who ran the aquarium in Melbourne. The boys, the Green boys were absolute devils. They used to run

01:30 riot in the place and they took me down to the basement. And there were two Gallipoli landing craft, metal boats with holes in em. I don't know where they are today. I suppose they might be in Canberra. You read a lot about WW1. Probably glamorised a lot of it. But when I got to France and saw the trenches and the conditions my heart bled for them and I began to understand how the men

02:00 drowned in mud at Passchendaele because the ground was unstable. And when you had horses and carrying artillery across it and the occasional tank and motor vehicles such as they were, the ground would be just churned up, mud and mess, shells falling and making a mess. A terrible, terrible war.

They didn't have counselling then, but were there members of the community

02:30 **for who allowances were made because of their First World War experience?**

That's a bit of a... That's a very difficult question. Well, put it this way, there were some employment opportunities offered to First World War fellas with disabilities, for instance the newspaper stands in the city and the vegetable carts in the city, from whence they sold. They were free.

03:00 The poor devils used to come around sometimes to the house during the depression, selling matches and bits and pieces like that. There wasn't a lot, as far as I could see, that was done for WW1 veterans but those who were somewhat handicapped were given some privileges. You may not know this, but the Boulevard at Heidelberg at Ivanhoe [suburb of Melbourne], that wonderful road, was built by hand obviously, as was the Ocean Road [South coast of Victoria]

03:30 by shovel, by mainly returned soldiers. Now the Boulevard was financed and paid for by Sidney Myer. He did that for the veterans. They used to go out to the country rabbit trapping, fencing, what have you, but the direct assistance, the records'd have to prove me wrong. The visual

04:00 aspect of direct assistance was the newspaper stand and things like that. They had a tough time.

I read of one man who was an alcoholic and everyone in the town knew him and made allowances for him, knowing he had a hard time.

That's human nature factor and that would happen anywhere. Yeah, that's a human factor. And the brotherhood of mankind to put it in glamorous phraseology,

04:30 was very strong during the depression, and sure they would make allowances for the fact that poor old Joe who has beaten himself up. I agree with that.

And so you were very aware of your Anzac Day history growing up?

Yes.

Did that influence your decision to go to war at all?

I don't think so. I think in those days we were an appendage of Great Britain. In sovereign terms,

05:00 as you know. And you've heard Menzies [Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies 1939-1941 and 1949-1966] say, "It is my melancholy duty." We as school children learning geography and history. I am an absolute whizz on British history. I know very little of Australian history. And of course in terms of defence, small defence force, but our defence was the British Navy, I mean that,

05:30 and the Royal Air Force and the biggest shock I got before I joined up was the sinking of the [HMS] Repulse and the [HMS] Renown [actually HMS Prince of Wales] off the coast of Malaya. Because they were our shield and armour and we were defenceless. For argument's sake, in my last year at school or the year before, on some damn scrap book we had to make, I'd done a project on British battleships and I had the [HMS] Royal and the Repulse and the Renown and the [HMS] Rodney. I could sing you a song about that,

06:00 and these were our shield and armour, but of course Britain got itself so embroiled, they had to leave us. And Curtin [Australian Prime Minister John Curtin 1941-1945] during the war, had to have the most almighty fight with Churchill [British Prime Minister Winston Churchill] to get our blokes back from the Middle East to Australia.

Do you remember where you were when Menzies made that speech? Do you remember that day?

Yes I do. I was on what was called a school tour. The highlight of my

06:30 school life. We went from town to town, going up through Victoria, up to Canberra and all sorts of places and the school play was being taken with us and we would perform the school play and we'd be billeted in these various towns. It was in Shepparton, Sunday night. I came back from the play to these lovely people and

07:00 heard this announcement. And having three brothers I, I, I blubbed I can assure you. I thought I'd never see them again. But the lighter side came because two days later we came up to the Hume Weir, and there was a solitary soldier, defending the weir. I burst out laughing. It was a very serious business and the darkness.. I suppose others would have told you of this, of the Battle of Britain

07:30 and the evacuation from the continent was just incredible. Without going over that ground and no doubt you've heard about, I'll illustrate it another way. When we were in Denmark we were right up the top of the peninsula of Jutland at a place called Rebild. We were there because they were commissioning a memorial that the Americans had paid for

08:00 because the Danes had been so good to their fleeing crews, who landed in Denmark. The Americans had given this ground and built this big hall and to my amazement I think the Danes had done this not the Americans. It was just a plinth of rock with a brass plate on it. If it had been the Americans, who'd paid for it, you'd think it would be battleships. The man got up to speak. He was a big man. He was on half sticks. It was a cold day, and he had an overcoat on. And he said, "We have

08:30 British friends here today. I want them to go home to their wives and their children and tell them that Winston Churchill may have lost the 1945 election, but he won the war." And he went on in this vein and I went up to him afterwards and I said, "Look, I'm an Australian and that's music to my ears." He said, "You really mean it?" And I said, "Now you and I agree, now what Churchill did, those three hundred thousand men who came back from Dunkirk didn't have a gun among them. Some of them had brought back

09:00 their rifles, but most of them were in training with broomsticks, and this was serious. And Hitler's 22 miles away." And for argument's sake, a fellow who was a prefect in one of Melbourne's leading schools told me recently that he was sworn to secrecy and told to collect all the rifles from the Army Cadet Corps that they had, package them and send them to England. I said, "What did you get after that?" He said, "Martini-Henrys, well they were in the 19th century." His resolve,

09:30 his will, held the nation together. It was the most remarkable example of morale building I had ever seen in my life. It taught me a lesson, that morale can carry you a long way forward. And as you know there came the Battle of Britain. I don't know how many fighters, 800 or something, we were in a very

bad way and we just got through by the skin of our

- 10:00 teeth. They'd taken poor kids, almost out of school, sticking them in an aircraft. There were 18 Australians in the Battle of Britain. Seven got back. That was the answer. Maybe seven of them were killed. But that beating Hitler was incredible because there's not much water between
- 10:30 England and France. They had all the military might and what the Germans had done in their Blitzkrieg, had been taught to them by an Englishman called Captain Liddell Hart. He had propounded all this stuff and the Brits wouldn't listen to him. Not that he went and told them. They just read his work. The RAF destroyed a lot of the landing barges. They poured petrol on the water
- 11:00 and set fire to them and what have you. It was the most incredible thing. The thing you must realise it took four years, what was it, 1940, it took four years before we could mount a major invasion and the most remarkable thing about that, I don't know whether you want to hear this, five thousand ships went across the channel that night, with umpteen thousand men. And they got through. That was done by
- 11:30 skill. One of the things was the RAF flying, dropping window Ever heard of window? It was little aluminium foil sheets like that and you dropped them in precise bundles, and they had I think, it was 67 Squadron flying a pattern like that at a pre-determined rate, slowly up and down like that, and it appeared that there was an enormous fleet going into the Pas de Calais area, which acted as a screen
- 12:00 for the real landings. But Churchill, I had the honour of going and looking at his grave and I mean that. And humble man that he was would not accept a baronetcy. It was only late in life he was forced to accept a knighthood. His grave is a straight flat piece of marble, black marble, Winston Spencer Churchill, diddle, diddle, diddle.
- 12:30 **From the beginning of the war until the time you were deployed, you kept up to date with what was going on?**
- Well, it went via newspapers and the radio, and of course the news, I laughed when all this business was going on in Iraq. I said to somebody, "Remember when, six o'clock at night, boing, boing, boing. Big Ben, this is the BBC here is the news." You get ten minutes of news and that was it. But we
- 13:00 were very well, well I kept up with the [news] during the war years and I used to follow all the action. When we were in action we had an army liaison officer, a captain, whose job was to inform us of exactly where the battle line was at any moment so that we didn't shoot our own troops. Communication in the Second World War was good, but nothing compared to today. I presume we learned something about
- 13:30 the German communication, an Enigma, that's a great strike, I love it.
- You were talking before about morale building. I was wondering how morale was built or boosted in Australia.**
- Well, I was only here, I left in 1943 of course. MacArthur was the hero of course, he came out here.
- 14:00 I dunno, Australia, the civilians, apart from the fact that they had their men away at war, they just had an attitude to get on with the job. We were not bombed to any degree of course. My eldest brother, when we farewelled him in 1940 on the train at Spencer Street Station, he turned to my mother and said, "Well mum,
- 14:30 Pete won't have to go." Pete had to go. No, morale was pretty good here. The big stomach revolt I got was the sinking of the Repulse and the Renown. Of course we lost 8,000 troops straight away in Singapore. I don't know, we just had an attitude that we were not going to get beaten. That's morale. How it was engendered I don't know, but I know that Churchill did it in England.
- 15:00 And I know on the continent we had brilliant leadership. You look up to the fellas, that was morale and we'd have wonderful parties.
- You're going to have to tell us about those.**
- One of the ones I must tell you about is the night before we left England to go to the continent. We had a wham bam party. About 11 o'clock at night up stood a French man who had served in the First World War and was flying with us in the Second World War. He was a squadron leader and said, "You know me
- 15:30 **as Phillippe De Liverie. That is not my name. Tomorrow I return to my homeland. I used a nom de plume because my lovely daughter is in France. If the Huns [Germans] knew where I was they would probably torture her. We will meet again." Well, months later we're in France and up the road came a convoy of two big red Belassa with motorcycle outriders. He told us, "I am a generale d'armee de l'air [French Air Force]. There are outriders and two of these cars and he's sittin' in**
- 16:00 **here's this Phillippe De Liverie in his generale d'armee de l'air uniform and he said, "I am here, I told you I would come. This is my daughter." And all the fellows were ogling at her. And he said, "The second car is full of grog, we will have a party." And we had a party. I read about him in another book. He's an absolute character. But you looked up to men like that. You didn't do it in a silly**

16:30 **way, you just admired them.**

And you'd had an enormous amount of respect for your brothers and your father.

Yes, I had too much adoration of my brothers, I mean that in retrospect. I went through school fearing I would let them down, as they had done well. My second son got a bit of that attitude and I bailed him out on it one day. I said, "I've been there, done that,

17:00 you can stop that."

So you found men to respect also in your squadron.

Oh yes, yeah, there was a mad man, called Wing Commander Bob Iredale, the CO of the squadron. He wasn't the CO when I got there, he was off on other duties. He came back and he was as wild as anything and he said to Knowle and I

17:30 one afternoon, "Come on, we're going to Avion and have lunch." I said, "Bob, we can't leave the flamin' aerodrome, we got to do a night flying test and fly on ops tonight." "Oh, come on", he got a jeep and away we went, had a lunch in Avion. Coming back, coming down a steep hill, it's a clay hill and there's water at the bottom, he said, "Hang on!" Hit the pool of water and of course the jeep went bbbmmmt. We got going after about half an hour or three quarters of an hour and we got back to the aerodrome and the CO wanted to see us. I said to Bob, "Listen Bob, you got the rank, you got us

18:00 into it, you get us out of it." And he did. I went to his funeral here in Melbourne. He was a superb fellow, really was. He told me that early in the war he was flying Vultee Vengeance. And he came back to the mess one night and they're having a whale of a party. And he said, "Why aren't I invited?" And they said, "This party's for you." And he said, "Why?" "Cause you've come back after seven trips, which was almost a record." The aircraft the RAF had at the beginning of the war were, for the most part, obsolescent.

18:30 Well, I don't know whether you know the story of the Schneider Cup. The cup was an international race for flight planes. And Britain won it and if you won it three times, you retained the trophy. So they won it the next year then the Italians won it, and the British government in 1930 or thereabouts, too expensive, forget it.

19:00 Lady Houston [Lady Lucy Houston] financed it and the Brits won it. The important thing about that was the man who designed the aeroplane was R J Mitchell. The people who designed the motor was Rolls Royce. And from those two, Mitchell designed the Spitfire, Rolls Royce designed the engine. That was the genesis of those two things. So Lady Houston is a hero. That aircraft and the Hurricane, they were really good, and the old Sunderland

19:30 was very good at the beginning of the war, but any of the bombing aircraft were useless until along came our brilliant machine. They eventually developed a brilliant four engine bomber as you know, the Lancaster. I'm glad I wasn't flying them.

For what reasons?

I dunno, it was not the fun we had. Well, those poor devils were up

20:00 at 25-30,000 feet being attacked by fighters. They didn't have the fun we had, chasing people on the ground.

Immense losses also.

The RAF lost I think it was 55,000 aircrew during the war. It was the biggest number of losses of any of the Australian services, was air crew. The smallest unit, almost to the

20:30 services was air crew. The losses were sometimes pretty horrible. Of course the problem of the Lancaster, and I used to say this during the war, "Why in the hell do they keep making those things? Why don't they make more Mosquitoes?" Two of us in a Mosquito going fast. Seven in a Lancaster, going slow. The answer's obvious. Well for the most part, a Mosquito could carry the weight that a Lancaster could. It couldn't carry a ten ton bomb but it could

21:00 carry a four thousand [pound] one. And several writers after the war have made that point. But I don't think the tape's interested, because it was written elsewhere how the Mosquito was born. It was born because to have them design an aircraft to win the air race in 1935 and was financed by McPherson and Robinson's, Robinson's chocolates. They had a Comet. From that

21:30 Sir Geoffrey De Havilland decided he'd build an armed bomber. He'd never built a bomber before, but he said the next war's going to need a fast armed bomber. And he did it as a private venture. That's how the RAF actually got it. It was good for the RAF, it was good for him too.

Did you have any contact with Lancaster crew?

I had a lot of friends in Lancasters, and I know a lot still. They can have it.

22:00 One night, Knowle and I were going up a railway line outside Berlin. We're looking for a train, and all of

a sudden we're surrounded in a great orange light. And I can't use the word I used. Knowle said, "What the hell was that?" "I know what it is, it's some bloody flare. Some silly b is going to start shooting up at us. Something's going to start dropping bombs through us." We pulled off. Now what had happened, we were always told where

22:30 Bomber Command was going to be, so that didn't happen, we didn't interfere with one another. I learned years later when I was reading a book, my God, is that how it happened. We didn't know about this. The RAF had what they called light night strike aircraft, Mosquitoes, and they'd sent a force of these damn things over to Berlin. And they had taken off about the same time as we did so we didn't learn anything about that so we met over Berlin. They didn't get me.

23:00 **Did any losses or casualties occur because of miscommunications?**

I suppose they did. Casualties occurred in Bomber Command through the dreadful business of bombs from one aircraft hitting another one underneath. One night Knowle and I were coming back over England and we were coming over Deal over the coast there and red lights, red lights. "God struth!" I said. "We're going down

23:30 through a bomber stream that's climbing up." Fortunately they were carrying their lights until they left the coast. So we didn't hit any of them. Which wasn't very pleasant. No, there were accidents in Bomber Command, aircraft running into one another, but we were single aircraft on our own on patrol. So we didn't have that problem.

Were there many losses on your squadron?

Yeah, the book tells you over there,

24:00 there's plenty of them. You go along and there'd be none, then there'd be a spate of them. I don't know what our casualty rate was. I suppose it on a par with the average, something like that. It is a truism, you talked about training, but the longer you flew

24:30 using your brain, the more skilful you became and the less likely you were to become a casualty. That is not to say that they couldn't shoot straight. But there were a lot of casualties early in operational troops. I do clearly recall being a coward about the last one we were doing, attacking a bloody train outside Berlin. They used to fire at us, nasty. What the Germans did with trains, they would put an anti aircraft

25:00 platform behind the engine and then probably a prisoner of war car and they used to fire at us. I had a flashing thought which I'm ashamed of but I had it, what a b fool I'd be to be killed now. So we finished operations on Hitler's birthday. I thought I'd send him a telegram.

Was there any way to mark a death, did you

25:30 **have a wake or that type of a funeral?**

No, we didn't, we didn't, because the fellows were killed away from the drome. Morbidity wouldn't've helped. I don't agree with that, it wouldn't've helped. I had that photo there of Joe Coast, he was my best friend, a New Zealander. What happened was, we came back from an operation one night and he was a pilot, by that time he was a wing commander. Frank Denton

26:00 grabbed me, "Peter, Joe was killed tonight." I said, "How the hell did that happen?" "Hit and they crashed." Now, we buried them. We had a special service also for a fellow named Group Captain Pickard, who had done a propaganda film at the beginning of the war called F for Freddie. Everybody knew F for Freddie. Pickard was the man. And on the Amiens prison raid when my squadron and

26:30 others released the prisoners from the Amiens prison, Ian McRitchie, who became a friend of mine, was being attacked by (UNCLEAR) and Pickard came to help him and Pickard was shot down. The French underground got him and buried him in private and when we got to France we had a ceremony, a proper military funeral for him, but that's another matter. But we didn't have the bodies, they were scattered round somewhere or other, prisoners

27:00 of war, shot down.

You mentioned some pretty close calls on your operations.

Well, that happened to everyone. I must tell you a story about a very, very remarkable man from Melbourne here. He was an academic, Don Shanks. He was a navigator, we used to call him 'Grandpa'. He was ten years older than the rest of us, and Shanksy went out with his pilot one day and they got shot up over

27:30 the Pas de Calais and they bailed out and his pilot never made it, he was killed and Don did make it. He spent the next six months on a French farm as a peasant. He had a brilliant command of French, French farmer's wife used to take the milk to the Germans on the V1 site. And they'd do nasty things in the buckets before they took them there. And when Shanks, there's a photo of Don

28:00 when he got back to England and he looks more peasant than a French peasant, and the RAF

intelligence wouldn't believe him. They interrogated him for two days before they believed him. He then told them all about V1 sites. Anyhow, he came back to the squadron, and he flew with a Canadian named Trites, and I can't say that I was a great friend of Don's. I think he thought I was an impudent idiot. And they go out one night and they got belted up. And Don says to Trites, now the pilot has the right to call the

28:30 shots, Don said to Trites, "Do you think we oughta get out? "I'm the pilot, I'll tell us when." Well Don says, "Well I'm not waiting. Goodbye." And he went. Trites didn't make it, the aircraft and he crashed. Now Don walked back and he came into the crew room and I'm sitting there, like at the table, and there was that laconic conversation. "Hello Don." "Hello Peter." He went across to his locker to see what he had lost. I could see him making a note of the things he had lost. "CO in?" "Yes Don, he's upstairs." "Flight Lieutenant

29:00 Shrimpton [actually Shanks] reporting for duty," he said. "You'll fly again over my dead body." That was the end of that. He became a farmer in middle Victoria and never married, but it's an incredible story. He was able to help them greatly with V1 information.

Did he tell you anything about his time in France as a peasant?

A lot of it not repeatable, yeah. Our boss, I told you, our great boss, Embry,

29:30 escaped and evaded, walked across France, walked through Spain. These fellas were, honestly, I'm being totally honest, I've said this to my family, we were taught how to evade, we had equipment, we had everything, it was our duty not to get caught. And I used to say to my family I don't know how in the hell I was going to do it. Who could pick that I was not European or what have you. I suppose my imagination was a bit high.

30:00 One of the things that used to catch our fellas very quickly, get up to a road, you look to the left, you look to the right, give away. You had to train yourself to look to the right, look to the left.

Was that part of your training, evasion and all that?

Yes.

How about French or German?

My French was red hot, I failed at school. We had a little code [phrase] book. I've got it still, out there. German, I had

30:30 learned German at school and I'm not claiming that I was... I loved it. I liked it as a language. From my interest in music, I had done a bit more and my proudest moment in German was to be in Lucerne with my wife and a couple of Americans one time. And we got lost. I went over and spoke to somebody in German and I found the way, and I took them to the hotel and I said to them, "I have just passed German."

31:00 We had these phrase books given to us. I suppose because there were so many foreigners wandering around Europe, slave workers from all over Europe, and that's a terrible story. You could get away with it, and some of my mates did. But some didn't. There was the terrible story of the great escape and I lost a mate, Jim Cavanagh, was shot.

31:30 How's that tape going? Have I timed it?

You also mentioned a special password system, a cigarette in your left hand.

Ah yes, well that was a briefing from both the raids. After headquarter raids we did, we were told, as I told you, to fly to Sweden, crash land the aircraft etc, but if we crashed

32:00 in Denmark we were to go to this pre-determined spot, try and look casual, which wasn't easy, and do what I said, smoke I think it was with the right hand, and stroke your hair with your left hand. None of our fellows had to do that actually. The losses in Copenhagen, they were killed. As I told you Thomas flew an aircraft to Sweden out of Bonn and Denton didn't do what he was told.

32:30 I had a very nasty incident after the war. My name was in the paper. A woman rang me up and she said, "You must have been with my son." And I said, "I was". "Would you please come and see me?" So I go down to Hotham Street, St Kilda. I'm 20 years of age, or 21 years of age, to be confronted by the mother and the fiancée. They just bailed me up, the room had been (UNCLEAR) "Is our son John, dead?" I said "Yes.

33:00 I saw him crash." Which was a lie, but I knew the circumstances in which he'd gone in. He couldn't be anything else but dead. It was a very nasty half hour. You didn't fret about losing friends, it's an extraordinary thing, you didn't fret about losing blokes. Somehow you knew it was part of the job. If it had been your brother or something like that, that would have impacted but it was, you know, lovely

33:30 RAF jargon, he's 'got the chop', 'he's gone for a burton', those things. You insulated yourself with this vernacular I suppose. Gone for a burton, well Burton Upon Trent was a big brewery in England, and it, I don't know how it was derived on the chain, but 'going for a burton' meant that he'd gone, gone. Oh, wait a minute, I do know

34:00 how it happened. Because there was an ammunition dump there that went up with a helluva explosion one night, so he'd gone for a burton. Had the chop.

What other sorts of phrases would you use for various things?

Can't think of them now, you'd have to get into the rhythm. I can sing you some songs, not for the tape. Well, the RAF had a lot of songs, most of which were highly bawdy, so I won't

34:30 try those. But the one that I, being an Australian this one did tickle me.

\n[Verse follows]\n "Here's to the Rodney, Repulse and Renown,\n We can't save the Hood cause the bastard's gone down." \n

That was before the Repulse and Renown went down. The Hood, that's a very nasty story. The Hood was a brilliant British battleship, and it had a wooden deck and a German shell went down the, you know the funnels on a ship, some of them are ventilating funnels. It went down the ventilating

35:00 funnel that went straight to the armoury, the ammunition dump and the Hood, blew it apart in a million pieces, and only about four survived. How's the tape going?

You've got time for another song.

I can't sing you that one.

The bawdier the better. You realise you can always put an embargo on it so you can't be publicly embarrassed.

Oh no. I might sing it to you in private.

35:30 As I said before, it was a very profound experience, particularly for a young boy. When I went on to operations, I wrote to my oldest brother who by that time had been invalided home out of the army, he was working for the army. And he, being the eldest I wrote and told him I was going into operations and said, "I'll leave it to you when you're going to tell Mum and Dad." Next thing I got a letter back from my mother, saying, "I knew." That was the woman who had picked up his wavelength,

36:00 so we were very fortunate we got through. We used to practice a routine which we designed ourselves. A friend of mine who is a retired surgeon, he thinks this is great fun. In a Mosquito, the pilot sat slightly in front of the navigator because you got in through the side door and you gotta have clearance to get in to the pilot's seat. Knowle and I, when we were in training in Canada, we sorta

36:30 using our brains, and we said to one another, "What's going to happen if we went?" I said, "One thing's sure mate, I'm not going to leave you alone in the aircraft. Let's try and evolve a routine." So I used to slip across onto his lap and fly the aeroplane, because you couldn't possibly lift a body sideways, particularly if he was a lot bigger than you were. I told my doctor friend this. He made all sorts of rude remarks. Subsequently we read in articles after the war, some of the fellows

37:00 done the same thing. I don't know of an instance where it was pulled off, but how could you possibly leave your pilot wounded in an aircraft and go out the door? You couldn't. So that was that. We used to practice evacuation from the aircraft, this was part of your practice. And they reckoned if you could, they had you all hooked up and all the rest of it, tail of the

37:30 aircraft up on blocks in the flying position, and remember they had propellers in those days, and they start talking to you, "Roma two three, you're flying so and so, so and so and so and so, all of a sudden BAIL OUT!!" If you could get out in I think they said, in 19 seconds, you had to pull off all this gear, grab your chute, put it on, kick the door out and get out, they said if you could do it in 19 seconds you can do it in nine, in real time. You would too.

38:00 But it was only a small hatch and some fellas actually got stuck in it so somebody had to push you in the backside. One brave Englishman I knew, he was a character and a half. I said to him, "How the hell, Shorty, how are you going to get out of an aircraft?" He said, "Don't carry a parachute." I said, "That's nice isn't it?" Shorty was killed, unfortunately he didn't have a chance to use his parachute. He couldn't have got through the hole with all the gear on.

38:30 Was there any time when you thought this is it, I'm going to have to put on the chute?

That's a difficult one to answer. The answer is this, probably, your concentration was so high, I like to say it was 150 percent. Until the actual incident occurred, you wouldn't think about it. When we attacked, the pilot had the guns, because he had to aim the aircraft,

39:00 the guns were fixed in the aeroplane. And from a nasty incident, I learned that yelling in his ear to pull out as I'm watching the altimeter, was not good. His concentration was so strong he couldn't hear me, so I used to stick my feet up on the dashboard, grab his left shoulder and pull the damn thing because one night we had dive bombed a target and we'd pulled out too low and an aircraft washes, as you know, washes, and we got bits of our bomb back in our aircraft and there was a

39:26 piece under my feet, fortunately there was a bit of steel stopping it. So that's when I adopted, talked to a lot of fellows in the mess and they copied it. They did the same thing. Because that concentration was

so high. So to answer your question, I don't know if I had an incident, but if it happened you'd know straight away, bang.

39:55 End of tape

Tape 4

00:30 **Well, I've got all sorts of things I'd like to ask you. You mentioned an accident you had at school that put you off for a whole six months. Can you tell me about that?**

It simply was that I borrowed a bike from a friend, I didn't have my own. Another friend and myself were going down Hawthorn

01:00 Road, Caulfield past the Caulfield Town Hall and he said, "We turn here." And I didn't hear it because there was a tram coming down at the same time. He turned in front of me I went, I can't, head over turkey. I hit the steel lamp post with my head. After the war I took my wife down there and I said, "See that dent there, that's mine, it oughta have a plaque." The great fortune was, this all happened outside the house, of that wonderful man, Group Captain McLean Borland. He scraped me up off the road, rang my mother and said you have to have

01:30 permission to move this lifeless body, which he did and he put me into this hospital and I was there for, I don't know how long, then I was home for months. That wonderful man, my father used to say to him, "Dr Borland, would you please give me an account on account?" He kept it and eventually Dr Borland said to my father, "Mr Lake, I've got to know you and your family through Peter's misfortune, there will be no account." For six months. And that was the man who was the chief medical officer at [UNCLEAR].

02:00 I went back to school and I can't focus now in time on what months they were, but I passed the, whatever the end of year exams were, I passed them, but then the authorities said to my parents, "You oughta hold back a bit". Not likely, me. Then the following year was the dreadful polio scare, 1937, that was worse than SARS [Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome].

02:30 I'll tell you. But I told a lot of lies and I was able to disguise my difficulty and I got in the airforce, and that was that.

You said you were flat on your back for a number of months as a boy.

Yes, I was. I don't recall exactly, but it was to the order of five or six, and when I got up and went back to school that was when I found out my left eye had gone west. And my mother had to rush me in to an optician,

03:00 Alfred Nott. Dear old Alfred Nott. And he trained it back with lenses. So when I joined the airforce, the medical, they used to use civilian people to do a number of things. And I'm sent down to Alfred Nott, fortunately the room was dark and he says, "My boy, have you ever worn glasses?" I said, "No sir." He said "Your left eye behaves as if it was trained by lenses." I nearly said, "Well you did it, you're the doc."

03:30 And I got away with that and I got away with my split eardrum too, because I feigned a very heavy cold. But I wasn't alone in doing that. Lots of other fellas did.

And otherwise they would have said...

Well they did require a high level of fitness in the air crew. One of the things was chest expansion. You had to have an aerobic capacity. When you think about it, there's some sense in that when you fly.

04:00 And your vision had to be good, very good, 20/20 and you had to be able to pass the Japanese Ishihara test, which is the colour blind test. Oh yeah, they were very strict on those things.

So this injury didn't affect your vision in the end?

No, no. I came up to 20/20 vision. He made that comment, I was staggered. Fortunately he didn't see me colour up under the dark light. He was absolutely right. It must have been some muscular reaction.

04:30 He said, "That looks as though it's been trained by lenses." Cause what happened was I don't know, every so many months they would change the lens and bring it up and eventually I wasn't wearing glasses.

In that time when you were flat on your back what kinds of activities did you get involved with?

The Herald [Melbourne afternoon newspaper of the time] was running wonderful Australian robbery stories, bushrangers and the old man in the next bed used to read

05:00 this to me every night. That kept me quiet for a while. At home, I did things with my hands, craft things as far as possible. My brothers and sisters were in the house, I was kept amused. I got a bit fat of

course.

You were quite a reader as a boy.

Yes, not so much as my wife but I did read a lot, in particular anything to do with flying or technical matters.

05:30 We'll go back to this polio epidemic in the mid thirties. What kind of precautions were people taking?

The school got a shock. I can't remember. A boy in our class got it, and some others got it round about. The degree of medical skill, precautionary medical skill wasn't very high in retrospect and they just took the precautions

06:00 of isolating whole groups of people and say, "You go home and stay home, you go home and stay home." Bit like the present day when they didn't want personal contact. Now a boy across from me who was going to a very posh school, he was home too.

You were just telling me more about the polio outbreak in Melbourne.

In 1937, it was vicious

06:30 really, in family terms. There wasn't a great deal, as I believe, of medication that could deal with the matter and families were in fear and schools were in fear. And the schools sent pupils home of the particular age group or bracket. My sister and I were in this bracket and we were sent home. The boy across the road who went to one of Melbourne's most posh schools, he was in that bracket and he was sent home

07:00 and the rehabilitation centre was at Stonington in Glenferrie Road, which is now a campus for the university. And they used to wheel the poor little tykes up and down Glenferrie Road in these cane litters. I don't know who made those cane, they were really mobile beds on wheels. And out of that they would I think, they would give them baths, hydrotherapy and physiotherapy to a limited

07:30 degree but a lot of people remained paralysed from it and a lot died. Of course, as soon as they got a polio effect in the chest it cramped the lungs etc, etc. But that was like a, just like a deadly fear. In my house, in the house where I lived, my three elder brothers were by that time in the city and my mother used to keep my sister and I isolated within the house, from our brothers. That was the fear factor.

Did she have certain

08:00 cleaning techniques of doing housework?

I don't know, I didn't do housework, I presume she did. I presume she kept things spotless. I think I'm right in saying I don't think they really knew how polio was transmitted. Another incident later in life, well into my business career, a lass who was my secretary, married a fellow who became a very high executive in Singapore. He was a young man getting on an aeroplane

08:30 to go to London to talk to his parent company in England and they took him off the aeroplane and he died in 8 hours. Polio. Now the Salk vaccine knocked it after the war. Lois and I were given the Salk vaccine after the war. That knocked it cold.

Incredible development.

But you think of these..to interpose it there, I often say

09:00 think of the horror of being a mother in the thirties, diphtheria, meningitis, measles, TB [Tuberculosis], polio, to name but a few, the fears that they had, and this happened to kids too.

You mentioned your mother had a great strength of personality.

Strong woman.

Could you tell me more about that?

Well, as I look upon her in retrospect, she and I were not the greatest of

09:30 pals. But she did have great resolve, and I probably thank her for that because I probably inherited some of it. She was stoic in the face of adversity, there's no question about that. She was a very good speaker. She used to belong to a debating club and she was very good there. I think I can sum it up by saying, when I got back from the war I looked at my mother and I said,

10:00 "Mum, I want you to understand one thing." She said, "What's that son?" I said, "I am not your little boy." Oh, and I then said to her, "How in the dickens did I get my second name? I know there were lots of kids, lots of cousins and what have you, and names were scarce, but where did I get that one, off the back of a bus or what?" She drew herself up to her five foot eight and a half and she said, "No, I was lying in bed waiting for you to arrive and I was reading a book about the Battle of Jutland. And I admired the

10:30 exploits of Admiral Rosslyn Williams, that's how you got your second name." My name was Rosslyn, R O double S, L Y N. So my mother put me straight on that.

How did she manage to get through all the challenging episodes?

I don't know. That took skill and Lois' mother is another incredible example of it for she was widowed when Lois was six, and she brought up four kids, running WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK S

11:00 in Croydon and she never complained about a penny. Quick story. When Lois' eldest sister was getting married. She was totally a different type to Lois, Noni was down the middle, right down the middle. Her mother said to her, "Noni, we're going to have a proper wedding." "No, you can't afford that, we don't want that blah, blah, blah". Any rate, Ruby forced it upon her. She left the church with her faith and one and sixpence halfpenny in the world. A couple of weeks later a small benefit came to her from

11:30 something that had happened, but she had that incredible faith, that if you did the right thing by life, life would do the right thing by you. And that was of course, not general but it was true of Lois' mother and fairly true of my own mother.

Do you think that people's faith helped them during the war?

What do you mean, religious faith? Well I don't know the answer to that, I think

12:00 yes, and of course in moments of great stress, fellows did turn to great faith, but that's mental attitude. I've always had an attitude that that is more powerful than anything else you've got. It got me through a lot of scrapes just saying to myself, "You're going to beat it, you're going to beat it." You've gotta be. For instance

12:30 some years ago when I was under treatment for cancer, I went to this damn oncologist, specialist, and I said to him, "What's my prognosis?" "Oh", he said "You've done very well indeed." I said, "I know that, what's my prognosis?", and he said, "You'll be dead in two years". I said, "Like hell I will!" I stormed out of his surgery. I never went back and that was eight years ago. But I do believe that resolve, if you like the Churchillian factor, to put it in a nutshell, "the same thing will be done, I will do

13:00 it. And I think that's what happens to fellas in moments of high tension.

So it's not always about religion. It's not necessarily ...

No, no, it's not necessarily always about religion, no. We're all born. Look at the world, I say the world has four faults, religion, politics, money, and what's the other one, I can't remember, it doesn't matter. You mix religion and politics you got dynamite, you mix money with it and you've got dynamite plus, but you look around the world, you've got religious

13:30 fanatics. We can't beat the Arabs, they're fanatical. They're like the things one used to read about in Boys Own Annual. About the tribes in Africa. And I think obviously we've all got some sort of religious factor in our being, nurtured by our education of course, but yes. I happen to love music as

14:00 I've told you and every Sunday I listen to a programme called Songs of Praise, because the beautiful English cathedrals and all that lovely music, and they can send me, put it that way.

I know that programme. You mentioned luck as well. The role you thought luck played in the war.

Luck plays this role that you've only got to be a few inches one way and you'll get it. For instance, this is dramatic but it's

14:30 truthful. When you're watching anti aircraft fire, you've read this, they have a tracer bullet every five or ten or whatever, they're just like fireworks, lovely sight, rrrrrrrrrrrr arching over. I watched this damn thing come along our wing one day and I realised what I was seeing was the fifth one or something. And it missed the engine, came past, went up between me and the engine,

15:00 hit underneath us and didn't do a great deal of damage and went out the other side. Now, the fact there was a matter of inches. Because in the aircraft that I was flying, what they call liquid cooled engines, and a 303 bullet could immobilise it because put a hole in it, the coolant went, we had that happen to us, and the engine was kaput [dead], that's the sort of luck.

15:30 And a couple of others. An amusing incident if I may, a dramatic, amusing incident. We came back to the aerodrome in France one night and we thought we had been hit in the hydraulics, and it was raining like stink and we landed and we swerved off the runway and that was the high side, clipped the tail of another aircraft that had gone off and we

16:00 came to rest on our belly and we had some bombs on. And the ground staff came through the beating rain with their macintoshes on, and I pulled the canopy out the top and yelled out to them, "Be careful there are bombs on this aircraft." And at that I pressed the two fire extinguishers for the engines, which made a loud hissing sound. Four air craftsmen went flat

16:30 into the mud on their face. And Knowle and I sat there and laughed. Now you don't want that on the tape.

Did anyone have lucky charms?

Oh yes, my mother sent me one. I had a small boomerang. I remember that. It's amazing how that, superstition. I used to do something organic before I got into the aircraft always. If you've worked it out for yourself,

17:00 superstition played a big part. That's human nature, and well, leave it at that.

Were a lot of blokes superstitious?

Oh, I think they all were underneath, to a degree, to a degree.

What were some of the things they carried?

Oh, little teddy bears, little koalas, wear the silk scarf, you always had to have that,

17:30 all sorts of things you always had to have with you, within a limit. We used to, we were issued with Smith and Wesson 38 [.38 calibre] revolvers. I carried it for a while when we were flying, but one night I said to myself, "What a damn fool you are, if you land on the ground faced by German troops who are highly trained, they've got rifles, you've got a

18:00 Smith and Wesson that couldn't hit a door at ten feet. You're too slow, you'll be dead in five minutes, use your brain." And I left it in the drawer after that. Cause your brains were your best weapon.

You mentioned your mum sent the lucky charm.

Oh yes, she did. She gave me this boomerang when I went away. I think she did it as a joke.

What other things did you receive in parcels during the war?

18:30 Cake was a very wonderful thing. Oh cake was important. Newspapers, tins of food. The food factor in England during the war was not funny. We were privileged of course. Every aerodrome, every vacant ground in England was used to grow food in some form or another. So the vacant spaces of the aerodrome were used to grow certain foods which would not interfere with the

19:00 flying of the aircraft. And the poor devil who had the license to grow stuff on our aerodrome at Thorney Island was growing mushrooms, and there were Australians there. You can imagine what happened. We were out of bed before he was. We used to scrounge his mushrooms. But food was, they used to have for arguments sake, food was grown up the walls of railway lines. That's how, every piece of ground, and eggs were as scarce as hen's teeth. That is a good pun, isn't it? And we were given eggs.

19:30 When we came back from a flight, we were given what was called an air crew breakfast. It was very good for your stomach, I don't think. Fried eggs, fried chips and fried bread, I think. Any rate, we were given chocolate, which the people weren't. I remember at the end of the war being horrified when they took the ration off ice cream and little kids were able to get ice creams, some of whom had never seen an ice cream, and they put it on again six months later

20:00 and it stayed on for years. Now this fellow that I told you about that couldn't get out of an aircraft. We went to a French school one day, he'd been a school teacher and he could talk French. So he took over the class. The poor little mademoiselle holding the class, she realised she wasn't in any danger and Shorty's talking to the kids and what have you, and he said to me, "Look mate, have you got any chocolate?" I said, "I've got some in my pocket. I got some here, let's give it to the kids." She had to explain to the children what

20:30 chocolate was. She had to explain it, what was available on the continent. The Germans had kept all the luxury. If I'd known Lois then I could've bought her a full length fur coat for six thousand dollars, which I didn't have, but things were there. The food in England was, a sausage in England, for the ordinary person....

21:00 About 85% I think the figure was, was bread and 15% meat. They had a very poor diet and they had to scramble for what they could get. Tea and butter and all those things were rationed and rationed and rationed to a high degree. We were lucky, they weren't for us.

What condition would you say the civilians were in during the time you were in England?

21:30 What, in bodily health? Well, I suppose someone had worked out a calorie ratio. They were not immobile, put it that way. And during the blitz, a man I knew there had worked all day, had gone home at night, had his meal and been on fire watch until one, two am in the morning, and that happened every night. And they did these things. No, somehow the authorities must have worked out the calories to keep them

22:00 from going into the ground.

Did you have friendships with English civilians?

Yes, we did. There was a wonderful leave scheme called the Lady Ryder Scheme. And you could, through the Lady Ryder scheme, you could get a billet. Now, I used it three times and each one was a whizzer. And you were taken into people's homes. Four times, and I became friends

- 22:30 with one family and I used to go there without the Lady Ryder Scheme. The first one I used was in the town of Kendall in the Lake District, we went up on the train, God knows how many hours it took. We went to the home of a minister, an arch deacon, it was a lovely home. He was obviously well heeled in the hip pocket, and on the mantelpiece,
- 23:00 was a VC [Victoria Cross], not very common piece of brass. And a son there who lost his legs motor racing and he had a hand controlled car, and I said to the son, "Was that dad's?" He said, "No, that was my brother's from the First World War." Any rate, Knowle and I went off exploring the Lake District on bicycles. Out of condition, we didn't make it. The fellow who had the hand
- 23:30 control car said, "How did you get on?" I said, "Not very well". He said, "I knew that. Have either of you got a driving license?" I said Knowle had. He said, "Take the car." So we saw the Lake District in great style in a Swallow, which was the predecessor of the Jaguar. Now I went and stayed with some lovely old ladies at a place called Riding Mill, near Newcastle, and they were wonderful to us. Family, people,
- 24:00 were wonderful. Now what was embarrassing when you went to places such as this, they'd turn up and they'd give you two eggs on a plate and I'd say, "Cut it out, we get eggs." "No, no, no, you're our guest." That was their attitude. Marvellous. The English people during the war were absolutely marvellous.

Was that different to or confirming of your expectations before you ever went to England?

I suppose I was partially an anglophile

- 24:30 because my mother had this long trip over there and she was very fond of it. She would talk about it. And I laughed at myself when I was first walking around London and I was walking around and I thought, oh God, I know where I am. I'd never been there. But no, I suppose we, if they were us.... we expect them to do these things.

How long were you given these breaks to go on the Lady Ryder Scheme?

The best leave you'd get would be seven days, more likely five

- 25:00 and you wouldn't get too many of those. But the fellows I felt sorry for, being serious, were the RAF fellas who were married who went home on their leave and then had to come back again. I thought thank God I'm ten thousand miles away from Australia, I don't think I'd like to do that.

I was going to ask you about the contrast of the extreme stress of the mission and coming back to a

- 25:30 **relatively peaceful base for sleeping and eating, and the parties.**

Yes, it's a strange existence, a weird existence. And the RAF used to encourage the parties because they knew it was a relief valve. Yes, it's not like the poor devils in the trenches.

You were going to say a word about the parties.

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. I had my first

- 26:00 drink of anything on the night we left to go overseas. I had what they call a portagaf. It was a wicked drink. It was port and lemonade and one of the fellas had got himself as full as a boot, and we're holding him up, two of us, and as they were calling the roll he was jiggling around, and I thought if he falls down on the ground we're in trouble. But we got away with it. But I learnt to drink on the way over. And they threw drink at us and they threw cigarettes at us, that was the wicked part,

- 26:30 cigarettes were the wicked part. I gave them up a long time after the war but they gave you hundreds of cigarettes. That's to do with the war.

You said you learnt to drink on the way over.

Oh yes I did, and we used to have lovely mess parties, the

- 27:00 camaraderie was incredible. You mentioned it earlier today. You had this great brotherhood. I met a fellow on Rotherby Road the other day. We greeted each other, put our arms round, population wondered what we were up to.

How long since you'd seen this fellow?

About five years I think, but I had a chap come out and stay with us a couple of years

- 27:30 ago who was another RAF fellow on our squadron. He come and stayed with us. Well it's a very close brotherhood. If it were not so you wouldn't be any use to one another, it would be a dangerous situation.

You've had life long friendships?

Yeah. I had a heart operation some years ago and while I'm recuperating, a chap I had not seen since the war, who was my best pal almost, during the war,

- 28:00 rang up Lois, said, "How's Peter? I'm coming down to see him." So he came down. I opened the door, I

was in my dressing gown. He said, "Good God, you still got your hair." I said, "Yeah, that's 'cause I drink and you don't." He lost his, but that was the greeting after fifty years or sixty years.

You mentioned it was quite a release valve, they used to give you alcohol and you used to have parties to have a release. Were there some fellows who couldn't quite

28:30 **cope?**

Some didn't, very few. Though you didn't become conscious of the fact that they disappeared. The RAF dealt with it very, very quietly. I remember one chap, and after the war I'm walking down Collins Street with Knowle Shrimpton and I said, "You look at that bloke coming up here, you know who he is? He's the flight lieutenant, the Rhodesian bloke. He was taken off the squadron for LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre]." Knowle said, "Well I never forget a face, that's him." But they quietly spirited them away. What the sad part of it was, the chaps,

29:00 what they'd get up to - subterfuge - and they'd turn back because their radio'd packed up, so they'd say. Or this'd gone wrong or that'd gone wrong. Eventually of course, they'd be found out. They'd be spirited away.

Do you think it was kept quiet because they felt LMF would affect your morale?

It could be contagious. It could be contagious, you know that, but they just kept it quiet.

Was there anybody that

29:30 **you'd had a chat to or pulled aside, not quite going LMF but a person you were concerned about.**

Nah, not I. I didn't do that. I suppose I was too young. That was the job of Dr Rodman who used to come, a doctor who used to come into the mess. "Where is so and so?" "What've you got to see him for?" "I gotta talk to him." So one time, that meant he was going to get that sort of lecture, we were at the war memorial at

30:00 Retino and there is a photo in one of those books and there were people in it, it says underneath, "They don't know who the photographer was." Any rate, one of our blokes was flying over and he beat the hell out of us on the ground. Roddy said to me "Who's that?" I said, "That's McMahon." He said, "You're not going on that show tomorrow are you?" I said "No, I'm not." "Is he?" "I believe he is". He was killed. He did a reckless thing. I said to Roddy, "Why didn't you pull McMahon up?"

30:30 You used to do that. What McMahon did, he attacked an anti aircraft emplacement and really, geometrically, you're a stationary target when you're diving at them. Anyway, that was that. I will tell you another story in the same vein and this has got an amusing side. On our drome, in came a squadron of Royal Naval Air Force air services in their old British biplane, the Gladiator. Sorry, Fairy Swordfish.

31:00 It was a dreadful old thing, carried a torpedo. So these fellows used to go flying every day and I said to the fellows, "What the hell are you blokes doing here?" "We're on rest," said he in a lovely cultured voice. I said, "On rest from what?" He said, "The Murmansk convoy." I said, "God you need a rest." That was protecting convoys on the way up to Russia and the North Sea, and your life time in water was somewhere between one and a half minutes and two minutes, bang. And I said, "But you go flying every day, what do you do?" "We've gotta go over the Bay of Biscay

31:30 and sight for submarines." I said, "You're mad. Submarines have got anti aircraft guns, they'll shoot the hell out of you." "Oh", he said, "We've gotta stay out of range and report their positions." So that's that. One day, we hear, "Mayday, Mayday, blah, blah, blah, blah." Cutting a long story short we all stayed aside and they got the plane down, got the navigator out, the pilot got out and fell on his right foot. We took off his boot and four toes were missing. Now, what he'd done, he'd got sick of stooging round the Bay of Biscay, so he

32:00 played Biggles and he attacked a gun placement in one of the Channel Islands, and they shot him. And it did it for him. Now the navy court martialled him, took his rank away from him, the RAF would have given him a very hefty boot up the backside. He'd disobeyed orders.

Why the difference in service approaches?

Different cultures. Well the navy had a culture going back hundreds and hundreds of years, and as you know, it's a very strongly disciplinarian. Have you ever been on Nelson's [HMS] Victory?

32:30 It's a great site. You get into the surgery, you can hardly stand up, he was a little bloke. And all the walls and the floors and everything were painted blood red. I wonder why. No, they had a very strong discipline, we didn't.

Do you think some of that independent spirit was encouraged because it was needed?

Well, I put it to you this way, I don't think it was discouraged, because

33:00 it was a great attribute when you're in single combat, you may need initiative, which does happen.

We're just about out of tape, any thoughts on that issue of courage that you want to elaborate

on?

Courage. I don't know what courage is, I really don't. I know that when flying on operations you are in

33:30 an intense situation. You're keyed up to God knows what extent, and you were sometimes frightened. But you are more frightened on the ground. You had a job to do, you were trained to do it, and that is what you did. You mentioned training on an earlier tape. It was superb in the confines of the time available to the authorities who trained you. It was brilliant. They turned us into

34:00 if you like to put it in glamorous terms, fighting machines from raw school boys so to speak.

In a sense the waiting time was more difficult than the action time in some ways.

Yes, I think one of the most difficult times for me was to be tossed out of the air force, after coming home having been flying on operations a few weeks before and finding myself walking the pavements of Melbourne. That, without counselling, was a stupid thing I see in retrospect. They didn't have it. Brilliant economically, getting rid of people off the payroll.

34:30 That's what they did.

Economically yes, personally, no.

Any rate, that's all.

We'll pick up again tomorrow.

34:42 **End of tape**

Tape 5

00:31 **You were saying that you hadn't ever been anywhere prior to going to war. Had you been in a plane?**

No, no I hadn't. In a plane? Training, yes, that was the first time. And to the big town of Sydney too. Oh no, I beg your pardon, I had worked in Sydney for six weeks. We had been interstate.

Can you tell me about your first time in a plane?

01:00 I suppose I was so excited I only wished it lasted longer. I loved it. I took to flying like a duck takes to water. I was very fortunate, not like some of my colleagues, I did not suffer from any form of air sickness anytime. And my greatest achievement in training if I may be so rude to say...we had to do a navigation exercise out over Bass Strait, in full cloud. It wasn't designed that way, but that's how it turned out, what you call a square search, which is

01:30 somewhat self explanatory, in other words you're searching. You're starting to try and find a boat or something. You start in big squares and you do little squares and you come in, trying to find, and we had to cut the coast at Lorne on the way back. You couldn't see the coast, and all of a sudden, your bête moi [stupid/foolish me]. Help me, there was a shaft of sunlight and it went down and I'm looking down and I saw the Lorne pier and I said thank you good God. Because that was dead reckoning navigation

02:00 at its utmost. You couldn't see anything, you couldn't see the sun, you couldn't take shots, you had to do it by timing and the winds and whatever. And I think that was my greatest navigation feat.

I will ask you more about the dead reckoning navigation. Will you describe that process?

Well, instruments are a parallel ruler, you know what a parallel ruler is? They've been using them in the

02:30 navy for a hundred years, and a brass compass, the big brass compass, your watch, the compass on the aircraft of course, a thing called a drift recorder, which was a method of finding what the wind was doing. You peered down and it had parallel lines along it and it gave you a contrast of which way the aircraft was going and you could work out the wind. That was okay if you were fairly low. You couldn't do it if you were at a fair height of course.

03:00 All of this applied to a chart, a chart on which you're flying. You plot lines and you plot what is called a track, you put two arrows on the track, that's where you want to go. And then as you take your wind readings and your other readings you draw another line, putting yourself off track, and for high level dead reckoning or for arguments sake, going out over the Atlantic, the submarine things they

03:30 would then plot from that point to the target, and as I said to you, for low level navigation that was fatal, you had to stay on track. It was a direct derivation of the sea navigation that had been going on for a hundred years, and instead of having currents you had winds, you were just a little bit faster than the ships. That's the way it worked. But then as the war progressed, let's put it into

- 04:00 perspective, because navigation was an inexact science, the Brits very cleverly carefully developing electronic tools to assist the first of which was called Gee, which was radar, which gave you radial lines, which gave you a reading, the Germans then jammed that of course. Then they had a thing, I never used it, a thing called H2S
- 04:30 which gave you a visual image of the ground from height. And they eventually had what they called Oboe, called Oboe why, because the note it issued was like the sound of an oboe. They sent an aircraft out, that's for marking targets, when it intercepted a certain point, boom, and that was the drop. So they improved navigation, nowadays it would be a requirement to have a hand held navigation. In the low level stuff
- 05:00 you did it, because we were going on little short courses, let me illustrate. We might go from here to your favourite Ferntree Gully on one leg and then from there to Hanging Rock, and then somewhere else, somewhere else, short legs of duration and that meant exact timing and careful study to try and pick up some kind of a pin point.
- 05:30 I suppose we were attacking primarily roads and railways. You had a very exact map of those so eventually not to say that you couldn't make mistakes, you could. One night, I always carried two watches, because I knew the importance of two watches. A fellow had lost his watch or busted it or something. I loaned him one of our watches. And before we took off Knowle and I always synchronised
- 06:00 our watches. And off we went, with one watch to me, and for some reason I hadn't synchronised with him, and Murphy's Law, what will go wrong does go wrong. Suddenly, over, just behind the Ruhr, I realised my watch had stopped and my heart sank into my boots. So I had to sit there and say to myself, now think, think, think, how long do you think it's been since my watch stopped, and don't alarm Knowle. So I
- 06:30 reckoned I knew. So I said, "Shrimp, what time is it?" He said, "Can't you read yours?" I said, "What do you say?" It got me back on, I'd guessed fairly, interestingly I guessed very closely to the time. In a minute or two minutes we had to turn elsewhere, but as I told you yesterday, low level daylight navigation, very much concerned with map reading, and you're reading a map
- 07:00 and in order to do that you study where you're going and you learn the features that are there, so you're not saying, "What's that? What's that?" Your mind picks them up. On an attack to a target such as the Gestapo Headquarters such as we did, we had a plan view map made by actually dentists, sculptors and architects. And all the little buildings, beautiful, I'd love to own one, just perfect so that you got
- 07:30 down at eye level, such as to your kitchen table, and looked along your line of sight and you had a perfect picture of your approach, so it was a skill of using your eyes, using your watch, using your compass, with meteorological information thrown in, but that could be wrong, for one night, the met [meteorological] man got up and he said, "There are
- 08:00 strong winds, you'll be driven to the target." This is in England, by 70mph winds, something like that. He said, "We expect them to moderate during the evening." Okay, we were blown over in 70mph winds which took very little time to get to target, because as you may well know, the wind force is just an additive to your speed in a vector. When we turned for home those winds had got up to
- 08:30 100 mph and it took a long time to get home and used a lot of fuel. And then of course, sometimes, because in England they were brilliant within their limited material in forecasting. The weather came from the west to the east. They got some plots from the Atlantic, from ships, and from the air force sightings, but they were very, very good, and so
- 09:00 many lives depended on it. Nowadays they can do it, piece of cake, all the information comes by satellite. Okay that fixes that.

You mentioned another piece of equipment, a special aerial of sorts, attached to the tail of the Mosquito that was secret, that had to be painted out.

That was actually, that was painted out by the great intelligence, torpedo tubes, that was a standard form of

- 09:30 equipment on any aircraft. What they should have painted out was the aerial wire from the tail to the cockpit, which had two functions. We had VHF [Very High Frequency], which was voice radio, not Morse radio. And we also had a device called IFF, [identification, friend or foe], which you turned on when you were on your own territory, so if a fighter came up behind you he could see that
- 10:00 he's one of ours. It was primarily your transmission line, and it might have had and I don't know this, it might have had a function for the radar set we had too, Gee set. But we were all amused when we saw the official photo of the torpedo tubes painted out. They've taken it out of the copy I've got now.

The signs were painted out, the wrong one.

Some very enthusiastic young erk [ground staff]

- 10:30 as we call them, got his 'white out' which was very rare in those days, white out all along the line of aircraft. Look at that boss, I've done it right.

The Germans did not have this same technology.

Oh, well, I don't know. The Germans had. Look, when you read books now, you find that their technology was maybe a step behind ours, but we had a great ally in Germany. His name was Adolf Hitler.

- 11:00 I'll tell you why. He had a fanaticism regarding the war. If it wouldn't be put in the field, in operation, in 12 months, I don't want to know about it. Because he had won the Blitzkrieg over France in a matter of weeks, his attitude was I can roll over everything. Now, that helped us to a very large degree. Let me illustrate. The Germans were the first ones to produce a jet aircraft. They had one
- 11:30 in 1939. They did not put it into military production for years. It would've killed the daylight bombing, which it nearly did at the end of the war. They had a hesitation of the production of the flying bomb. This was Hitler's, "if it can't be done in 12 months I don't want to know about it." They were under great strain on the production side, when you think about it, they're producing thousands of aircraft each month and losing many,
- 12:00 and materials and all the rest of it. Slave workers were very handy, there were plenty of those. We didn't have those in England. They had ordinary workers in England, they gave them some pocket money. And they were wonderful. But his attitude definitely helped, aided our attack, because he wanted to get that particular weapon into the field and operating in 12 months. Some things take a long time to develop, such as
- 12:30 the V1 and the V2. You know what a V2 is? What you send to the moon now, that rocket, and it hit randomly, hit London and England. We were told that this was going to happen, happen in September as I remember, and they said, "There will be a series of explosions and they will be reported in the press as gas mains." The point about it was of course
- 13:00 there was no defence to it except getting it on the ground, because it was super sonic. Couldn't hear it, the first thing you hear is the big explosion as it hit the ground. As opposed to the V1, which was a flying bomb, which used to make a noise like a poor motorcycle because it was powered by a brilliant little motor which will become the motor of future flying machines, the ram jet. In other words you ram air into the front of the nozzle at
- 13:30 pressure, ignited it with fuel and the thing just keeps going. I think that's enough on that subject. The poor population in England however, with the onset of the V1 and the V2, they had been for some years without bombing and the attitude, oh we've beaten them, they won't come. And it did hurt, psychologically it hurt very badly when the flying bombs did come.
- 14:00 **I've heard people talk about those, hearing the sound of V1 and hoping.**
- Hoping it doesn't stop. When it stops the gyro goes out of focus and drops straight down on you, yes.
- I was going to ask you next if you could walk us through the Mosquito. Nose to tail.**
- Well you can't walk nose to tail. You can only get into the cockpit, two man cockpit, pilot on the left
- 14:30 hand side, as in all aircraft. The navigator in this case happens to be on the right hand side about six or nine inches behind the pilot's seat, which gap was for two purposes, to give ingress to the pilot, because it is very tight. A great friend of mine got into the cockpit of a Mosquito in Canberra, in the War Museum [Australian War Memorial] and came back and said, "I'll never be rude to you again, cause it is so tight." It was really,
- 15:00 to illustrate it best of all, it was really like a fighter aircraft. Which it was, a fighter bomber, one of its versions, the one we were flying. And you were very tightly packed into that and behind the pilot's seat was the radar set that the radar used for Gee, if he could use it. And there were some controls there and on the right hand side the navigator had to operate some controls, most particularly the fire extinguishers, extinguishers for the engine
- 15:30 if they packed up. Of course the dash board in front with all the instruments. The altimeter was almost in line with my eyes. I don't know if it was by accident or design, but I found it very useful. Behind each seat they had a half inch steel plate to try to protect you from attack from behind, and in the case of the navigator, they had a porthole window in the top of it, and it was hinged, and you could
- 16:00 drop the thing down, and you had an unobscured view and if you wanted to pull it up for protection you could do so, latched into place. The aircraft in which we flew, the Mark we flew, the Mark 6 fighter bomber, was armed as follows: Four 20mm Hispano Suiza cannon in the under belly firing forward, obviously. Then in the nose, four Browning
- 16:30 machine guns. In the bomb bay, up to four five hundred pound bombs. And on the wings you could carry extra bombs, but you didn't, you carried long range fuel tanks usually, which were made of papier mache. I always had a picture of little ladies in London in their back rooms, chewing up papers. That of course is not the way they did it. But at one stage we were signalled by the group to try and not drop the wing tanks because the production rate couldn't keep up.
- 17:00 So the CO took an empty tank, a full tank and a half full tank out the back of the aerodrome and fired shots at them. You know what the result was, the full tank leaked, the half full tank leaked and burned.

The empty tank exploded. He said, "I think we want to carry with the rest of our wings, we'll drop the tanks." Now there's a lovely story about dropping tanks. I don't think it was a pocketful, I was told it in Denmark. There was a lady, in an old person's home there was a lady

- 17:30 who was very pro German, and the other Danish ladies in the place said to her, "You know, the British will do things to you, they'll do things to you." We went over and the fellas dropped their long range tanks, which were on that raid 100 gallon, normally they were fifty gallon. They exploded, made a helluva noise. This other person said, "There, they're already onto you, the next time they'll drop one right on top of you." They said she never complained again.
- 18:00 A brilliant piece of engineering and as many of the viewers would know it was made virtually entirely of wood. A spruce log can be peeled into a fine veneer and you can get a mile of wood off a spruce log. It was a sandwich of spruce/balsa/spruce/balsa/spruce/balsa with araldite in between that was invented for the purpose. And then it was put under
- 18:30 intense pressure, and I think the sandwich ended up just one and a half centimetres, strong as an ox as a consequence. And the curing process to modern people was very interesting. De Havilland were, invented the infra red microwave to cure the wood, you see. They didn't patent it the silly goats, they would have made a fortune.
- 19:00 There was nothing after the navigator's seat, because that was just the fuselage. In the front of the nose in a bomber version there was a perspex nose, and the navigator used to have to lie down and bomb aim from there. But ours was a solid nose, had two wonderful Merlin engines. We learned when we were in training, that Packard Merlin, Packard in America,
- 19:30 had been given the licence to make a Merlin engine which was a most brilliant piece of machinery. And they had contacted Rolls Royce and said, "We cannot mass produce this engine to these tolerances." Because they were virtually hand crafted in England. And they were given licence to extend the tolerances a bit. We found from experiment, that they cost you about ten knots of pace,
- 20:00 in the air, that ten knots might cost you your neck, so we always made sure we had Packard Merlins, the genuine article, the British bulldog job. A wonderful engine, but as I said yesterday, an in line engine is cooled by a cooling fluid called glycol. If you hole it, the glycol goes, so the engine's in trouble, as opposed to the radial engine, which can take more punishment. But the in line engine's better, that's me, prejudiced.
- 20:30 What else did we have? The aircraft was fifty four feet two inches wide on the wings, forgotten how long. It was virtually almost the same size as you like, of a modern FA18. It was. We were twenty five thousand pounds, take off weight, I see they're about 57 with nothing on them. Because power is the answer.
- 21:00 Endurance. With long range tanks we could fly for five and a half hours or thereabout. Which at 300 mph or thereabouts you can go a long way. Of course Europe is so small, and Australia doesn't appreciate that until they get over there. The whole of Europe fits inside Australia with great ease. So it's when you
- 21:30 talked about flying to Berlin that was a long way, well it isn't a long way. It was only 700 miles or something. They used them as I told you, from Sweden to England as a courier plane by BOAC as though the Germans didn't know what they were doing. They were carrying escaped airmen, people escaping from Europe, but most particularly, ball bearings.
- 22:00 Ball bearings were absolutely essential to the war effort and they'd carry great loads of ball bearings back from Sweden. And the Germans used to have fighters off the North Frisian coast trying to intercept these things. Only two of them were ever lost, and they weren't ever known if they were ever lost over enemy action. Although one examination proved there were no enemy fighters about when the accident happened. Sorry, it was a wonderful aeroplane,
- 22:30 it was the one that marked the bombing raids. It was the one that marked all sorts of things, its speed, its capability, manoeuvrability. At the time it was launched into the war, it was the fastest military plane flying. But as you loaded it up it got slower, a couple of fat Australians. But in production, you hear a lot about the
- 23:00 Lancaster. I think my figures are correct, there were six thousand three hundred Lancasters produced, there was six thousand seven hundred Mosquitoes produced. Because they were in all sorts of realms doing all jobs, photo reconnaissance, bombing, fighter attack, fighter bombing, night flying, night fighter, everything you could think of. If you wanted an aircraft, you used a Mosquito. The Americans fell in love with it.
- 23:30 They tried to swap it for some of their aircraft, no dice.

By far the most versatile aircraft in the force.

Yes, it was. It was the most versatile aircraft in the Royal Air Force.

Did you have a sense at the time of the purpose of your squadron or the Mosquitoes?

Oh well, we knew what we were doing and the squadron had a pretty proud history of achievement.

- 24:00 Before I got onto the squadron, people used to say to me when I came back, you know so and so Ian McRitchie [Squadron Leader A. I. McRitchie] on the squadron? I'd say no, he was silly enough to get shot down before I got on the squadron. There's a wonderful story. I can tell part of it. He's not with us now, but he was in the Amiens prison raid. Now you would have read of the Amiens Prison raid [18th February, 1944] where the three squadrons of 140 wing, that being 21 RAF, 464
- 24:30 Australian, 57 New Zealand, attacked the prison, released the prisoners, including a lot of criminals who were in gaol there, and we lost aircraft on that attack. But that was kept secret, that raid, for months. It only came out in the news months afterwards. Why? Because they feared the Gestapo would learn
- 25:00 something from it, I'm not quite clear what. Any rate, that and a number of other famous attacks were in the squadron history. You were proud to be on the squadron, you were very pleased to be on that first class aircraft, and I don't know I, in the early part operations at least, when you should have been very frightened, I wasn't. I felt that the aircraft was such a safe [plane].
- 25:30 They say (and it never happened to me and I can understand it) the loneliest moment of your life is the half minute after you bail out of an aircraft. In the aircraft, you're cocooned and safe so to speak, then you're thrown out into the air. It was confirmed by a couple of my friends who had to do it.

Do you have a sense now, looking back of what the 464 achieved?

Well there is a book over there it's been written by

- 26:00 a now Professor of Chemistry at Wollongong University. He rang me in Melbourne a few years ago and he said, "My name's Leon Cain McGuire." And I said, "I recognise the surname." He said, "Yes, it was my father." His father had been on the squadron and killed. His father's name was Noel so his name was reversed. The twin babies were left as orphans with their mother, and Leon has become the Professor of Chemistry. He said, "I'm in Melbourne. I want to talk to you for an hour."
- 26:30 He came to our house, five hours later he left. I have a photograph of him over there standing with Lois. And then a month or two later, a then Wing Commander RAAF Lax rang me and said, "I'm about to tackle, I've done a number of squadron histories, I'm about to write your squadron history. Can I contact you?" I said, "Of course, but there's a fellow fifteen miles away from you trying to do the same thing." They joined up, joined authors, and it's a brilliant book
- 27:00 very nearly 100% true. I learned the other day that Leon McGuire was having his 65th birthday, so I rang him up and gave him a shock. And I said, "Are there any more left, Leon?" He said, "No, there are only two left out of the print. But we're thinking of doing a paperback with, as people had come forward, with extended information." His father, Noel Cain McGuire, was flying the Ventura aircraft with
- 27:30 which 464 squadron was equipped before we switched to Mosquitoes. And there is an interesting little tale about that. Our chief was then Air Vice Marshal Basil Embry, as I told you he'd escaped from the Germans, and the RAF wanted to equip 140 Wing with the Vultee Vengeance bomber. The Americans, they thought, had done a smooth deal with them swapping Vultee Vengeance for Mosquitoes. Well, that's like taking a
- 28:00 clapped out [worn out] Ford and giving you Rolls Royces. So Embry said, "No, I will not allow my squadrons to be equipped with any aircraft which I haven't personally tested." And he took a Mosquito up, took a Vultee Vengeance up, and came down and said, "There's no way, that's not suited to the European theatre of operations. It might be alright for the Pacific, but it's no good here." He then went to the air member, Wilfred Freeman
- 28:30 and said, "I demand that the 140 Wing get mosquitoes." So Sir Wilfred Freeman said, "All right Basil, there's a meeting of the Air Council next week. I'm going to take you in there and you can say your piece." Basil Embry got up and said it, and we got Mosquitoes. Now I mentioned Ian McRitchie, I think I should tell the tape something of this wonderful man. He was a heat treatment engineer at BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited] Whyalla [South Australia] before the war
- 29:00 and as he says in his own words, "Whyalla before the war was a very dead town." So he went down to the local aerodrome and learnt to fly and became a flying instructor. When the war broke out what did he naturally want to do? He wanted to join the air force, but he was in a reserved occupation and he was not permitted to go. Now some of this will be a pocketful, but it's roughly correct in its detail, and he, with the help of a very prominent knight in this land, got a passport, worked his passage to England
- 29:30 (he deserted in other words) aboard a ship as a deck hand. Got to England, joined the RAF, was soon shown to have a great flying ability, and he was flying the temporarily successful Boulton Paul Defiant [aircraft] over Dunkirk. Why I say temporarily successful, it looked like a Hurricane, it had one thing different, a gun pointing out the back, and a feller firing that gun, and it was very successful over Dunkirk, but it was soon wiped off.
- 30:00 And the authorities in England, Ian made a number of suggestions about improving the aircraft and

they took him and said, "We're going to send you to Farnborough Experimental Station." And he said to Basil Embry, who was then the wing commander in charge, at Wittering [RAF Base] "Basil, I don't want to go to Farnborough." He said, "Do as you're told Ian, you've got the skills, you can get those. One day I'll need your flying abilities and I'll call for you." And he did.

30:30 When 464 Squadron was equipped with Mosquitoes, Ian was sent down and became a flight commander and Ian was shot down on the Amiens raid. He had 29 wounds in him and his navigator was killed. He was fortunately picked up by the Luftwaffe and not the Gestapo. Luftwaffe nursed him back to health. He tried to escape once by knotting sheets out the window and he was re-caught. Any rate, his

31:00 engineering skill was utilised in prisoner of war camps for making buckles for escape belts, doing all sorts of metal work. He fabricated a pair of bolt cutting shears out of some ice skating blades he got hold of, did all sorts of wonderful things. Eventually of course, he was a trouble maker and they sent him to Colditz, which was an escape proof camp. So when I came back from the war a friend of mine said, "You must know Ian McRitchie."

31:30 This man had been partially responsible, buying Ian McRitchie's engineering business. I said "I don't, he was shot down six months before I joined the squadron." Well, you can work it out. I had to phone Ian McRitchie. He said, "I'll give you half an hour." He was a man then about 72 years of age or thereabout. And he's still in his overalls, still working in his heat treatment works, and he said, "I'll give you half an hour at six o'clock." He knew why I was coming. I left there about four hours later. We became very close friends.

32:00 His story should be told in much more detail than I have been able to. Squadron Leader Ian McRitchie, DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross], an amazing man.

What was your sense of coming into the war at that particular time, of what direction the war was heading in?

Fortunately, Britain had climbed the terrible mountains by that time and was consolidating a lot of the North African campaigns. I don't know whether they were over or not.

32:30 We used to get chased up and down the desert, you may have read about that. And eventually we won the North African campaign with great difficulty. We were obviously consolidating forces for the forthcoming invasion time, when, not known. And as you went around England, you saw the evidence of that. I will never forget the first tank I saw. It was in Brighton, in a little narrow curving street

33:00 and they'd obviously taken out any obstruction on the footpath such as a hitching post or a lamp post and this darn tank came down, with its treads on the two pavements, threading its way through the streets. By the time we went over to Canada to do that course it was very obvious it was building up to a crescendo and I think I told you, I was sitting in a hotel in New York, awaiting a ship back to England, when they announced

33:30 the invasion and I used some very foul language. An interesting thing in my opinion. I don't know if this should go on the tape, I'll tell you two [things] about the difference in morale of the two nations. It's a fact that the whole of New York closed down. The people walked down the streets, metaphorically speaking, with their heads hung low and they all went and filled the churches. So five days later we were back in England and I said, "What happened on D Day?" "Oh, it was like a public holiday, everybody got up and went forward."

34:00 But of course, you've got to say to yourself, the Americans were thousands of miles from the action, and as you know, if there's any problem, the person who feels it least is the one at the coal face. The people at home feel it worst. So we got back after the invasion. So by the time I was on operations of course, it was well and truly underway. I would put it this way, I think this will answer your question, by the time

34:30 I was in operations, I knew we were going to win the war.

That must have changed your sense of morale and purpose from those who had come before.

I don't know. But I know we were looking forward to winning the war.

Can you take me through the moment of take off and the different commands Knowle and you would share and the different dials you would turn? I would love to have a description of that.

35:00 I don't know if I can do that with any detail now. Well you spoke, the pilot spoke to the tower, "Roman 2, 3, you have permission to take off." We'd taxi down the runway, open the taps, go like blazes down the runway, lift the tail, pull the aircraft into the air, and I would be watching the dials all the time to see if something went awry. I was very concentrated on, I was if you like, acting as an aide de camp.

35:30 We didn't have that problem. One of our blokes, I suppose I can tell you, a lucky problem. One night...I always flew with my oxygen mask on, cause I reasoned that that extra bit of air, you might, something might erupt into the aircraft and you might get fumes or what have you, and in a stress moment you wouldn't put your oxygen mask on. I said to myself, don't be a fool, fly with it on. And it had your microphone in front of it, a little switch which you'd talk to your pilot

36:00 and I didn't fly with my flying goggles down over my face. I don't know why, 'cause we were in a nice cockpit and it was heated what's more. It was a Mosquito, we were living in luxury. But this bloke took

off one night and the glycol cooling pipe went across from the starboard engine to the port engine behind the dashboard in front of them, and it burst, and it sprayed hot glycol fluid into his face. He, by

- 36:30 the grace of God, had his flying goggles on. And he put the aircraft down. Had he not of course he would not have succeeded. You climbed the height, the predetermined height on your flight plan, gave the pilot the course to fly, settled down and read the newspaper. No you didn't. Through then, from England you are aiming to go to your point of exit at the coast, which is predetermined. From England across the North
- 37:00 Sea, on an angle upward about 40 degrees, on Egmond aan Zee which I spoke about yesterday, and so on and so forth. From France, where we were nearer the battle line, you would be making a track to attack, to approach the battle line at a predetermined place. The British forces were in the north of the Rhine, the Americans in the south of the Rhine, so we were primarily up near Arnhem and Eindhoven and
- 37:30 Wesel and those towns on the Rhine. They had an exit corridor across the Rhine, when the Germans were in command of it, and we would change it every now and then. You'd climb to height and dive across the Rhine, but when the Allies got it, we had those fixed corridors and they would sometimes had searchlights up through them, which was a bit funny. But they'd change them and then of course,
- 38:00 familiarity breeds contempt. And as with the flak ship outside Overflakkee [Goeree-Overflakkee] one night Knowle and I were coming back, we'd been chasing trains and transports round near Berlin, and I said to him, "The corridor's under siege." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I can see fighters, dropping flares into the corridor." They knew the aircraft had to come through there. I don't know who the artillery battery was, but they won my undying praise.
- 38:30 I don't know how many shots they fired but they knocked out the three flares. We stuck our nose down and went through, but then they changed the corridor. But that was, it was ever thus, you know, it's successful you don't do anything until something goes wrong. Being nearer the battle line was a lot better because you're not wasting time flying. The aerodrome we had in France was a former German aerodrome
- 39:00 and I have pictures over there in the book, it was disguised as a village. The hangars looked like, brilliant. And when we got to Brussels, and I'm a fool for not doing something about it, there was a wonderfully big aerodrome which had been a civilian aerodrome before the war. It was if you like, the number one aerodrome for Brussels and we had a brick building which had been I think built by the Huns. The walls were
- 39:30 covered with murals of ladies not very well clad. There was a bronze bust of Hitler and we hung it by a rope outside on a tree. What a fool I was, if I had that back now, I could retire in peace. And what you did then when you got onto the continent, being lazy, you had to find a way to get your washing done. So you went straight down to the nearest village and you knocked on doors and you talked to the peasant farmer,
- 40:00 and they didn't want money, money was useless. They wanted things they didn't have. So soap, things like that, and you get your washing done. Knowle and I got out very quickly when we got to Brussels, got ourselves lined up and a fellow came to me and said, "You so and so, you sabotaged. I've gotta go down to the next village!"

That's just the end of the tape

- 40:23 **End of tape**

Tape 6

- 00:30 When we arrived in France we were in this aerodrome near the Somme River. That is not a good description, it is not a river, it is a series of cesspools which gets flushed out every so often when the rain develops. Squadron doctor called us all together and said, "Listen you blokes, you cannot drink the water. It's got a typhoid content of eight out of ten." He said, "You've gotta use these pills and boil it, and you won't wanna do that."
- 01:00 I stuck my hand up and I asked, "How are the locals able to live around here?" I've learnt since that he was absolutely right, nature is a wonderful thing. They are inured from birth and they can drink the foul water. Excuse my throat. Any rate, we did a deal. We said we would give our ration of beer, which was French beer and foul stuff anyway, to the airmen provided they'd let us fly an aircraft once a month
- 01:30 and pick up Scottish Kentdale lager. And we lived on that and that was good stuff. I didn't shave in it. I don't know how I shaved. I suppose I shaved in the foul typhoid water, but these are the little things you meet in the field.

Ways of coping.

Yes, you gotta cope. And Australians are good at coping. In my generation it was bred into them.

We have definitely heard stories of

02:00 ingenious little ways of.. Are there other ones you can think of? Little tricks or little methods of getting by?

You didn't need to get by. Really, truthfully, we were treated like kings compared to the soldier on the ground in the field. A great friend of mine, who never got over the fact that I was stupid enough to mention one day. He said, "How did you live in that great mess in England?" I said, "Oh that was pretty stylish Bill. We had

02:30 stretchers which we were sleeping on and we had sheets." Sheets!! And he's never forgiven me for that. I said, "Yeah, and we pilfered them and sent them over to France and sent a signal to say that we'd pay for them." Which we did. He never got over that. But sheets are very useful things. Any rate, I don't know what happened to them. Oh, in France we were billeted in an old, old chateau and it was a fine looking old building, but of course it had been plundered, and one

03:00 thing it had, was an enormous cupboard, I don't know for what purpose. But we soon devised, a good idea to put a kerosene heater in the bottom of it and hang up your washing up and it would dry. Until the night it caught fire, and we had to get that out, had to stop that. My father was in the furniture business and there was a magnificent Louis the 14th couch. I recognised it, been painted over, not guilty, and I

03:30 drew it and sent the drawing back to dad. He said, "It is, bring it home." The hot water service in the chateau, if it ever worked, it didn't. And I, with my meagre knowledge, connected it together and got it going. I've got a photograph of one of my colleagues having the first bath. These are the sort of things of ingenuity you did. Anybody would do it. If they went up the country camping they'd do it.

04:00 How were the interactions, relations, with ground crew?

Excellent. The only problem with that in my opinion in retrospect, the Royal Air Force, as with all Britain at that stage, had a very high protocol business, of them and us. A stupid thing was when air crew graduated,

04:30 a proportion of them were made sergeants and a proportion of them were made officers, which was very stupid. Now, you were not fraternising with the ground crew to an ultimate degree. It was somewhat frowned upon by the real brass. Let me illustrate a point however. One night I was in Brighton on leave with a magnificent RAF officer whose story was absolutely legend.

05:00 He was a very highly decorated squadron leader at that time, and we met one of our sergeants. And Sid, "Let's go to the Bullfrogs Club". He said, "I'm not allowed in there, I'm not an officer." Sid, "Yes you are." Took his coat off. He said, "They know me." Stuck it on the fellow, who ended up with a DSO [Distinguished Service Order]. Now that was a real man. But he was an ordinary Englishman who had been a grocer's assistant who had enlisted in the RAF before the war, as an ordinary airman, become an air gunner

05:30 and then a navigator. Did one hundred operations with a very famous pilot, dropped his rank, went and did pilot's instruction, came onto our squadron as a pilot. So Sid was a thoroughly worked over human being. He hadn't gone to the right school or what have you.

Speaking of those old prejudices. How were the perceptions of the RAF of the

06:00 Australian squadrons like the 464, the RAAF?

Well, actually those fellows, the top British airmen were absolutely in a class of their own. They were super big, in my humble youthful opinion, idealists I should say. No, they probably frowned upon us in some ways but they joined in with us. No, they were wonderful

06:30 leaders those men. I think I mentioned yesterday they were trained as gentlemen. They did a university course before the war. They had to do everything correctly and they dined in the mess with the mess silver and all that stuff which of course didn't happen during war time.

So in general, did you feel you were on an equal par?

Strange thing, the brotherhood, you would obey the rank unquestionably

07:00 but you'd treat him as a mate when it wasn't necessary to obey the rank perhaps with the exception of the group captain. He was God and he was a wonderful man too.

What was his name?

Peter Wickham-Barnes, hyphenated with an amazing record. And he was the group captain in charge of our wing. He was a fine fellow. You hardly ever saw him, but after the war

07:30 he dropped the hyphenated name, that was the measure of the man, went out to Korea, taught the Americans ground attack. He had the sense to know that 'Wickham-Barnes' wasn't going to be grabbed with two hands by the Yanks. While we were in London at one stage, we were invited to his funeral but we were up north. He was a wonderful leader, calm man,

08:00 you can imagine him saying, "Half the aircraft got away." Good Lord. Not me. All the others, they did have the rank distinction. In France, was occasioned no doubt by the size of buildings, but they had the senior officers (that's squadron leader and above) in another building further over. It was a better building but in the mess,

08:30 it was all the same.

Speaking of Yanks, what were Australian perceptions of them?

Oh, well, we didn't have a great respect for their flying in the early part because they had this terrible lack of navigational skill. You had to admire

09:00 their ability in the field. They were boys, virtually, stuck in uniform and sent over to Europe. They had very big losses, as did the Brits, but Patton [US General George S. Patton] was the one that we used to be highly amused at with the pearl handled pistols. And 'General Pat', General Patton broke through in the south over the Rhine down near, oh, what was the town, and he was

09:30 going to outsmart Montgomery and do a hook up through. Put it this way, the Brits and the Yanks would clash by culture, that was natural. The whole of the shebang was led by Eisenhower [US President Dwight Eisenhower] who as you know became the president eventually. His deputy was Air Chief Marshal Tedder [Sir Arthur Tedder] a Brit and a very good one.

10:00 So they tried to, and they did succeed in mixing them, the two cultures together. And of course there was the story of the Yanks in England. They were over here, over sexed, over paid. But that force, that available force, and you must respect Churchill's ability in this. He knew Britain couldn't win the war without assistance and he did everything in his power to encourage it to happen and he succeeded. But there were I think,

10:30 two million Americans in Britain during the war. That ship I came over on had 18,200 on it, and there were two, the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth, and they were going backwards and forwards across the Atlantic. And Queen Mary, 85,000 ton, going about 28 knots one day, cut straight through a British cruiser like a cheese knife, straight through. Mass

11:00 by velocity squared, if you've done physics. And it just cut straight through, and it didn't stop either.

And what happened?

I don't know. A lot of sailors drowned, the poor devils.

What did you know of it?

Didn't know anything about it. I think it leaked out toward the end of the war. A lot of things are kept secret.

Tell me more about the trip to the United States, and the train trip

11:30 **across?**

Well, we were put on board the USS Mount Vernon, which had been the steamer Mount McKinley, a luxury liner. And there weren't very many on board. There were a number of American soldiers going home and a small contingent of Australians going to England. And one funny incident which I should never forget. We were allocated duties occasionally, nothing onerous. And I was made troop deck officer

12:00 on one day. And I don't know what you were supposed to do, I hadn't a clue, but you walked up and down the troop deck looking for trouble. And I watched the Americans playing crap and I'd never seen this before in my life. And a fellow put his hand out to grab the centre and another one didn't agree that it was his centre and he knifed his hand to the deck. And here am I, nineteen years of age, quivering on the deck, what the hell am I going to do now? And I saw an American military policeman down

12:30 the gangway with his .45 pistol on his hip. "Sergeant, take over". "Yes sir." Bang, and I retreated. It wasn't a very pleasant incident. We landed in San Francisco and we were taken on to a place called Angel Island, which was an island in the middle of the bay. We did get a couple or three days leave but I can't remember what. Oh yes, myself and another fellow, I said to another fellow, "I'm going to the top of the Mark. We've gotta go to the top of the Mark, it's famous," so we went to the top of the Mark.

13:00 The Mark Hopkins hotel. It was very famous, there was a bar there. So we ordered the cheapest drink in the bar. Of course you got this magnificent view, San Francisco Bay. And we had watches, they are now coming back into fashion, they had leather casings on them, and I've got this on. This fellow came up, an American, he was very well dressed, and he was obviously pretty happy too. He said, "Say buddy, what's that you've got on your wrist?" "It's a watch." "Well I've never

13:30 seen anything like that in my life. We're having a party, come over and join us." A wedding party, so we joined the wedding party. So these are the sort of silly things that happen when you're wearing Australia on your shoulder. And I've got another one to tell you in New York. And we then went across the States in the train. It was a very, beautiful exercise. 'Course the silly Australians were wearing shorts on the plains. We got to the Chicago rail yards and the snow on the ground.

- 14:00 They got out and the natives looking at them as though they're raving lunatics. Which they were. Taken into New York, camped in a place called Fort Slocum. Which was a military establishment. Then we went on leave in New York. Well, first of all we went to Schnozzels and Randie's bar. Had to get there and one of the fellas there said, "Hoostralia."
- 14:30 Got a few free drinks. And oh yes, I know what it was. There was a brilliant, brilliant jazz pianist called Hazel Scott. Her dexterity was probably better than any classical pianist in the world. And I was determined to see her if I could and she was performing at the Café Society. I said to my fellow, "We're going around there." He said, "We can't afford that." I said, "I know that, but we can buy a cup of coffee, and we'll sit in the corner and I want to see Hazel Scott perform." We were sitting in the corner
- 15:00 having our slow cup of coffee. Someone spotted the 'Australia'. They put a spotlight on us and made us sing Waltzing Matilda to this crowded night club. With all the colours of the rainbow in my face, we got over that. Then a waiter came across and said, "Miss Scott is giving a party when she finishes tonight, she'd like you to be her guests." I'm not going to miss this. You could walk around New York all night and day and you
- 15:30 wouldn't get mugged in those days. So sure enough we went to Hazel Scott's party. And there was a very, very drunk British naval commander there with his arm around a lady who was much younger than he with blonde hair and I didn't think he was married to her, put it that way. End of story. When we were in England, the battleship HMS Warspite fired at some of our blokes, the navy couldn't recognise aircraft, and by way of
- 16:00 apology, they invited us down for pink gins in the wardroom in Portsmouth. I said, "I'll be in this, I've never had pink gin in the wardroom." So we go on board this old battleship and they allocated an officer to every two officers to show them and look after them, and this fellow came along and I said to the bloke, "Leave this to me, I've got this bloke." I said, "Sir, were you in New York?" And by gosh we got wonderful treatment. How about that for a coincidence?
- 16:30 **What were your expectations of Americans prior to getting to the country?**
- I don't really know. Well, we knew it was a wealthier country by far than ours. And one was excited to go and see the world famous places in New York, which we did. They were extraordinarily generous to you when you caught up with them. One family took me under their wing, and wrote to me
- 17:00 for the rest of the war. And I told you about Colonel Harry van Lew coming back from Australia and he wanted two Australians, kicked his kids out of the house. A very generous nature and they did an enormous job. They eventually saved the world, but the world wasn't there to be saved, unless the Brits had hung onto it.
- What about this family you became fast friends with?**
- 17:30 I've lost touch with them now. I did send them Christmas cards for a while. I daresay the mother and father, oh put up a lovely (UNCLEAR) in America at a cocktail party in their house. The Australian vernacular and the American vernacular are different. We had been up all night when we went back to New York, we were taken off the ship. And I rang these people up, I knew the daughter from a dance. They'd asked me out of course. Hadn't had
- 18:00 any sleep. I'm not good when I haven't had any sleep, so at five o'clock at night, there is a very posh cocktail party going on in their house. The father was a professor at Columbia University, the mother was a surgeon. You got the tone, and the house was better than mine, anyhow I put it. Not being a very good drinker at that stage, "What will you have to drink?" I said, "I thought, you know, little old ladies drink sherry."
- 18:30 And I put it down on a glass topped table and it shattered. My hand was shaking. The host came over to me, "Ooh, what's the problem?" I said "I'm sorry, I'm somewhat knocked up." Deathly silence in the room, and he took me outside and explained to me, for which I'll never forgive him, that in America that meant I was illegally pregnant. And I had to walk back into that room. He should have said to me you better skedaddle.
- 19:00 So there were differences in the language.
- At least you weren't a female.**
- It was an ordinary Australian colloquialism.
- So you were pretty wide eyed when you got to America?**
- Yes, I was. Oh yes, definitely. I'm very interested in architecture, travel and things like that and I thought, if you get an opportunity you don't miss it. That's the point. And the same in London.
- 19:30 When I first got to London, I didn't go down the pub, I just walked London and looked at all the things. I was propositioned in the dome of St Paul, if you please, by a Dutch woman officer. I told her I was busy. Right up in the dome of St Paul!
- How did she phrase that?**

Oh well it was something in the order of, "Oh, let's spend the day together and we can get on with it." Something like that, I don't know, but me being frightened, disappeared.

20:00 But, no. I used the time I had the best I could to see....I went on the bus to South Downs, one Sunday afternoon, to go to a village called Alfriston, as I knew it to be a historic village and I went into the pub. Wasn't an unusual thing to do and there was a fellow behind the bar and I got chatting to him and I realised he was the proprietor.

20:30 I indicated my interest. He said, "Come with me." He took me out the back of the pub, opened up a trap door, said, "If you get in there you can walk right down to the sea, that's a smugglers tunnel." And went back to Alfriston a few years ago and I checked up the pub and it's still there. Because the cliffs, which I hadn't understood at that point in time, the cliffs of England are very heavily chalk bound, particularly that area, and you can bore through chalk and it's stable,

21:00 so that's how the smugglers used to have all these lovely tunnels, bring the brandy in from France.

Did many of the men get American or English sweethearts?

Oh, yes, yes, yes. One bloke. He was an Englishman but he was in the RAAF, as mad as a meat axe, in fact we shared half his house in Western Australia last when we lived over there. Freddie got engaged in San Francisco to an actress,

21:30 then went to the equivalent of a registry office, only to be told that there had to be so many days notice, so that was over. He eventually married an English girl. There were a lot of fellas married English girls of course, but not too many married Americans unless they had been stationed over there, not when they were just passing through. Except Fred was trying to do so. He'd've done it too.

When did they marry these girls, during the war, after the war?

22:00 Mixture of both, mixture of both.

You had a funny story about a fellow who wanted you to bring a girl out for him.

Oh yes, the squadron doctor. People trust me with women. Another time, a friend of mine, I spoke of him, Jim Vickers-Willis. He fortunately had a car, nobody had a car, "Peter, Peter, meet me in the corner of Elizabeth Street and Flinders Street." "Yes Jim, what's wrong?" "I'll tell you when you get in the car." In those days you could go down Alexandra Parade of course

22:30 and stop under a tree, no parking meters, no parking signs. "What on earth's the matter son?" He said, "You know Dianne." I said "Yes, she's a nice lass." He said, "I've had a row with her, I want you to take her over, hand her back then." I said "Jim, that's your problem, not mine." But Jim married a wonderful lovely girl. Actually that needlework picture of an old house was done by Jim's wife. No, but Oddy, the doctor from South Australia, our squadron doctor,

23:00 I told him the story. He asked me to bring Joan out and hand her over. By coincidence, Joan and Bill Odham lived in Perth when Lois and I lived there between 1948 and 52, and he being a doctor had a little Brangar motor car, so we used to go all over the place.

To clarify, you weren't engaged. He wanted you to bring a girl over because he wasn't able to because he wasn't divorced.

He wasn't divorced. Wanted me to

23:30 transship the girl. But there were wonderful people you met. Now in Western Australia one night the door bell rang. Well the door knocker, there's Oddy, standing on the verandah. He said, "Someone here wants to talk to you." I looked up and there's an RAF wing commander. "Good God Bill, what are you doing here?" Bill Kemp. And he'd stayed in the air force after the war, and he'd just been out in Greece fighting a war out there, some war, and he said, "You know, the war

24:00 is going to break out again." Which it didn't. That's the sort of camaraderie you had. It was a matter of years you'd see each other. We were not close but we were on the same team so to speak.

Did you have any sweethearts during the war?

I used to take out a Canadian nurse, nurses plural usually. She married a Canadian officer. She cracked up, poor kid. They

24:30 had these field hospitals round an aerodrome, at Gatwick as I told you. And she was there and she couldn't stand seeing the battle casualties coming straight off the battlefields. She was a lovely girl. I didn't have any girlfriends. Company, yes. I was very timid in those days, I've changed.

How long after the war did you meet Lois, your wife?

I met, well,

25:00 I became engaged in November 1947. She'll argue about that but I won't. And we married in June 1948, but I told you that Knowle Shrimpton and his wife came out to Australia and Knowle borrowed a car from his father who had two and came up to Croydon to see me and as we were going up a road in

Croydon, Knowle yelled out so and so, to a fellow who he'd been to school with, who was Lois's brother. So I met him first.

25:30 I paid for my own 21st birthday party and I invited Lois's brother. I didn't invite her. She invited me to hers. No, we just met just after the war. I always say to my mother, "You had your eye on that one, didn't you?" She wouldn't admit it but she did. Lois had been engaged to a fellow before, whom she discovered was no damn good and she broke it off

26:00 as a young girl, which took courage. And I always say, "You bounced off him." She was very upset at times. Teasing her.

You meant that your mother had her eyes on Lois for you.

I think so. I think so. It was the best thing I ever did. We've got three kids as I told you. Well, they're not kids, they're very much grown up adults. They all look more like Lois than me, with the brown pigment in the eye.

26:30 None of them have got my cheek. They're nicer people.

You said there was a funny incident when you first met and someone used the incorrect rank to address you and she thought....

Alan Moorehead's mother, the author's mother, Mrs Moorehead, said, "Oh, that's Wing Commander Lake", and there was Lois' mother, Lois' aunt, Lois, I think that was the complement on the bridge, strolling would be the

27:00 term, not walking. And I went through them like a dog goes through a pack of sheep you know. That was when Lois took the view, he's no wing commander, he must be a stuck up so and so. I should have turned around. A month later, I would have turned around and told her what she'd said wrong. But I hardly knew the woman. Alan Moorehead, the author, came out and stayed with his parents whilst I was up in Croydon and he wrote the book, Tobruk.

27:30 His father was a journalist as he had been and his mother was a wag, absolute. He gave her a trip to Paris and they were having breakfast on a balcony over the Champs-Elysees and he had his back to the Champs-Elysees and Mrs Moorehead was looking down the parade, and she said, "Alan this is a funny place." He said, "It has its peculiarities." She said, "Do they always have lions walking up and down the street?" He thinks, oh, mum's gone mad. Sure

28:00 enough, there was a lion. Escaped from some circus.

What were your thoughts, your opinions, about Bomber Harris?

I was not involved with Bomber Harris. As a human being, I

28:30 was not very happy with the raid on Dresden at the end of the war. Rationale given for that, as you may well know, is that it was a signal to Russia. The Dresden raid I think horrified me. I was always very grateful to circumstance,

29:00 that I was not involved in mass bombing. The thought of killing hundreds of thousands as it was, of civilians. It had to be done, it was the war, that's the war, but it didn't appeal to me. What we were involved in was attacking an enemy who was attacking you. He was a military man, virtually. So I suppose in reading of Bomber Harris and

29:30 Bomber Command after the war, my attitude was that he had to be a cold hearted commander. And you would make a calculation, alright we're sending out 1000 bombers or 500 bombers, the attrition rate will be so and so (he was very gently spoken, the 'attrition rate', not 'the chop'). Barnes Wallis for instance, that famous, wonderful engineer who invented the bouncing bomb for the dam raid, he just burst

30:00 into tears when he heard the calculations before the fellows had landed. He said, "I would never have done it if I'd known it was going to do this." Any rate, my attitude to Bomber Command was those fellows had a hellish job to do, it had to be done, I'm very grateful that I was not involved.

30:30 **So you felt quite fortunate to be....**

Involved in the 140 Wing in the duties we were doing and in the aircraft we were flying. I certainly did.

What did you know of what was going on in Europe particularly the bombing of Germany at the time in the war? Did you know much of the civilian casualties?

I don't think we did. Well they didn't blast them over the

31:00 newspapers to tell you we just killed 100,000 children or something like that. That all came out after the war. You knew, you could see the teeth missing out of London. The buildings down. The whole area around St Paul's Cathedral for instance, was flattened, and it had been a series of merchants, Craft Lane, Tailors Lane, Breadmakers Lane and so and so. They had little ropes round on

- 31:30 spikes to show you where they'd been, they were just a pile of rubble, and unfortunately they didn't rebuild that, they changed it all over, but by a miracle, you can say what you like, one bomb went through St Paul's and yet the whole area around it was flattened like a pancake. But after all, Coventry Cathedral didn't exist after the bombing raid. Lois and I went to Bonn, Cologne Cathedral. It's a beautiful building, wonderful
- 32:00 building. An extraordinary thing there. You can say it was divine providence, you can say whatever you like, it was not bomb damaged, but around it was, and the bombs uncovered a Roman museum, and they've got it there now, with wonderful Roman glasswork, it's incredible stuff. So we did a wonderful job of digging. I was upset to say the least at the thing that had happened in Copenhagen,

- 32:30 because I have a reason to believe, and I'm not the only one, that Peter Kleboe who crashed, should not have been on that raid. He was not experienced enough, at low level flying. That is not to say the windscreens clouded over and there was flak and dust and filth and bombs exploding. The vision was very, very bad.

What was the

- 33:00 **money like? How did you get paid and how did you get it?**

The Australian air force was paid pretty well. I can't remember the rates of pay now, but I know it was 25% more than the Poms. Used to tease the Poms. And I was able to live very happily and pay my mess bills and I sent money home to a bank account. A pile of money, a little pile of money when I came home from the war.

- 33:30 No, we were pretty well treated in money. You started off on six bob a day with everyone else when you're the lowest thing on earth, but you soon got out of that.

Did you send money home?

I sent it home to a bank account. I told my father if he was short to raid it. He didn't until after the war. He came to be and he said, "Son, could you possibly loan me some money for your sister's wedding?"

- 34:00 I said, "Certainly dad." That was nice. We had no money. Well, you could have money worries if you blew it right, left and centre, but I didn't.

You said the alcohol was mostly a provision rather than an expenditure.

Ah, well, it wasn't, it was a partially a provision, but also an expenditure.

- 34:30 The Brits did a very cunning thing. I think the figures are roughly right. That there were probably two million strangers in England during the war, and stuff was scarce, so what do you do about grog? If it's short, you get riots in the street. Now they watered the British beer down. I am not conscious of when there was any time, when it was not possible to buy a beer in

- 35:00 England. It had a two fold affect. It lowered the alcohol intake too. They brilliantly provided enough alcohol for all the thirsty persons. The Americans had money and they used to have bourbon. Whisky, bourbon whisky.

To what extent do you think men coped with alcohol during the war?

I don't recall seeing anybody, oh I do in training once, here in Australia,

- 35:30 but I don't recall anybody grossly affected by alcohol, and like I said to you, when flying on operations we had, whether it was a written law or not, but it was certainly obeyed. Twelve hours before an operation, no grog, because your judgement had to be spot on.

And there was once when you were told to go take a shower?

And we went and we came back. We were given, what do they call them now? What do they call the pills,

- 36:00 the wakey wakey pills, what do you call them? We were given

Amphetamines?

Yes, amphetamines by the doctor, when we'd had an overstressed amount of lack of sleep, and had to go out again, but dosage by him. I didn't even know what it was. Here, swallow this.

What affect did they have on you?

I don't know. They were designed to keep you awake and alert, and obviously, otherwise, I might have been wrong, but they seemed to do that.

- 36:30 **Any men have ill effects of these wakey wakey [pills]?**

I'm not aware. I'm not aware. The dosage was probably so small.

How were you able to fall back asleep after operations?

What happened when you got back you were what you call debriefed. In other words, the intelligence officer would take a complete transcript from you of what happened. There's an amusing incident I will tell you about in a minute. And you were then given what I told you, an air crew supper, which was good enough to rot your stomach.

- 37:00 And I know, you fell asleep from exhaustion after that, you did, and relaxation. You come down from a big high and relax, you'll go to sleep. But the amusing thing about a debriefing. We had a young junior intelligence officer one night. We were his first victims. The senior intelligence officer was standing behind him watching the performance. This fellow, I said,
- 37:30 "Well I saw what I thought was a fighter." "What sort was it?" I said, "I did not identify it." My aircraft recognition was very good. He said, "What sound did it make?" At which the senior officer said, "Excuse me, Flight Officer," and took over, because you can't hear a sound in an aircraft, when your ears are drummed out with your own engines and your headphone. I don't think that he would have ever said that again.

Did you have trouble falling asleep after the debrief?

I never did. No,

- 38:00 I didn't, no. I suppose I tossed, no I didn't. I don't recall having sleeping trouble. For argument's sake, if you did have sleeping trouble you'd probably go to Oddy and say, "Oddy, give me something to knock me out." Which I never did, and I don't know whether others did or not. Alcohol helped.

Someone mentioned to us that there was sometimes cocoa, coffee, with a dash of rum.

Oh yes, yes. Rum, rum, that's a good story, if you've got an hour on the tape that's a good

- 38:30 story. No, the doctor had the right to apportion the rum dosage after an operation. Some of the blokes didn't drink it. I wasn't going to miss it, they'd put it in your tea. Oddy was smart, he didn't give you a full dosage, he would keep it back, so he would accumulate a lot of rum. He'd go round the mess when we weren't flying, "CO's room, ten o'clock. CO's room, ten o'clock." That meant to go and buy Coca Cola, we were going to have a rum party. And that was the last time I ever drank Coca Cola, so
- 39:00 when those rum parties followed up with....On this occasion, the squadron had a motor bike, it had a jeep, and it had a 15 hundredweight Commer truck. The jeep and the truck were governed to speed, the motorbike was not, so we navigators sat down half blithered, and worked out the handicaps for these vehicles, without lights, to go round the perimeter of the aerodrome in a race. Well you know what happened, the motorbike crashed. Charlie Davidson, who gave us that lovely camellia out there,
- 39:30 ended up on the ground in a heap of blood. That was the end of the rum parties. But the interesting thing about Charlie Davidson was, he ended up with a scar, a glazed scar there, and it would not go away. So Oddy was at a party in London where the famous Dr McIndoe was, the New Zealand plastic surgeon who had the guinea pigs club, fixing all the burned airmen. And he said to McIndoe, "Look I've got this boy, so and so." Told him the story.
- 40:00 McIndoe said, "Well, we'll sneak him in, don't know how we'll do it, we'll have to forge the papers." So Charlie was a member of the guinea pig club. He was very proud of it. He's got the little guinea pig lapel. And they fixed his scar, McIndoe fixed it. That was the end of the rum parties.
- 40:17 End of tape

Tape 7

- 00:31 **We'll talk about your sons coming to you during the Vietnam War, tell me about that again?**

They were both of the callable age, to coin a phrase. And they were concerned about it and they came to me and said, "Dad, what do you think?" I said, "What I was involved in was very black and white at the time. The way I saw it and in retrospect I still see it as black and white, for the very simple reason that it was a battle for

- 01:00 the survival of human, our form of life in the western world. But what you may be involved in has so many shades of grey that I simply didn't have an opinion." So I wasn't any use to them. Fortunately neither of them got called up.

And had you talked much about your war experience to your children?

I don't think so, I would say that well, not without it being logged, I would say for forty years, I virtually bottled it up.

- 01:30 I didn't march on Anzac Day. I marched down the main street of Croydon, now that was a big deal in the RSL in Croydon at the time. But my mind was unlocked and I'm very grateful for that, because I think the inward pressure was released by some researchers in Denmark, a Pom actually, writing me a letter and asking me questions. From that

02:00 I've got piles and piles of paper and of course I've been able to see them since. So that exploded the thing as far as I was concerned. Then, a few years ago, I think about 20 years ago, looking at that book over there, I got a letter from an author from South Australia saying, "You should buy my book." So I wrote back and I said, "Why?" which wasn't a bad question. Cause \$20 was \$20 and he sent me some extracts and it was that other book over there

02:30 and the Mosquito monogram, and he said, "Your name's in it." So those sort of things happened.

So what was your involvement with RSL?

Well, I was just in the local RSL and the president was my best man. He was a captain of the army who had been badly wounded and he was a fine bloke, became a minister of religion. I'm not involved in the RSL now, although I belong to it. The infamous RSL, which I attend very occasionally, not as the meeting, but

03:00 fellowship. The Heroes' Club in Toorak. The Toorak Club has the nickname of the Heroes' Club. It has a tie on it with a little H on it.

How does its members feel about that?

The members did it! It was started by a couple of fellas post war. They decided they wanted a meeting place. The building as I understand it, belonged to the church at one stage. And they got it and how they raised the money I have no idea

03:30 but they did and it's a very, very lovely club. As a matter of fact Lois and I went there a couple of weeks ago, April 27th. It was a small church service commemorating Anzac Day and then a lovely luncheon. We were all friends, yeah.

And so during that forty years when you weren't really thinking about it did you have any contact with old squadron members?

Friends, I s'pose it would have been, let me see, it would have been 20 years.

04:00 I was up in Sydney on business once and I was with a major institution. A feller said to me, "I'm taking you to lunch." I said, "Well, there's something I want to do before you take me to lunch." He said, "What is it?" I said, "I want to go and see a fellow in the Electricity Trust of South Australia, one of my mates during the war." We came home together to win the war. Hirohito [Japan's Emperor Hirohito] heard we were here and he gave up. And Dunkley, I hadn't seen him for 20 years, and I walked into his office and looked across and we were just talking. That fellow when we got outside, the other chap said,

04:30 "I would not have believed that possible. You two have not seen each other for 20 years. I would have thought you had been talking to each other every day for twenty years." That's the way it is. As I have told you. The other fellow that I hadn't seen for 58-60 years. He came to my house when I was sick, "Good God, you've still got your hair."

You were saying before, it was less than three years, your time at war. You had a massive....

Yeah, it was, I,

05:00 because the air force kicked me out. I was inducted, signed up on my birthday, but I was inducted on the tenth of October 1942. I was thrown out on the cold street, on the 9th September 1945.

And so the experiences and the friendships you made, seemed disproportionately large, don't they?

I think that comes back to something you two have said today. There is a camaraderie and a brotherhood

05:30 to use a terrible phrase, brothers in arms, to illustrate it. It's like, it's the same. You've no doubt got chums from school, you just had that strong bond.

So when you did reunite with people, did you talk about the times you had, or experiences?

I don't think so, I don't think so, except Squadron Leader Dunkley

06:00 in Sydney, was on leave, when we did the Copenhagen raid and Knowle and I flew his aircraft and he was always ticking me off. "We didn't dent it Dunkley, that's all you gotta worry about." No we didn't talk about it.

And so once you did start to think about your experiences, did you talk to your grandchildren about it much?

No, I haven't. I've given my eldest grandson, and I said, "Guard this with your life." I gave him an escape button.

06:30 An escape button. Was fabricated in England, brass button, uniform, with a Royal Air Force crest on it and inside it had a compass. It was a left hand thread. The Germans never broke them. Typical woman, I gave it to Lois after the war and I said, "Open that", and she went boom and she opened it. She didn't

know a left hand thread to a right hand thread, so I've given it to my eldest grandson. I said, "Hang onto that, that is a great memento and very valuable." I haven't decided

07:00 what to do with those maps yet and I don't know whether I shall. No, I haven't talked to them. Why should you?

There seems to be an interest in the generation after the immediate generation. This archive is testament to that.

Yes it is. Well they'll all see what they want to see on the box won't they. Tap in mug and, you'll, up it will come. No, they'll

07:30 I don't, wouldn't abide by holding briefing sessions with my grandchildren. I love them too much.

Speaking of the box. I'm wondering about your perceptions of film. Representations of well, bomber or fighter.

Well, eh, oh, there's some genuine stuff of course. Well, the Battle of Britain that was produced in England is very

08:00 good. I remember seeing that in the Capitol Theatre in Melbourne not long after the war. When they were starting to fire back I suddenly realised I was ducking, so it was that good. I have a film over there, produced by the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] which has to do with the Copenhagen raid. But of course the quality of cinema work in those days wasn't all that good, particularly from aircraft. If there's some good film. I

08:30 think now people such as yourself will be finding some of this stuff. I don't know if you can digitally master it or what you can do nowadays, but you can obviously do a clean up of some sort. But I go to a luncheon once a month, at a club. It is the aviation day. It only started about three years ago, and the fellow who started it said, "We can't have this, we can't talk business in the club, we can't show pictures,

09:00 we can't do anything. We're going to a private room." And he is an absolute aviation enthusiast. He flies all round the world often. And he collects the most wonderful films, and he brings them round. Last Monday for argument's sake, we had a hour long documentary on the FA18. Produced in America. It was really something. So we see that. Those films are good. There are dozens and dozens of them. There's a magazine, he gave me,

09:30 talks about Mosquitos. In the back of it, there are pages of ads saying such and such, such and such, such and such, various films. So there's plenty of them about. I haven't got them.

Is there anything about the social aspects of those films that they got right or wrong?

What are you digging at? You mean the inevitable blonde and the American airman, I don't know, I haven't thought,

10:00 I haven't looked at it that way, I'll have a good look next time. The social behaviour, the social atmosphere, the social. Well the flying films are normally done from aerodromes. Whilst it evolves in its behavioural pattern, it doesn't act in the local town, does it. No, I don't pick it up in those films. But you would if you went to an American

10:30 cinema, the blonde, dancing girls and all the rest of it.

When you talk to someone who was a pilot in a Lancaster, he says it's rubbish, no one talks in an entire mission, whereas in the films they are always talking.

Oh yes, that's right, I understand the man's point, yes. Well, you asked what happened after you took off. You shut up. You shut up for hours. And you only opened your voice,

11:00 speak when you're spoken to or when it's necessary. But no, he's right. But a film has to annotate the damn things, complete with the forty piece orchestra. We didn't have an orchestra.

How would you fit one on a Mosquito anyway?

Oh yes. Stick a little thing in the back now. I see what you're getting at. Constructed films, of necessity, have to narrate, don't they? They can't have twenty minutes of saying nothing,

11:30 or quarter of an hour of saying nothing, you've gotta narrate, you've gotta throw something up or do something, "Oh hang on Hank, we're being attacked." Boy those fellows took some punishment. I used to see, you'd see these flights of B17s going out in daylight when we were in France, there'd be a great stream of aircraft going overhead. Later that day you'd see them come back, and there were an awful lot of holes in them, an awful lot of bits of tin hanging off aircraft. I said, "I'm glad I'm here

12:00 not up there, thank you."

Could a Mosquito take much punishment?

It could take a lot of punishment. There's a photo over there in a book of a friend of mine who'd lost

about twelve feet of his wing. He came back, and another friend of mine got a hole through his fuselage, and we think it might have been some sort of an artillery shell, cause it created a hole, 12, 14 inches in diameter. The wooden construction, it was as strong as a horse, and it didn't readily burn either. A metal aircraft

12:30 will burn once you get past the ignition point, because there was magnesium in the alloy. And very rarely did they ever burn and they take a lot of punishment. Those books over there will show you pictures of very nastily bashed about aircraft. But they weren't perfect. They had their vices. One engine flying was one of them. We had to do it on several occasions, and Knowle was expert with

13:00 landing an aircraft with one engine. If you made a throttle mistake it would flip. I saw that happen once. You go straight over. So they weren't perfect, but they were as near perfect as you could get in those days. Because the other brilliant airplane was the Spitfire. That was a magnificent piece of machinery, still is.

Ever get a chance to go up in one of them?

No I haven't. There's no two seater.. I don't know there might be a two seater out there. My second son's been up in a

13:30 two seater Mustang, the little blighter. Someone shouted him. I didn't.

You were talking before about flying home in a huge head wind. Were fuel levels ever a problem?

You had to watch them all the time, it was my job. Had to watch fuel levels. They don't go very well on air. No you always want....changes in wind and weather. Well obviously, like a car, if you do high acceleration, you chew fuel.

14:00 Our normal consumption cruising speed was about 50 gallons per hour per engine, so it was 100 gallons per hour. If you accelerate, do all sorts of things and, I don't know, it'll be off the map. And so my job, one of my jobs was to keep a close eye on the fuel, and I did all the time. And I'd say "Mmm, mm, calculate, yeah, we're all right." And you'd do that and I'm sure it happened, fellas ran out of fuel. It did happen I know that.

Did you have any close calls in that plane?

14:30 Well, landing with a dry tank. Oh, not really because we got back alright. One was a bit frightening. We came back and England had a habit of clamping down in fog. It was the most incredible phenomenon. I'll tell you something about that in a minute. Winston Spencer Churchill. And there was special aerodromes which he caused to be created. But we decided we would get in

15:00 to our aerodrome because we were on the edge of the sea and we decided we would creep down through the cloud, watching the altimeter and praying, until we could get some vision. We got vision. I don't know how, what height. We got vision at low height. We flew into the aerodrome, we sort of flew landed, got down. The tank was very light at that time, so we weren't particularly keen on stooging around England trying to find another

15:30 aerodrome. But let me tell you the story about these emergency aerodromes. It is worth knowing. During the war they sent out, and the story is roughly right, a hundred Wellington bombers were sent out to do a job. Ninety three got lost and the rest got back. Ninety three of them were lost through fog crash landing in England. Churchill got up in the house the next day, so the story goes, he was a sentimental person, with tears streaming down his

16:00 eyes, saying, giving an instruction, "This was never to happen again, and it was to be beaten." So they built three emergency aerodromes, Carnaby, Bramston and Bravil Bay. It was like going to the pictures to land on one of those which we had to do on a couple of occasions. Because they landed there. They had a mile long runway and about half a mile or more at each end of the runway of cleared ground. And they landed three aircraft at a time on the main runway if they could

16:30 do it, to get em down. And we came into Bramston one time, with one donkey working the other donkey not working, and we had a fire in the engine and they said to Knowle, "Have you got control?" He said, "Yes." They said, "Well land in position such and such on the runway, you'll see a truck flashing a red light, land near that." So we landed near that. Immediately as we started to pull up, cause we had bombs on, they said to us, "Follow that truck." They took us right out into

17:00 the scrub, away from the main drag so if any explosions, wouldn't do any harm, and then we went to bed in that aerodrome. It was like the pictures. A Lancaster, with one engine, or firing two engines or whatever, land on position, all right, bang, so he'd land on position and a bulldozer'd push them off the runway to make room for the next aircraft. But they saved a lot of lives, the emergency aerodromes. And they had what was called Fido. Have you ever heard of Fido - fog

17:30 intensive dispersal of. You're under threat of death if you called up for Fido unless it was absolutely necessary, because all it was really, was galvanised piping like a watering system in the garden, running up the side of the runway, and they belted paraffin and petrol and all sort of things through it. We used it once, and it cut a swathe about 300 feet high, like a tunnel, through the fog and you could land in

Fido,

18:00 but you wouldn't be very popular if you called for Fido and it wasn't necessary. Cause fuel was very necessary. You know how they got the fuel to the continent eventually don't you, by Pluto. Pipeline under the ocean. Pipeline under. A wonderful cable company, an electric cable company, which I knew a lot about because I'd been involved with them. They made these pipes like an electric cable without wires in it, and Pluto was pumping fuel across the continent.

18:30 **I was wondering about your procedure outside of briefing when you came back. Did you wait to see who came back, or did you just go to bed?**

Go to bed. You'd soon learn if somebody, well, when you came back and someone had gone missing and they were looking for them you knew. I remember one night one of my friends went missing. They set off looking for him. He'd got near the drome and they'd lost him from there on. I asked the CO if we could go and look for him. We were told, "Superfluous.

19:00 Go to bed." He'd crashed into a hill at Hornchurch actually. You didn't know until the next day, who'd got the chop. Or whether he was a POW [Prisoner of War] of course, that happened.

How would you find out, by their absence or

You'd know by their absence, or it'd be, well, the flight board, which was chalk marked in columns, with the pilots name and navigator's name, the aircraft name and pilots number and time of take off,

19:30 scheduled time of take off in the right hand column. If you came back and someone was supposed to take off an hour before you and he wasn't there...He wasn't there was he? So that was one way.

The same bomber pilot we talked to, Lancaster bomber pilot we talked to found out about the success or otherwise of the mission by the papers the next day.

Did he? Good on him. I suppose that's true. They didn't, they didn't, well, we knew

20:00 well, we didn't know really what you had done. We knew what we had done. But on those low level attacks on Gestapo Headquarters, they were splashed all over the papers the next day. The Danish resistance movement sent signals within seconds of our finishing the job. And they kept on sending them. I've got a number of them over there. I don't know how I scrounged them, but I got them.

20:30 **What were your most common targets or objectives?**

Trains. Knowle and I credited, well not credited, we officially attacked 14 trains. Transports, convoys of trucks, troop concentration. For arguments sake the night we got the bomb blast through the aircraft, attacking the blast furnace, very appropriate wasn't it, blasted the blast.

21:00 We were not involved in general bombing. We were given an area to patrol, a defined area, and we were to take off at 2130 if you like and go off and do it and come back and someone else would take over after we [finished]. The objective was to paralyse, in so far as was practical, the transport system. Because that's what got trains and trucks and troops and

21:30 God knows what to the front. The Germans, as I said, used to put a flat car on the train, very nasty, they became very expert at getting over the problem, but one of my colleagues - there was a tunnel in France and a train disappeared into the tunnel, and he bombed the back end, and he flew round and bombed the front end of the tunnel, and entombed the thing. We never knew what happened to the train

22:00 but of course the trains were carrying the munitions for war, and the troops.

You mentioned before it was easier on your conscience.

Well it's true, it was, I, well, had I been exposed to the other way, I probably wouldn't have had a conscience to it, but I'm very glad I wasn't, that's all I can say.

22:30 **I was going to talk about the nationality of your squadron. It was Australian.**

It was an Australian squadron. Number 464. I've forgotten. I don't know how many Australian squadrons there were in Britain, which I should and I don't. There was 453, 467, 460, famous bomber squadron,

23:00 456 Mosquito night fighter, 464, you know, about a half a dozen or more. They were basically crewed by Australians with a smattering of Poms and other weird people.

How did that smattering fair amongst the Australians?

They had to take the banter and they did it very well indeed. We had a great bloke on our squadron. When we got to Brussels, I think I told you, the luxuries were available

23:30 and my sister had become engaged and I went down and saw in a shop window a Brussels lace table cloth, a beautiful thing, which I could afford, ten pounds it was. That was really heavy dough, but I paid it. I took it back and I was undoing it and Jack saw it and he was a married man in the RAF so he was getting 25% less pay, and he's got a wife and kids.

And what kind of contact did you have with your brothers.

Oh, my brothers were all up north. One was a

24:00 captain in the anti-aircraft in Darwin. My next brother was in the army medical corps as an orderly or what have you, struggling through the dirt, in New Guinea. My eldest brother was in the Middle East, got invalidated back home, so I had no contact with them virtually at all. But by a lovely coincidence of time I attended my next brother's wedding in Melbourne. I was on leave and they got married. That was the only really close contact I had with them during the war.

You weren't able to

24:30 **find out how they were faring?**

Oh, I'd get a note from home, letters home. I've got all my letters that I wrote my mother. She kindly kept them and I have them there. They're pretty terrible English but still, they do remind you of events.

How often would you write?

Well, I was pretty meticulous. Being a member of a large family I suppose you develop this attitude. I used to write I think about once a week or once in ten days. And we had these air letters. First of all we had these

25:00 aerograms which were photographed and miniaturised, then we had these air letters, which are flimsy. You've still got air letters today.

Did the Pacific action get much press in England when you were there?

Not a great deal, well it got well, shall we say, in quotes, headlines, when you sink a battleship or have a, win a great action, that got a, no day to day comment, no, except to say that

25:30 some poor devil's belting the way up to Kuching and you didn't know of the torment of the prisoners of war no. Gosh a friend of mine came back after the war and he was about as white as that post there. He was five stone something.

What were your perceptions of the activity in this side of the world?

On this side of the world. Well, I told you earlier, the worst tummy tumble I had was when the Renown and Repulse were sunk.

26:00 I was brought up to understand that our shield was the British Navy. And I was anxious for my country. I don't know why but I didn't think this country could be invaded, which was probably stupid, but I didn't think so. Submarines, midget submarines up Sydney Harbour, caused a bit of a stir to say the least. But after all we lost thousands of men in the prisoner of war camps, and we knew our blokes were having a

26:30 very tough time. We had to listen to American propaganda, they won the war three times over every week. No, I'm teasing. You had just a general concern for the well being. I didn't think that Melbourne was going to be invaded, or Sydney was going to be invaded. We knew that the top end was obviously vulnerable, which it was

27:00 and to a greater degree than we ever learned during the war, we only really learned publicly about the bombing of Darwin [afterwards]. And we were told lies about how many people who were killed, about half the number that were killed. There was a series of raids, as I've read, on Darwin and other areas up north.

Was there an understanding at that time that you weren't getting the full story?

The understanding about any war is about information.

27:30 Dunkley and I were going to come back here, we were going to win the war. We were going to fly out here, but we didn't get a chance. For which I'm grateful because I'm still here.

The war ended on your birthday.

It did, it ended on my birthday. So I think I'm unique in that. Back in Australia and the war ended on my birthday.

A day of celebrations.

Yes, we were in a

28:00 little nightclub in town, which is the Centreway Arcade, opposite the old Hotel Australia. It goes underground, been used for all sorts of things. Called Navarettis [?] and I was paying for a meal for a few friends and a girl I knew, had worked with years ago. She was in another party over there and she went outside. She came back and said, "The war's over, the war's over." "Oh well, she's always exaggerating." So I went upstairs into Collins Street and she was right.

Were there people running around dancing in the streets?

- 28:30 There were in Sydney as you've seen on film. I don't know what happened in Melbourne, because I went home that night. We had to then, we got called up into the victory march. I've only marched twice in my time down Collins Street and the last time was with my brother. He said he wanted to come down to Melbourne and march with his army unit for a reunion. I said, "You'll never make the distance." He says, "No Pete, do a kind favour and will you walk with me?" So I did. And him among the army. The victory march we were ordered to march. We got this telegram,
- 29:00 we said, "What the hell's happening?" The war's broken out. And away we go, down Swanston Street. All of a sudden I spotted my cousin. She was in the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] and she was a gorgeous looking creature and a great sense of humour and she yelled out my name and started following me down the street 'cause we hadn't seen each other for years. And we dispersed down, it's a place called the Trocadero, where the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] was, just over the bridge. And her father was a brigadier, and she came running up the street
- 29:30 to me with her tie out the back and her hat on the back of her head. And I said, "WRAN Dollery that's no way to wear the king's uniform." And she stopped in her tracks and looked at me, and said, "You bastard." She had a great sense of humour. Now I learnt something about her the other day that made me laugh. A woman told me, when she came up from Flinders on leave, she wanted to get out at Caulfield 'cause she lived near by. The train didn't stop. She got up to the driver beforehand and she said, "Come on, be a sport, just crawl through, just crawl through." She jumped out
- 30:00 and they threw her baggage after her. She's not with us now unfortunately. That march, we went on that. We had another occasion when I said, "The war's broken out again." Knowle and I had finished our operations, we were sent to London on leave and had to go back to the squadron and sign off. We were coming back to the aerodrome at Brussels, looked down, we were in a transport aircraft
- 30:30 of course. I said, "Knowle, there's Woody." Woody was the squadron manager. "What's he doing here?" And he came over and he said, "Are you two fellows ready to leave the aerodrome immediately?" Well, we'd had that particular situation in France when we had the standard readiness to evacuate the aerodrome. Your mind immediately races and I said, "What's happened? Has the war broken out again?" And he grinned and he said, "Here's your ticket, there's your aircraft. The Americans have invited two Australians to be at Cannes for a fortnight", so we did that. That was fun.
- 31:00 **It's amazing, what an opportunity?**
- Yes, it was an opportunity. And they gave us the Hotel Montana, they had the best hotel and the best dance band was down at the Mirima at the waterfront. And one morning at breakfast I said to Knowle, "That woman's been in to breakfast two or three times." She was older than we. "That's strange, because it is allied forces in this place." So I
- 31:30 was cheeky enough to sort of say good morning to her. She replied to me in very pure English. That raised my queries, so I said to her, transpired her husband was away at the war, she hadn't seen him for six years, a French man. She lived at the Chateau. She supplied a lot of information to the Americans and the intelligence bases. And the Germans were billeted in her house. The German colonel one morning had breakfast, her dog was annoying him so he shot it in front of her, nice man.
- 32:00 So Barbara, we tracked around with her and she was grateful to have the company. She came to us very excited and said, "My husband's coming home." Well, that was wonderful. She came out later in the day and said, "He wants us to come out to dinner." I said, "Don't be ridiculous Barbara, you haven't seen him for six years. He doesn't want to buy us dinner at black market prices and they're horrendous." And it happened, and I realised why. He didn't know his wife, and he knew that we knew his wife and he wanted a bridge.
- 32:30 And he sat at that table grinning, with his very limited English, looking at his wife, and we were the bridge, and we got a free meal. It was good. Poor devil, six years, prisoner of war.
- So many stories. There were so many people having trouble adjusting back to....**
- Well, you imagine apart from war. If your partner had disappeared for six years. It would obviously be a strange atmosphere. So, there we are. Lost
- 33:00 track of Barbara, I don't know where she is now.
- Did you have trouble catching up with friends, back in Australia?**
- Yes. Two school chums, we went through school together, I caught up with them fairly early. Lived in Croydon, met a few people. I didn't meet old friends. That's the answer to that, I didn't. I didn't pick up friends from pre-war except these two friends from school.
- 33:30 It was a very strange atmosphere I can assure you. And we who had been in England and I know I am not the only one who has said this, because it has actually been written, we were not ostracised when we came home to Australia, but there was a feeling, you blokes have been on holiday, the real war's been up north. It was that sort of feeling. And when I was asked that question some years ago about five, ten years ago, and I said, "Yeah, that was true." And this woman said, "Well, I've heard it and I've read it in the papers."
- 34:00 It's a very natural reaction isn't it? Well, these fellows went over to England to have a holiday while we

were. A good holiday too.

I think a lot of that comes from the funny, happy stories that are told.

Of course it does.

Not the more difficult ones that are perhaps suppressed.

Yes, I suppose so. Your question, sir.

We were talking about the 'Australian-ness' of your squadron.

Ah,

34:30 you're right too. In complement, at one stage we had a Pommy CO who had been in Australia and I'd have to say this, and I wasn't the only one to say it, he wasn't our favourite son. And we had an Australian CO. We only had two or three Englishmen in the squadron, the rest were Australian. There is a photograph there and I could tell you, looking, straight off.

35:00 There was an odd Australian in. These three squadrons formed the wing. 21 RAF, 464 Australian, 487 New Zealand. That complement of aeroplanes formed 140 Wing. There was a couple of Australians in the New Zealand squadron and one New Zealander in our squadron. In those days they didn't say, "Fush and Chups." That's come post war, did you know that? I'm sure it has. I tease my daughter in law, she's one of them.

35:30 **Did you used to play a lot of sport?**

No. Didn't play sport, it was not regular. You didn't have the time for that. We used to play a game called football, combination of rugby, soccer and Australian rules, and it got pretty vicious. Now to show you the camaraderie of the RAF I remember the game we played in a hangar at Thorney Island

36:00 which had been bombed in 1940. Had no roof and the door was jammed half open but the offices along the side and the rest of the building was intact. And there was this great flat area which was covered in snow and so we played this game. Of course we scrambled all over the place and a strange senior officer came in through that bottom gate, and he was scragged before he got to the offices. Now that was the camaraderie of the game. He was alright, he bought us drinks that night. Now,

36:30 we didn't play sport, there was no, oh, you know. Somebody'd pick up, I don't know if we had a cricket bat, somebody do something, ten minutes of this and that. We played volley ball, somebody throwing a ball up, but not a lot of sport.

Do you think the Australian crew were fit?

They started off fit. I can tell you a story about myself there. They started off fit. But smoking and drinking and long hours in the air

37:00 yes, you had to be fit. But I used to play water polo before the war, for the Melbourne Swimming Club. And after the war I went down to the Melbourne Swimming Club and they were playing a practice match for the under 18s and Peter Bennett was the captain. And he was short and he said, "What about hopping in?" I said, "Cut it out Peter, I've been drinking, smoking and doing nothing for three years." He said, "Come on, be a sport." I floated out exhausted after ten minutes. That was the last game of water polo I ever played. And that was me fitness.

37:30 **Just wondering about nicknames for each other as well.**

You've already heard them. Oh well, Earn Dunkley, was 'Dunk', Knowle Shrimpton was 'Shrimp'. I don't think they called me 'Puddle'. The kids at school used to call me 'Puddle'. I want to use that as an address, Lois won't let me. I want ppuddle@bigpond .

38:00 Oh, there were a few, you'll always shorten a name, surname. CO Iredale was called 'Bob', he wasn't called 'Iredale'. That's a difficult name. No, that's what'd happen. And 'Shorty' Dawson. Shorty Dawson was a tall fellow of course. Had to be. 'Lofty' Walker was a small fellow.

38:30 **Even though you were fighting for England, was there a lot of pride in being an Australian squadron?**

Yes. Absolutely. I suppose there was an undercurrent of, "We'll show em." I don't know if that's true, but that helps to answer your question.

A sense of needing to prove yourselves?

That we were better than the rest of 'em. The Canadians were very good by the way.

Do you think they had the same motivation?

39:00 Well, we were all part of the Empire in those days. But proud empires fade away, it says so in the hymn and this one did fade.

Do you think there were any particular Australian characteristics about

About Australians.

About the squadron you were in, that you really notice when you went over to the UK?

Well, we weren't as disciplined, in a gentlemanly sort of fashion, as were the Poms. We were not. That's all, you know.

39:30 Well disciplined larrikins.

39:37 **INTERVIEW ENDS**