Australians at War Film Archive

Clarence Gardner (Clarrie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **You've got a lot to tell us and we really want to hear a lot of detail too so when we get into the detail you don't have to hold back you can tell us everything that you can remember in the more detailed part, I'll first talk about your life, and first start with your life more generally.**

Yes, well before we start I felt that I'm going on my first solo in a Tiger Moth.

01:00 **Well the good thing about this is there is no right or wrong way to go about it so we're going to listen to you and respond to you and we don't have to do it the exact way, we just have these sort of general directions that we are supposed to take. There are no right or wrong answers of course, it's all happening and it's your perceptions that are valuable to us.**

Yes fair enough.

So my notes tell me that you were born in Streaky Bay.

01:30 That's right. I suppose you've never heard of it have you?

Tell us a little bit about it OK.

Well if you can imagine the Great Australian Bight and Port Lincoln at the bottom, Streaky Bay is about half way between there and the head of the Bight, Eucla.

And what was it like growing up there?

Well it was a typical little country town and mostly relied on agriculture, sheep, cattle and wheat barley and oats and so forth

02:00 and a very interesting small town to grow up in because most of houses were within three or four hundred yards of the beach and so could even during lunchtime we could slip down and have a swim and be back by the first class.

In the middle of school you would actually go to the beach?

In the middle of summer, usually yeah.

02:30 **And tell me about your brothers and sisters; well you really had brothers, older brothers?**

Oh I'm number 5 of 7. Yes.

And in what order were the brothers and sisters?

The sister was the eldest then two boys, three boys rather and then a daughter and son after me.

Well tell me about your father.

03:00 Well my father was a General agent and he had a couple of insurance agencies and he was a wheat buyer and also virtually general agent in the town and auctioneer, what was the General Motors agency before Holden

03:30 selling Buicks, Oldsmobiles, Pontiacs, Chevrolets and those cars, he was the main general agent in the town.

How many people had motor cars back then?

Well that was the beginning of the motor car era really pretty well probably 1922, 23 were the first cars in the town

04:00 Might have one or two at the very end of the First War.

We need to double check the sound I think. You were telling me about the early days of motor cars and your father sold motor cars tell me a little bit more about that.

Well there were only about three of four main motor car dealers on the whole of the main of Eyre Peninsula,

04:30 we're talking Port Lincoln and Ceduna, so he was one of the very early car agents

Did he have to know quite a lot about cars?

No he wasn't mechanical at all but there were two or three garages in the town starting up and…

Sounds like he did a little bit of everything, he was multi-talented.

05:00 He did yeah, he was very well known on the Peninsula because he was a standing auctioneer and he used to do most of the auctions between virtually Port Lincoln and Ceduna.

And he was quite a community man?

Yes as a matter of fact he was a, he has a drive between the main road and the football ground named after him the J F Gardner Drive.

Oh my goodness.

In fact the equivalent of the Brownlow medal is named after him, it's the JF Gardner medal. For football mmm.

And how did that come about?

Well he had been president of the football association for many years and he actually managed a country team

06:00 to tour Yorke Peninsula in the early days of football there.

Did he play himself?

No he didn't funnily enough. No he was a very active man otherwise, he played tennis quite a bit but he didn't play football.

Did you play football?

Oh I played as a kid but I was very light, I was only about 9 stone and

06:30 the headmaster when he left realized that I was getting knocked about on the football field so I think the best thing that I can do is give you one of my white shirts and an umpire's whistle, so I umpired football for about 8 years. It was quite interesting. I used to train with the local team and travel with them to outgoing areas for playing

07:00 as just, as one of the boys.

Oh that's great. Tell me a little bit about your mum?

Well she was a very active worker in the town and in fact she laid the foundation stone for the maternity wing in the local hospital as a reward for her activities in raising money for the hospital and so forth.

07:30 She was just a local girl, she was one of nine children, very unusual name, Smith.

She had her hands full with seven of you.

Yes she did. But she had a fair bit of help from the eldest of the kids by the time I came along and we had help in the house.

08:00 pretty well all the time.

Were all her brothers and sister nearby as you were growing up?

Yes they lived in the local district, several of them are farmers, farmers or farmer's wives.

Tell me a little bit about the depression and that effect on your childhood.

Well I came as number five in the family,

08:30 three ahead of me went to boarding school in Adelaide, however the depression hit 1929-30 and in particular when it was my turn to go and that prevented me from going to boarding school. I got the rest of my education when I went into the Air Force actually. To enter the Air Force in those days you had to have

09:00 a leaving honours and the local school only went to leaving, I had my leaving and my intermediate certificate and I had applied a couple of times to the Air Force because I was interested in flying and because of the fact that I didn't have leaving honours my educational qualifications weren't good

enough.

And how did you end up by getting the opportunity then?

Well by the time war came

09:30 and the education restrictions were lifted and they were only too glad to get people who had the leaving certificate.

How did you feel at the time about not going to boarding school?

Well, disappointed of course but I probably, it didn't affect me that much because I got a job straight away and started with a wool broking company Goldsborough Mort

10:00 and Company and that was interesting and along the lines of my father and I progressed reasonably to become an auctioneer, a livestock auctioneer and then beyond real estate auctioneering and possibly wool auctioneering, so I was not that disappointed.

That's where you saw yourself headed in that direction?

Mmm.

10:30 **What were the auctions like, I've never been to one?**

Oh haven't you, they are just typical auctions, it wasn't just real estate and so forth we'd have general auctions for household effects and so forth, yeah they were quite interesting.

How did they call out, how did your father call them?

I beg your pardon?

How did your father call the auctions?

11:00 How did he call it, oh well he was recognized as the best auctioneer on the Eyre Peninsula he, as a result, got most of the good sales.

So you did Scouts as well? Boy Scouts.

Yes.

How did that affect you?

I loved it.

11:30 It gave us an opportunity to lead and I was always a bit interested in leading being a small bloke you had to be trying to be good at something, yes I finished up Trail Leader and then Troop Leader and we attended two huge camps in Adelaide during the period I was in the Boy Scouts.

12:00 Jamborees they called them in those days, people from all over Australia and beyond and quite a lot of overseas scouts came and attended it.

And what were some of your favourite activities that you did within scouts?

Oh the camps of course, getting away from home and camping alongside the beach and so forth, they were the main interests. I didn't go beyond,

12:30 I wasn't a King's scout because I don't think there were any King's scouts on Eyre Peninsula at the time.

Did the Scouts come in handy later in life?

Well I think it assisted me in getting a commission of course but having had or sort of having had very

13:00 elementary lessons in looking after kids probably somebody thought I might have some ability to look after men ultimately.

Big kids, big grand kids.

We had a lot of those in the Air Force too.

We'll get you to tell more about those stories when we get to them eventually. Tell me about your first job at the stock agents?

13:30 Well it didn't entail auctioneering of course that was for the branch manager, I was only a junior and mainly looked after the sale of merchandises. In those days at Streaky Bay we had a fortnightly boat come from Adelaide with stores, food, fruit and vegetables and stores required by farmers

14:00 oil and super and so forth and so we stocked all that type of merchandise, so we were virtually glorified shopkeepers the junior staff and then periodically we'd be giving the branch manager assistance in livestock at sales but at Streaky Bay they were

14:30 very, very irregular that it wasn't the general practice to have livestock sales there when I joined, they did afterwards.

What were the most popular items, would you say that were sold and what did they cost, do you remember?

Wow, well we used to sell quite a bit of motor oil to the farmers for instance.

15:00 although only in 4 gallon drums cost, be about 5 shillings a gallon from memory.

Pretty different from now.

I'll say it is. Petrol was about 2 shillings a gallon.

15:30 **What are the aspects you liked about the stock agents?**

Oh well you were dealing with pretty well, with adults for a start, men entirely were men like I can't

16:00 just can't recollect any particular aspect of it that was appealing, we had quite a bit of spare time more or less in a small branch like at Streaky Bay, so again we were still pretty close to the beach and we made use of that as soon as knock off time came.

What did you do at the beach?

Well, the jetty

16:30 we had a shark proof enclosure at the end of the jetty and it was a pretty attractive part of the town of course, summer time every day, take a sandwich down to the beach and probably be there about 3 or 4 hours.

You must have been fit?

Yeah, we were all pretty fit, yeah.

Compared to now when everybody is watching television.

Yeah.

17:00 **And when you were growing up, did you have any contact with men who had served in the First World War?**

Very limited. I had two uncles killed in France, my father's half brothers and three others, three brothers of my mother all returned but gassed, two of them

17:30 were gassed and badly wounded and so I saw the result of war, yes not very attractive.

Did you talk with them about the war?

Not very much no. They were pretty reticent talking about their experiences. They went right through the Middle East and

18:00 they were there for practically the whole war.

Did you have any particular perceptions at that time about war that you would have gathered?

Well I don't know whether it was particularly as a result of the war but two of them were great blokes but they drank pretty heavily and I feel that almost certainly

18:30 that was a result of the war, their war experiences.

And your dad by that time already had four children at the time of the war.

Mmm that's right.

Yes so he was a bit older then.

Yes that prevented him from joining up.

Tell me a little bit about your perceptions of when the Second World War broke out, where you were.

19:00 Well I was at a small place called Wudinna on the railway line about 80 miles from Streaky Bay and I joined up in 1940 and we were in what was called the Air Force Reserve it was before the Empire Air Training Scheme commenced we were given the draft of lessons

19:30 periodically that we had to do and submit mainly on very elementary navigation, yeah mainly navigation, aircraft silhouettes to identify and that type of thing and we were on the reserve for about ten

20:00 months before we were actually called up and went into camp.

So when you're on reserve you are you still live as a civilian and you're doing the courses.

Oh yes, simply because they didn't have the schools to accommodate us.

When did you do the course work, the actual learning part after work or at weekends?

Oh yes.

20:30 I got a fair bit of help from my wife on those. We had some things that were a little bit beyond our original education, trigonometry and that type of thing, my wife had flown through her leaving honours and was about to start a course at university in Law. Her mother died unfortunately and she had to go home and look after her

21:00 father and two brothers but she was excellent, she was an outstanding scholar.

When did you meet her in the course of…

I met her at Streaky Bay actually, she owned a hairdressing salon in fact owned two on the west coast and we met at Streaky Bay and Ceduna

21:30 we both lived at Ceduna for a couple of years.

And when you met, how long did you court for, I think your wedding was in '41?

About a year mmm. Fast worker, wasn't I? Yeah we were married in January '41

22:00 and I was still in Australia for best part of a year I suppose in training at Parafield initially in South Australia, Point Cook in Victoria on twin engines, then we were at Bradfield Park in Sydney, posted to Canada to do our

22:30 advanced flying training and on the Mariposa, in fact we were training over, we were going to travel as civilians, we had our cabins allotted and so forth and an excellent lunch I remember and a huge dining room on the Mariposa and over the Tannoy system or public address you call it, "All Air Force personnel report

23:00 on the wharf with all equipment." and we learnt afterwards that the Japanese submarines had just attacked Sydney Harbour and they had knocked off quite a bit of shipping outside in the Pacific and so they dragged us off and we continued to do our training in Australia.

And you would have gone to Canada otherwise?

Oh yes we were due to go on the ship.

23:30 **And what were the reasons why you were later sent to England without the Canada training in the ATS [Advanced Training School]**

Well we had training then on twin engine aircraft at Point Cook that we would have got in Canada but they weren't available when we embarked from Sydney.

Tell me a little bit about your training.

Well we started on Tiger Moths in Parafield

24:00 an odd one or two fellow had flown a bit before but the majority, there were about 40 in our squad and only a couple of them had flown a bit before, so we were absolute sprogs really but had excellent pilots who were much older than we were generally,

24:30 we were mainly young 20's and they were into their 40's and so forth and they had fellows who were not servicemen prior to the war, they had just done civilian flying, sporting flying really, then from there we went to Bradfield Park on the way supposedly to Canada

25:00 and it was the summer of 1941 too, we were sent to Richmond, trench digging for about 3 months. That didn't appeal too much to fellows who had never had a shovel in their hands but then we did a very short course on Tiger Moths at Temora in New South Wales

25:30 and then posted to Point Cook fly air speed occupants.

And during this time you were living on base was it allowed to live on base or did you have to be apart from your wife?

Oh yes we had to live on base. You usually had weekend leave, most of the married chaps

26:00 had their wives living in Melbourne or renting spots in Melbourne and so forth and so we weren't completely apart all that time.

How were the Oxfords different to the Tiger Moths?

Oh well they were twin engines for a start and a bigger aircraft and much more of what we expected to

fly when we got to England but in a smaller

26:30 type of course, they weren't war planes as such they were purely training.

Had you been in a plane before you signed up for the Air Force?

Oh yes. I had a few flips with Kingsford Smith when he was barnstorming.

Tell me more about that.

Well that happened from Parafield

27:00 before the war, three or four years before the war, yes they came to the country towns periodically usually landed on spots, like a racecourse for instance in any flat area, reasonably flat area that was clear with the sort of aircraft they had, all single engine of course and you could have a

27:30 fifteen minute flip for about five shillings in those days.

Was it frightening?

Oh no not frightening, but exhilarating for somebody who had never been in the air before.

That was your first go?

Yeah.

And what did you do, did it go upside down?

No, no aerobatics, no just a flip around to show you the town and

28:00 it was only two or three miles from Streaky Bay when I first flew.

And this got you excited about flying?

Yes it did. Yes I was always interested in flying from a young kid and I took any opportunity to have a flip with these fellows coming around barnstorming.

28:30 **And tell me again about when you were a boy and you saw a plane fly over for the first time.**

Well we were told at school that an Italian airman called Marcus De Pietro was flying over from Perth to Adelaide in a seaplane. It was the type of aircraft they used in the Schneider Cup Race,

29:00 in fact I'm not sure that he didn't win one. We were out on the football ground or the playing area, the sports area, two hours waiting for the aeroplane to come over and finally we could hear it and finally it went overhead and it was about as big as a crow at about 10,000ft and anybody like I was who was mad keen to fly, it certainly was

29:30 an exhilarating experience to see this fellow up way up in the sky, we'd never seen an aeroplane before

That was the first one.

Absolutely the first one.

And how old were you.

I was nine I think. Yeah about 1924

And you didn't get to see another until the Kingsford Smith…

Oh yes. Well it would have been probably

30:00 several years before they landed at Streaky Bay yeah, or any other country town in South Australia mainly.

We'll talk more about your training because I want to hear more about the kinds of things that you did and get a general sense of the timing and everything, you only did the training for about a year, the better part of a year before it was time to go to England.

30:30 Well our training at Point Cook entailed cross country trips, you usually did that in pairs, the pilot took instructions from the navigator who was another trainee pilot and so we used to fly from say the general landmarks from Geelong would be the You Yangs and Mount Elephant at Lismore

31:00 and Cape Otway, those sort of landmarks, it was OK as long as there wasn't much cloud around but if it was a cloudy day you had to get down underneath them and follow the main road or the railway but generally speaking you had a pretty good, a few pretty good landmarks, Mt Buninyong near Ballarat was another

31:30 landmark and the lakes of course all easily visible from 3 or 4 thousand feet.

About what was the…

Probably an hour to an hour and a half would be a general cross country flight, training flight.

And while you were doing that flying

32:00 **about how long did you get a chance to do it in terms of hours, before you had to go by yourself?**

Well Tiger Moths, I think I took about 7 hours before I went solo, I'm not too sure about Oxfords probably about the same.

Not long.

No not very long but they shortened as your experience,

32:30 the hours that you had on the aircraft, that you are going to fly operationally were reduced, we can talk a bit more about that later perhaps when we got on to Halifaxs and Lancasters, we had very little dual instruction before we were operational.

Tell me about your first solo takeoff

In a Tiger Moth?

33:00 Well you would have to say exhilarating for one thing because the instructor had to have enough confidence in you to feel that you were going to bring it down without breaking it, which of course happened a few times, blokes who found

33:30 the main difficulty in judging the height, holding off we call it, yes two or three of my friends who were as keen as I was in being a pilot simply couldn't land an aircraft, couldn't land a Tiger Moth, their judgment wasn't good enough for them to land satisfactorily, so they were what we call, scrubbed.

34:00 They were scrubbed as pilots, they continued their training as either, if they were good mathematically for instance they'd be navigators if their maths was a bit short, because a lot of the fellows by the time we went in had only done intermediate certificate standard and if they weren't

34:30 probably above average in maths they would certainly be wireless operators or gunners.

And you were sure that you wanted to be a pilot, you were…

Well I thought because of my size I thought I was a monty to be a gunner, fit into a rear turret very handily but fortunately I was just able to keep my head above water as a pilot.

35:00 **OK we've just got a few minutes left on this tape so I will have you tell me in short just about when you finished up training, did you have a farewell before it was time to go to England.**

No. No official farewell, we were just posted to Bradfield Park, Sydney and

35:30 we did have pre-em, what they call pre-embarkation leave but they couldn't call it that because they couldn't give any indication to the enemy that we were going to Bradfield Park for a ship to embarkation, so we knew that our training in Australia had been completed, so obviously we would be going to England

36:00 and we had no idea whether it would be via America, the Panama or the Suez or via the Cape, almost certainly not the Suez then because that was still a pretty precarious shipping lane, so almost certainly would have been via South Africa or through the Panama, we finished up going via South Africa.

36:30 **And what was the name of the boat you were on, the ship?**

It was an old Holland America line packet called the Western Land, not a very comfortable ship, but I was commissioned then and I got a cabin and most of my mates were down about 5 decks below and it was very, very uncomfortable

37:00 for them, hammocks slung in what was the dining room during the day and they'd sling the hammocks at night and so forth yeah.

And you had a cabin, how was that?

I had to share a cabin with another bloke, I shared the cabin with the padre who was on the ship going to England at that time too.

You got to be friends with him?

Padre Thrush, he was obviously called birdie. Yeah.

37:30 **And we may ask you a little bit more about the conditions on that ship, you can tell me a little bit more before the tape runs out. What was the food like?**

Our food was reasonable, I'd have to say that because there were civilians travelling in it as well you see, we were virtually travelling as civilians, the dining room facilities and the food and so forth were as

available

38:00 to a modest sort of a civilian ship. Nothing like the Mariposa, I can assure you.

What did the boys get up to in their spare time?

Two-up mainly. By the time we'd cleared the Sydney Harbour Bridge a pair of twins named Carmody had the blankets

38:30 out on the deck and they commanded the two-up school the whole of the way to England or to South Africa, I think they went over from South Africa to England they went on a different ship because we called at Durbin for about a week and then Cape Town and we were taken off the ship at Cape Town and went out to a big transit camp called Stellenbosch.

39:00 From there we were actually conducted to the wharf on two occasions for embarkation before we actually left because the German U-boats had sunk about 12 or 13 ships off the Cape and of course they wouldn't put more than two or three hundred partly trained

39:30 airmen on any ship going between Cape Town and England.

Too risky.

Mmmm?

Too risky.

Yes, yeah.

Well we might ask you more about that after we swap tapes.

Tape 2

00:32 **Now OK you were telling me about the ship that you went over to England on and there were some dangers obviously in going from South Africa to England at the time from U-boats…**

Yeah the losses there were very heavy off Cape Town at the time and as I say we were at the Stellenbosch transit camp there were quite a lot of

01:00 Brits from ships that had been sunk by U-boats both airmen and sailors, Americans, it was a huge camp actually, yes the losses were very heave between just outside of Cape Town and on the route from there to Sierra Leone which was pretty well a direct route to

01:30 the UK.

Did you know about that at the time…

Oh we knew about that, why we had been held up, oh yes they told us quite clearly why we'd been held up in Cape Town but that didn't worry us much because we were getting plenty of invitations to be guests and so forth of the local South African people, most hospitable.

Were you billeted at that time?

No, no we were in camps but there was always a list in the dining room area, a list of hosts who were keen to host the dominion fellows as they called them, or as they called us, the dominion fellows.

So that was your first time overseas?

Oh yes. Yes we sailed from Sydney and went well south of

02:30 Tasmania and called into Perth for a couple of days.

What were your perceptions of the South Africans?

Well they were most friendly people of course, the colour bar was very distinct in those days, I mean quite a lot of buses for instance, blacks weren't able to

03:00 travel, some buses they had to take 3 rear seats, only in the rear, seats at the back, they weren't allowed to swim on the same beach as the whites and the natives were operating rickshaw services

03:30 and they had a small rickshaw, and they'd take you anywhere, as a matter of fact we were warned against them because particularly at night, we were warned before we got off the ship not to get into a rickshaw after dark because they could nick you down to the doubtful sections, quarters of Durban for instance and

04:00 knock your wallet off and that happened on a couple of occasions to a couple of fellows.

What were your perceptions of the arrangement in South Africa at that time do you remember what you thought about it?

What, about the colour bar? Well it wasn't altogether that foreign to us because the situation between whites and our own aboriginals in those days wasn't

04:30 much better, they were generally speaking in Eyre Peninsula where I grew up, aboriginals or mainly the half castes were very good shearers and that section of the aboriginal population were well accepted because they were good workers and paid exactly the same as

05:00 the full whites and generally speaking they were great people. But from the point of the Australian white attitude to the full blacks in 1920, wasn't that different from South Africa.

There were still a lot of

05:30 **prejudices…**

Well they were never given an opportunity, nobody would give them the opportunity to work, if they did they wouldn't be paid money, they would be paid tobacco, sugar, tea and flour and so forth and that's about all, except for these half castes who I say were very good shearers and they were accepted in exactly the same way as full whites.

06:00 **Going back to the ship again, so you said there weren't a lot of fears even though you knew it was dangerous, there wasn't a lot of fear amongst the boys headed out to South Africa?**

Oh no, we were escorted from Perth to South Africa by a British cruiser and we were in

06:30 I suppose, just trying to think how many, there might have been 7 or 8 ships being escorted by two Royal Navy or RAN [Royal Australian Navy] ships, so we felt they wouldn't send us off if there was any more risk than the average shipping.

Tell me about coming into England.

07:00 Well we could hear the depth charges being shot off from the Naval ships of course, that would occur obviously when it was pretty certain there were submarines about. Coming into England, well none of us, well almost none of us had been

07:30 out of Australia of course it was pretty unusual for young people to go outside Australia in those days and I think we saw Northern Ireland first and of course there was great excitement when we landed, we finally landed at Liverpool

08:00 and immediately in train to Bournemouth where there were big holding camps and we were then billeted in the hotels that had been taken over by the air force.

Were you with all Australians or were you…

Yes, we were mostly billeted together as a trainer but there were quite a lot of Canadians there by then, there were mostly Australians or Canadians.

08:30 **How did they get on with one another?**

Oh very well, yeah. We were there for several weeks and by then they weren't ready for us to commence flying training so we, I shared a room with a Canadian in the old Royal Bath Hotel in Bournemouth, very comfortable.

09:00 **What did you do with your time during that period?**

Well they endeavoured to organize some revision work mainly navigation, elementary navigational study and so forth but without much success I must say, it was pretty hard particularly the NCO's [Non-Commissioned Officers] were billeted in a different pub,

09:30 pretty hard to round them up for lessons, having just arrived in England for the first time. But they had, every weekend there would be a major concert party down from London, like the London Philharmonic and so forth, they put concerts on in Bournemouth, they treated us very well

10:00 and food and everything for wartime England was pretty acceptable.

What were your perceptions of the English in your early weeks?

Well they were most hospitable for a start, again there was always a list of hostesses who or hosts who were able to take either one or more or two or three fellows would go together

10:30 and generally we were confined to the area fairly close around Bournemouth, we could go to London of course at weekends and the entertainment was arranged pretty well the whole of the time I was in England by an outfit called the Lady

11:00 Frances Ryder Hospitality Scheme and all you had to do was write to their headquarters in London and

say that the three of us would like to go to Ireland, Scotland or Wales and within a couple of mails you would get a reply to say “Your host or hostess will be so and so, you will be met at so and so railway station

11:30 by one of her staff and the railway times”. It was a marvellous setup really.

Did you make some particular friends through that?

Very much so, yes. We mostly visited, I flew, I did 2 tours of operations. You au fait with tours? First

12:00 tour of operation is 30 in bomber command, 30 trips over Germany, second tour of 20 if you were lucky enough to do the first one and so I took a lot of leave with my navigator who flew both tours with me and with another pilot

12:30 who was from Geelong incidentally, but he was about 7 years older than I and so he was regarded as too old for operational flying by the time we got to England but he did other service flying.

And you made friends with some local people during that time?

Oh well the people who hosted our leaves were just marvellous

13:00 they went out their way to make us feel completely at home and so forth and when we were operating we were getting pretty regular leave, we were getting 10 days every 6 weeks but in the 6 weeks you might have done 12 operations over Germany, so you were

13:30 ready for a spell and they just told us to do exactly what we liked, generally they’d have the best in the country, Ireland and Scotland for instance there’d be some shooting, some fishing and general sight seeing and so forth yeah.

What did you do when you began your training again, prior to beginning the missions, tell me about your training in England.

14:00 Well having done twin engine flying on Oxfords we converted then on to wartime aircraft which was Wellingtons they were twin engine jet frames, marvellous aeroplane really, but they were on the way out by the time we got there, they were still operating for

14:30 such jobs as dropping arms and armament to Yugoslavia and that sort of area, yeah they were still doing that sort of work, but before we got on to those I was posted to an outfit called the Air Transport Auxiliary ATA, and we were based

15:00 in the Midlands and an aircraft like an Anson which would take 7 or 8 civilian pilots, they were in ATA uniform but they weren’t wartime pilots, in fact several of them were young women, the pilot would pick up 7 or 8 of these and take them around various aircraft

15:30 factories, they would pick up the aircraft either new or re-serviced and deliver to the squadrons, they might fly a Spitfire in the morning and a Halifax in the afternoon. Quite remarkable pilots they were.

Men and women do this?

Yes. 2 or 3. I flew with two or three quite young women, they were only about in the mid 20’s.

16:00 **And how long did you do this…**

Oh I did that for about 5 weeks, 5 weeks I suppose it would be. Remember Amy Johnson? Yeah well

I think you mentioned it to the person you talked with on the telephone to.

Yes, well she was in it. Jimmy Mullerson who was a pilot. I was saying my father was a general agent. He was agent for the first air service

16:30 at Streaky Bay and Jimmy Mullerson was a pretty well known pilot in those days. He flew one of the old Junkers, he was in the West Coast Service I think they called it. I knew him a bit before because he used to come home with my father. Yes, well actually Amy Johnson

17:00 flew into the estuary of the Thames and I’m not sure whether the aircraft was recovered or not, I think it was later on but they were quite outstanding pilots.

So you learned about all these different aircraft?

Well I flew in several of them just as what we called second dickie, I was allowed to turn the fuel cocks on and off, that’s about all I did

17:30 but we had our wings by then, we got our wings at Point Cook and so we were qualified pilots as such, yeah I flew in several different types of aircraft but just as second dickie. The old Whitley was one, they were actually just still flying.

18:00 But that was quite an interesting experience really.

And then they prepared you for (UNCLEAR)

Well then we were posted to Lichfield to convert on to Wellingtons and then again that was virtually service experience because we were flying

18:30 aircraft that were still operating and then you had find a crew which, crewing up was an interesting procedure. Usually there are about, when we did ours anyway, 300 airmen in an assembly hall and the CO [Commanding Officer] said

19:00 that "The purpose you are here is to find a crew for yourself to fly Wellingtons". You needed five: pilot, navigator, rear gunner, wireless operator and a bomb aimer and then later on when we converted on to Halifaxes and Lancasters you had to find another mid upper gunner and a flight engineer.

19:30 In the first instance at Lichfield, you had to walk around the crowd and if you saw a navigator for instance, with wings on. "You flying with anyone?" "No". "What about having a go with me?" And the same thing to a rear gunner and a bomb aimer and that's how you crewed up.

Did you know anything about the fellows?

Not the slightest. I had never seen the men in their lives before, never seen each other.

20:00 It sounds a strange way but how else would you do it? And so having crewed up, my navigator was also a junior officer pilot officer and the other three were NCO's [Non Commissioned Officers], sergeants, they were flight sergeants I think. So we began our

20:30 conversion on to Wellingtons and pretty well the same procedure on Oxfords we did what called circuits and bumps, circuits and landings and then daylight cross countries, across to Northern Ireland, usually Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Midlands from Lichfield and then on to night flying instruction

21:00 flying across countries and then you were ready to convert on to four engines, which we did on to Halifaxes initially and they were usually pretty clapped out old service aircraft and the same procedure again and so forth, across countries

21:30 and then night flying and then finally a very limited, very limited conversion on to Lancasters which we then knew we were going to fly and I think I had about from memory about 6 hours daylight and about 6 hours night dual instruction and about another 20 or 30

22:00 hours solo flying before we got on the squadron.

And the Lancasters by that time had the extra engines. It had been beefed up in other words.

And the Halifaxes too. Yeah they were marvellous aircraft.

Oh I will definitely have to hear more about the Lancaster in a bit. You only had a very short time on it before you began the missions.

A very short time when you realize what

22:30 the requirement of a civilian pilot would be. But of course they were losing so many at that time that they couldn't afford to use any more hours on a conversion procedure and they had to get the trained crews

23:00 on to the squadrons.

Now I believe you crewed up with your cousin.

Well that happened at Lindholme when we were looking for a mid upper gunner and a flight engineer. Again we were in the assembly room and one of the instructors was calling the roll alphabetically and he got to G, Gardner and I said

23:30 "Present". And after a bit of a delay a fellow at the back of the hall said present, the instructor looked at his sheet and he said "Well I've only got one Gardner here which one are you?" I said "I'm CC". He said "Well, which one are you?", at the back of the hall. He said "I'm DD", so I looked him up out of curiosity more than anything, I had no idea whether he'd already crewed up so finally I

24:00 found out that his name was Donald Drew Gardner and he lived on Yorke Peninsula. I knew my father had lived there as a very young boy and in fact his father died when he was three and he had remarried and so he spent quite a bit of his boyhood

24:30 in Yorke Peninsula and we finally found out that our grandfathers were brothers and so he hadn't been shot down but he had to land off Spain. Anyway on an island off Spain, on a mud flat and they had run out of fuel on an operation they did to northern Italy

25:00 and he had lost the rest of his crew so he was just an odd bod looking to crew up and yes we flew 30 trips over Germany together.

And you've kept in touch ever since.

Yes. I spoke to him a couple of weeks ago. He's a very successful farmer.

25:30 **Tell me about your first mission, your first operation.**

First one? First one was to a place called Leverkusen, I went as second dickie, the idea being that you sit in the second pilot's seat to see what an operational crew does and get some idea what search light evasion

26:00 and fighter evasion and what an experienced pilot would take, generally the idea, and of course you also get the experience of path finder target indicators and so forth and what to look for and what

26:30 tactics you should take in evading search lights and so forth. I didn't get any experience of that nature because the target was completely cloud covered, so virtually we didn't see the target indicators and we had to bomb on the navigator's dead reckoning.

27:00 Actually path finders really were just perfecting their methods when I started and for the for the first few operations I didn't get much assistance from the PFF [Pathfinder Force] but we had to rely on our navigation dead reckoning to a large extent. Later on in the first

27:30 tour we got quite a lot of help from bombers, have you heard of the master bombers?

Tell me about the master bombers.

Well generally they were very experienced fellows, chaps who had done a full tour, many of them had done 40 or 50 ops over Germany but in some instances they flew in Lancasters,

28:00 the same as we did, others more frequently, they had been flying the Mosquitos twin engines, which were about twice as fast as we were for one thing and they would fly on the perimeter of the target area and if the attack had been affected, say by a stronger wind than we anticipated and the bombs were falling short of the target,

28:30 the master bomber would be able to tell us by radio telephone to keep our attack up windward of the target indicators and so forth. That was their main purpose to know how the attack was formulating and if it was not as successful as they had hoped

29:00 because there had been a change of wind velocity from what we had been told, they would be able to, as they were flying at a much lower altitude than we were, they would, would be able to pick up the fact that the attack was developing short of the target and the bomb aimers could correct their

29:30 attack accordingly.

There were obviously many, many dangers that you were experiencing. Can you describe some of those to me?

Well fighter attack was the main danger. We were usually flying between 18,000 and 21,000 feet and collisions were another

30:00 positive danger because you realized that in most attacks there were 500 4-engine aircraft and often up to 800 and occasionally up to 1000, all flying, aiming to be over the same target which was probably a square mile say, if it was a city,

30:30 at about the same time within say a quarter of an hour. On takeoff we would be briefed to fly in phases of three minutes banked up in altitudes from 18,000 to 20,000 feet at 500 feet intervals, you had say 5

31:00 different altitudes of 4-engine bombers flying at about 3-minute intervals stepped up like that, now if the navigators at the back were a bit off their target they could slip this way or the phase in front of them might slip back and so you've got bombs coming down, another danger, it didn't happen very often but occasionally that would happen

31:30 but there were a fair number of collisions. For a start on take off there were 56 aerodromes between the Wash and the Humber, all on the east coast of England in an area about as big as Gippsland. So say you've got 700 or 800 aircraft

32:00 all flying up all trying to get up to altitude before setting course, usually the set course would be about 15,000 feet if you were clear of cloud. Very often we had to take off in cloud up through cloud knowing that there are another 500 or 600 bombers doing the same thing. You couldn't see anything, you couldn't

32:30 see 40 feet when you got into a decent cloud and that was one area, the take off area before we got to the enemy coast but then again when we were converging on the target you had the same risk of about 400 or 500 aircraft all aiming to get into a small space within a quarter of an hour, so there were a fair number of

33:00 collisions. I collided with a fellow once. We were on a bombing run, on the target run up to Berlin, we had just dodged into a cloud, dodged a fighter and I was just breaking cloud and I just saw the exhaust flames of another aircraft, I didn't know what it was, whether it was a fighter or one of our own but

then when I instantaneously got a bit closer

33:30 I realised, I could see the exhaust flames of another bomber and we crossed and we hit like that, he bent both props on the port side and knocked the top of my rudder off on the starboard side and we didn't know what happened to him till we got back to base and in any incident like that, the navigator

34:00 logged the exact spot, I head the fellow in the little cubicle at the interrogating section back at base say "This bloke came up out of cloud, he was off course and so forth", and I checked with the navigator and said "Where did we hit that peanut?" He said "yeah that's the spot, we were about 111 miles short of Berlin". What he was going crook about was,

34:30 particularly as we hit, he hit my props and it put a great score down his bomb bay and he couldn't open his bomb doors and he didn't know whether the collision had been severe enough to shake any bombs off the bomb rack and he had about 6 tons of live bombs sitting on the bomb doors. As it happened when we went out next day they were still on the bomb rack, anyhow he said he put down a pretty smooth landing.

35:00 But my port motors with propellers bent were pretty rough but you could still use them.

So we've got a few minutes left on this tape. You did obviously your first 30 missions and then you had a break between missions, then you had a break.....

The first 30 I did we lost 889 bombers and that's over 6000 young blokes. I was 2 or 3 years older than the majority of the fellows particularly the gunners, some of the navigators were older, the gunners were only about 19

36:00 and a good many of the pilots later on were only 20, 21 but people don't realize that the losses were that heavy: 889 on 30 trips.

How could you cope with the loss of so many young mates?

Yes well very often I think five, the five crews one night we lost. That's 35 blokes that

36:30 you had a meal with and not there for breakfast. The heaviest loss was one night on Nuremberg we lost 97, mostly Lancasters but some Halifaxes, I think that's 719 blokes. One night.

37:00 And when you tally that up against the other wars, Vietnam for instance, we lost 515 killed, total and we lost 719 blokes one night.

How did the stress of that affect all the other air crew?

Pardon.

The stress of that, how did it affect the air crews?

37:30 Well quite obviously you would be a fool if you didn't realize that it was pretty close to your turn when you got to 30 because a lot of the fellows, one fellow in fact the losses between 1 and 10 operations was very heavy compared with total losses between 10 and 30. If you

38:00 got through the first 10 and got a bit of experience behind you evading search lights, fighters and a damn lot of luck you're all right but I arrived on the squadron with a fellow that I had most of my training and got my wings with and we used to fly together, a chap named Forrester, also from Adelaide and

38:30 we were met in the mess by the squadron leader and he asked which flight we were going to and I said "I'm going to B flight sir". He said "Where are you Forrester?" He said "I'm A flight." He said "I'm Callaher, is my name. He's Squadron Leader. You fit, we're on operations tomorrow night I'll take you as crew Forrester". They didn't get back from one. All his training, 2 years' hard training

39:00 he didn't get back from one. I rang the other fellow I flew a lot with at Point Cook, he was a trainee detective, Roy Clarke, he was allotted to or posted to another squadron. I rang about a week later to find out how he was going and exactly the same thing happened to him, he went as a second pilot and didn't get back from one op. Both killed.

39:30 **So terribly sad, so young.**

Yes, well that was the way of it but if you were lucky you had another sort of experience that I told you about my hitting another aeroplane. Generally speaking if there was a collision at 20,000 feet, they'd both go in, if it was a severe enough collision your bomb load would probably blow up

40:00 and that would have happened quite a lot, nobody ever knew how many because both planes went in but we could see it from the air, we could see the occasional collision and both go down.

You must have a lucky crew.

Yeah of course we were lucky, yeah and silly enough to go back for another tour. Yeah.

40:30 But you could go back as a Flight Commander. In fact when I finished my first tour my CO was a very well known airman, he was a Group Captain then, and the highest decorated Australian in the Air Force,

41:00 Hughie Edwards, Group Captain Hughie Edwards VC [Victoria Cross], DSO [Distinguished Service Order], DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] and he said, he was a fairly pucka sort of Australian to us you know and after I had finished my first tour he said "Well Gardner what have you in mind?" I said "I'm about 6 months off for a kick off sir". He said "Yes that's a good idea, you'll be instructing". So

41:30 he said, well from then on and I said that I would like to come back on the squadron. "I'll keep it in mind" he said. By then he was posted to headquarters and almost exactly to the day 6 months he rang up and said "Are you still interested in going back to the squadron Gardner?" And I said "Yes I am". I can arrange a crew", and he said "All right leave it to me", so a fortnight later

42:00 I got my posting back to 460 squadron.

Tape 3

00:40 Well I started just at the beginning of the Battle of Berlin which was the period of the heaviest losses of all in bomber command that was on 18 November

01:00 until 30 March 43, 44 [actually was 23 August 1943 to 24 March 1944], we had 16 operations on Berlin itself, of which I was on 14 and we lost 518 aircraft in those 16 trips and so it was easily the heaviest

01:30 losses of the war, mainly they were about 350 to 700, I think we had one over 800 and pretty well all Lancasters, some Halifaxes, but it was obviously a very heavily fortified target and our main objective was to

02:00 get to Berlin like dodging the areas like the Ruhr and other heavily fortified areas even getting across the enemy coast caused quite a lot of losses because they had ack-ack batteries right from virtually from Scandinavia right around to southern France by then so any aircraft crossing the coast stood

02:30 a risk of meeting objection from the ack-ack guns but again I mention a lot of the losses were collisions, mostly fighter aircraft, they would be the heaviest losses.

Can you describe what it was like up there?

03:00 Well you would have to say it was pretty terrifying sometimes if you for instance, if the track took us somewhere near the Ruhr, all of those cities were all very heavily fortified but often because of weather conditions they had to route us fairly close to those areas anyway to limit the time we were over Germany

03:30 so that if it was a target like Nuremberg or Berlin itself you knew you were going to be over enemy territory for a minimum of say 4 hours sometimes longer, so it was quite obvious that you weren't going to get out of a trip like Berlin without reasonably heavy losses

04:00 at the time. Yes we went, one of our Berlin trips, I said I had 14 on Berlin, actually I didn't get to Berlin in one of them, we lost a motor before we got to the enemy coast with coolant trouble on starboard motor and at briefing we were told that there was what we call a spoof attack of 40 Halifaxes going to

04:30 Heidelberg, I'm sorry to Heligoland, remember I showed you the photographs of Heligoland, well having lost a motor you're supposed to get rid of you bomb load over the North Sea and return to base, it was fairly early on in my tour, so I thought I would try to get some benefit out of the bombs,

05:00 we'll join up with the 40 Halifaxes which are going to Heligoland, the navigator had that on his log and so that's what we did, we stooged around the North Sea for about half an hour until we had the ETA [Estimated Time of Arrival] over target of the Halifaxes and supposedly joined in with them

05:30 and when we got to the Heligoland area all hell broke loose with heavy ack-ack and they shot out the motor on our port side, so we had one on either wing fortunately and so we got rid of our bombs in a hurry and put the nose down and got back to base and, and when I got back we went into interrogation and

06:00 explained why I was home an hour earlier than the Berlin boys and the interrogating officer said "Wasn't your wireless operator listening out?" I said "Why?" He said "The Halifiax spoof attack on Heligoland was cancelled after you took off." So we were over Heligoland on our own and no wonder we were fairly warmly greeted by the ack-ack, so anyway we

06:30 were able to get back to base on two motors and when we joined the landing circuit and I started the one we were having coolant trouble with, and we landed virtually on two and a half motors. So it was a fairly hairy do but actually there was more trouble on that trip than I had on most of the others on Berlin actually. But we lost another

07:00 we were at Nuremberg, we lost 97 on Nuremberg and a week later we lost another 79 on Leipzig so we were starting to run out of new Lancasters a bit with that sort of losses and crews of course, it was 160 in a fortnight just aeroplanes and crews of 7 as well

07:30 **How did the boys feel when they knew they were going to go to Berlin?**

Oh well we called it the big city. We were being briefed in groups of, usually about, you'd get instructions usually in the morning that high command

08:00 what they called a maximum effort and if it was a maximum effort all over bomber command you knew that most squadrons were going to put up say 10 per flight, we had 3 flights of 10 aircraft and if they were all serviceable you'd get as close to 30 crews from a squadron as you could generally 24 or 25 serviceable aircraft

08:30 that was pretty good, so you knew that there were 20 plus crews being briefed for a trip to Berlin.

And what happened when they told you it was the big city?

Well you didn't know until you got to briefing of course, but the navigators did, they had to prepare their log and their flight plan and so forth

09:00 and they knew what the target was earlier in the day than the rest of us but they were sworn to secrecy, so we actually didn't know until we got into the briefing room and there would be a curtain over the target area and the curtain would be pulled back and there would be a big red ribbon from base to the target area say

09:30 Berlin it might be, you might fly out over southern England just north of Paris and across towards Lake Constance in Switzerland and to try and fox the German fighter command and give them the impression that you were going to say Munich or

10:00 Nuremberg or one of those eastern cities and then change course and go due north to Berlin, that was about the only target we had for about 3 or 4 months. Yes we got to the stage that every time we went into the briefing room we almost certainly

10:30 reckoned we were going to Berlin.

Did anyone voice their concerns?

No, not really. You'd get a smart aleck who might say "Berlin again, I'm so sick of this place". He'd been that many times that he was tired of it but

11:00 actually the losses on Berlin itself were not that different from most other targets but it was a long trip, very often we would come out due north of Berlin perhaps over Denmark or Norway, somewhere over the Baltic before you turned due west.

About how many hours in total flight time?

11:30 Oh very often seven and a half to eight and a half hours.

And how long would your petrol have lasted?

That's another thing, if the met section, the meteorological section, if they were a bit out in their forecast or they had information, they used to send a Mosquito out west of Ireland to get the latest weather

12:00 and occasionally they would be out and one time I remember we went to Leipzig I think it was and they expected a very heavy snow storm to come in about an hour and a half to two hours after we landed back, well they were a couple of hours out and by the time we got back over the North Sea the snow storm had hit us

12:30 and as a consequence the wind velocity was about 100 knots more than what we had anticipated and by the time they got back over the North Sea there were aircraft going down all over the place, they had run out of fuel, we lost 41 over the target area, they were the numbers the Germans could verify, they knew from crashes over Germany and we lost 29 over

13:00 the North Sea and crashed over England because we came back in a terrific snow storm and yes they just went in.

What was landing like in that kind of weather?

Oh shocking, yeah, absolutely, yeah. That was the heaviest loss that I can recall from caused by a dummy met forecast.

13:30 They were usually pretty good, very good. But a lot of our flights were over what we call 10 /10 cloud cover very often from 7 or 8 but occasionally up to 10 /10's, you wouldn't see anything until the time you landed again, just cloud.

How were communications?

Mmmm?

How were communications with other aircraft

14:00 **when you had no visibility?**

You'd climb up above the cloud ceiling and it might be down to a say couple of thousand feet cloud base but occasionally you'd get over Germany and they might have forecast reasonable visibility when you got there and the cloud had stayed longer than you had anticipated from the previous front

14:30 and you just wouldn't see anything at all and in those instances where the path finders were dropping what we called ground target indicators coloured red green or yellow indicators they perfected parachute flares

15:00 which were of the same colours and they can drop them through the clouds and so if we were sailing at 18,000 or 19,000 feet we could still see the parachute coloured flares to bomb on that were probably down at about 11,000 or 12,000 feet.

And how well were you able to communicate with other aircraft when you couldn't see them?

I couldn't see other aircraft, ever.

How did you communicate at all?

15:30 I didn't communicate, no. The only communication was with the master bomber. No it was bomber command, it was radio silence immediately you took off until you landed, the only communication was RT [Radio Transmission] within the aircraft and that was always with good crews, that was always

16:00 very limited too, nothing like you see in the Yankee films.

You had some rules about that I believe or some preferences when you were piloting about how they conducted themselves on the plane?

Oh absolutely, there were strict rules, good crews simply didn't communicate more than was absolutely necessary

16:30 The necessary ones were to check that every member of the crew was on RT with you and heard any communication which the pilot gave or the navigator so that about every 10 minutes as pilot or captain of the aircraft you go around the crew and say

17:00 "Rear gunner OK, wireless op OK, navigator OK, yes", and that's all you had and the flight engineer would naturally have to give the pilot information about oil temperatures and oil pressures and so forth but that's a very brief communication too about,

17:30 he would say "All motors OK skip". Yes, you couldn't risk the intercom being cluttered up in case you wanted to give an emergency instruction.

Was it an isolating feeling being up there just the few of you, without much contact with others?

Not really.

18:00 You knew very well that there were about 400 or 500 others up there with you and if the navigation was spot on and every, fairly frequently you would hit a slip stream of another aircraft in front of you and that was fairly reassuring you get a few bumpy jolts but you knew very well if you were hitting slip streams you were with the rest of them although you couldn't see em

18:30 unless you got very close and you would see their exhaust flames then, if you were hitting slip streams, you felt comfortable.

Tell me now about the 462nd set of operations, there were to be 20 and you went on 18 I believe, the last one…

Including the Berchtesgaden one

19:00 and that also included about 6 daylights right at the end of the war and 5 what we call gardening, gardening trips were mining trips up to the Skagerrak and the Kattegat area in Scandinavia

19:30 and the idea there was to, we knew that the Royal Navy had bottled up several of the major cruisers of the German Navy like the Tirpitz, their biggest battleship was in there and the Scharnhorst and the Gneisenau, they had all gone in for

20:00 re-servicing and replenishment and so forth and we knew where they were, so we were instructed to carry magnetic mines and generally with magnetic mines you couldn't drop them from 18,000 feet like, you could with bombs, so most of what we called gardening was done at 3000 feet

20:30 and they were pretty hairy trips because a lot of the fjords in the fjord area the mountains were 3000 or 4000 feet high too, I mean they wouldn't send us into an area where we would have to get down to 3000 feet where the mountains were 4000 feet obviously, very often depending on the cloud base you had to get down pretty low to

21:00 try and pin point in the moonlight, pin point where the fjords actually were and the mountains were that high also, so we did I think, we did 5 gardening trips.

You're letting out these magnetic mines at much lower altitude for the purposes of destroying these ships?

21:30 Well yes, so these ships couldn't get out, well yes destroy them, well hopefully destroy them actually, the fellow who used to call into our squadron occasionally, a fellow named Tate, Willie Tate, Wing Commander, he was tracking the Flight Officer in the Intelligence Section at the time, so he called fairly frequently

22:00 he got a roving commission, he could fly anywhere he wanted, so he finally bombed the Tirpitz and was known as Tirpitz Tate. He was awarded DSO and three bars I think, we reckon he ought to have got a VC for a swap.

22:30 Although quite remarkable, some of those blokes did 100 ops. Some of the master bombers, they were the most experienced of the path finder blokes, they did up to 100 but it was reasonably unusual for our fellows to

23:00 complete two tours with ops.

I was thinking it would be quite beautiful in Norway with the fjords but you probably don't have time to take that in at all.

No we couldn't see anything of course we were just dropping on dead reckoning in those days. I think we might have had a PFF fellow, yeah had a PFF once I think, but they are only about

23:30 20 or 30 of us on those trips against 600 and 700 bombing trips.

When you came back from an operation what was the first thing you did?

Well we had to wait usually for a bus to come and pick us up and we were all in our full flying gear in the winter time and of course

24:00 particularly the gunners they used to get up to minus 36 or so for them, they had electric suits and they were quite comfortable and we had heating up the front of the aircraft, the navigator, bomber and the wireless operator and the pilot and they were very often just in ordinary battle, I only ever wore battle dress with a wool lined

24:30 jacket, but it was the poor old gunners who were freezing. I'm sorry what was your question?

When you first came back, did you have a cup of tea and wait for the other planes?

Yeah, well we got rid of our flying gear and returned our parachutes and so forth and they were individuals, the gunners sat on their

25:00 parachutes, we had our harness on but the parachute was stored up behind us and we put them on in an emergency, so all that equipment had to be returned to the drying rooms in case we got wet, they were all air conditioned and flying gear was all dried out and so forth and ready for the following day if we were on, then to interrogation

25:30 and at interrogation they always gave us a cup of coffee or a cup of cocoa or whatever and something to eat, just a snack and a shot of rum if you wanted it and cigarettes, but I didn't smoke, my blokes, my gunner used to get the extra fags from me, the navigator didn't smoke either,

26:00 the gunners used to do all right out of us. Interrogation would usually take about half an hour and very often you'd hear from the crew next door, they were in cubicles close by, very often you would hear the gunners from the cubicle next door

26:30 telling the interrogation officer how the fighters were all over the place and I used to say sometimes "We must have been on a different target". I didn't see any fighters but that could be the luck of the draw, the very next night the boot might be on the other foot your gunners might have seen all the fighters. Sometimes you'd find that you'd had a very

27:00 inactive sort of an operation of 6 or 7 hours and almost not see a fighter and almost not see any other aircraft until you got over the target area and then the light would be reflecting under the cloud, you would very often see other bombers but occasionally you would fly the whole night and not see another one

27:30 **When you came back to command how did you relax after that extremely stressful 8 hours?**

Back to base? Yeah with some difficulty, with the first few you would be pretty sleepless. They'd give us what we called wakey wakey pills, they'd give us a couple each op

28:00 on a long trip to make certain that we didn't go to sleep, with us 8 hours for instance, you were up very early in the morning and very often preparing for operations if it was on, you wouldn't know until midday if it was on and you quite often had been the night before and you wouldn't take off until say 7pm

28:30 and you wouldn't get back til 3am and 4 am next morning, so you know they were very long days sometimes and you got very tired and so as I say they used to give us Benzedrine I think it was, wakey wakey things, I didn't very frequently take 'em as a matter of fact but occasionally I would and then if you took them too late when you felt a bit sleepy

29:00 you couldn't go to sleep when you got home, so that's why I didn't use them very much but it was very difficult coming back, the Northern Star was a very bright star on our starboard side and when you were turning for home and after you had been concentrating on about 15 to 20 dials in front

29:30 of you with oil pressures and so forth and compass and concentrating on that and also taking your concentration off the panel to look for aircraft to dodge it was a pretty tiring day.

To say the least.

Yeah, yeah.

30:00 **Was the rum or beer commonly used to relax a bit…**

Oh never after a, as I say we used to get this shot of rum in our coffee or cocoa, cocoa I think it mainly was, yeah if you wanted a shot of rum that helped you sleep a bit but we didn't have a habit in the mess other than that until next day if you wanted it,

30:30 but there wasn't a great deal of liquor taken in the messes, most of the blokes drank a bit of beer and that was only after they knew there were no ops on that day. No there was not much liquor consumed, and certainly none until you knew that

31:00 you were on ops or not but when the moon was out we didn't fly very much and there was a bit consumed then, yeah we used to have some pretty good parties and that made the squadron pretty bearable and probably that's why I went

31:30 back on a second tour.

What else went on at the parties?

Oh well they were fairly wild at times, pretty wild. One fellow, he's been made life president of 460 Squadron, Tim Anderson, great bloke, I think he finished up as Flight Lieu [Lieutenant].

32:00 he was on the squadron longer than anybody else that I knew anyway, we had a game called high cockalorum which is a fairly wild sort of game in the mess after a few drinks were consumed and I think he either broke his arm or his leg twice whilst on the squadron. He was there for about, most tours took about 5 months.

32:30 He must have been there about 12 or 13 months.

How did you play that game?

Oh well you had an imitation soccer ball and generally the blokes played soccer in the mess or rugby, rugby yeah.

33:00 **How did you feel when you finished that last mission, that last mission over Berlin? Tell me what you did and what you felt?**

On the last tour. Oh well we were pretty relieved obviously I was a flying officer by then we were losing so many senior blokes I was acting Flight Commander pretty well all the time I was on the first tour

33:30 and when I went back as a squadron leader on my second tour I was there all the time and by then our losses were much, much less and in any case they restricted Squadron Leaders to one op every third because we had so many crews and so few losses,

34:00 right at the end of the war they only allowed us to fly every third op because a lot of the operations then were three to three and a half hours they were going to northern France, in fact they only regarded them as half an op, at one stage some fellows did

34:30 up to 36 operations in their first tour.

And when it was all finished and you had finished the second tour how did you feel?

I was pretty keen to get home of course because I was married before I left so I was then appointed Commanding Officer of what they call the Dispatch Squadron at Gamston

35:00 and most of the fellows who had been prisoners of war were posted to Gamston and ships were, berths on ships were available to get them home and just prior to that and these weren't considered operations but we were flying to Brussels to pick up the

35:30 prisoners of war, a lot of them had walked right across Germany as a matter of fact, some of them had been released by the Yanks and they'd got rides by mechanical means but yeah a lot of them had walked a long way across Germany to get back to Brussels. We were picking up about 27 or 30 of them in a Lanc, lobbying them back to, a lot of them

36:00 had been POW's [Prisoners of War] since Dunkirk, three and half to four years, so they were pretty relieved to see the White Cliffs of Dover.

What sort of state were they in?

Generally pretty right but by then they had had reasonable food and so forth in camps coming across and the Yanks had been releasing them from

36:30 POW camps and they had been supplying good food and so forth, so generally they were in pretty good shape.

And those were the last operations you did prior to getting ready to come home?

Well there a couple of others that we didn't call operations but the Dutch people were pretty well starving and the Germans gave us a truce to fly

37:00 in over the Dutch coast, we had to fly no higher than 300 feet along a narrow avenue 300 yards wide, we had to come in over The Hague and fly to Rotterdam with our bomb bays filled with food usually done up in double sugar bags. Flour

37:30 and sugar and that sort of food and we just dropped them on the playing field, the football ground, so I did 2 or 3 of those they were called Operation Manna. I have struck quite a few Dutch people who were in Rotterdam at the time and got the benefit of the food we dropped, they thought

38:00 it was a great idea.

That was a very rewarding and positive thing to finish your time too.

Oh yes it was too.

We're about to run out of tape in a moment but tell me how you got home.

Well as I say I was CO of the Dispatch Squadron and we had to implore these POW's particularly

38:30 when they were taking their leave to get back absolutely on time so that we didn't waste berths in the ships and so forth cause remembering that most of them had been in the bag in POW camps for up to four year and their pay books were full, they wanted to get to London and spend some of this dough and generally have leave and live it up a bit

39:00 so you couldn't blame them and of course it happened fairly frequently, they didn't get back on time and we had to try to fill the berth somehow or just waste them. I came home on, oh, I got a cable from the Minister for Air instructing me to put myself on the draft because my mother was seriously ill with cancer and

39:30 so I was only there for about 6 or 7 weeks I think, put myself on the draft and came home on the old Orion with about another 1200 or 1300 POW's.

How was that trip?

Great because we came back through the Panama and this was after VE [Victory in Europe] day in Britain of course

40:00 and they were still fighting against the Japs and we expected to come back here and operate from north Australia and at one stage I thought I would be going to India on Lincolns which are slightly bigger than the Lancaster, we were training on Lincolns before we left, I wasn't

40:30 I didn't actually fly a Lincoln but they were training at Binbrook where I was stationed and we came through the Panama and VJ [Victory over Japan] Day was declared about mid Pacific. We landed in Auckland, we were on a dry ship, so we had to wait till we got to Auckland to let our hair down a bit

41:00 which we did I think from memory. Memory is not too good on that part of it. Yes it was a great feeling to know that we didn't have to fly against Japan quite frankly.

Tape 4

00:43 **So we left you back at Auckland you'd come back to this side of the world, what was the procedure arriving in Auckland?**

Oh well, we were entertained by the Australian Agent General, the

01:00 officers were anyhow. I again shared the cabin with another person on the way back and he was fairly keen on an odd whisky and the Agent General really turned it on he said "Now you fellows have been on a dry ship, we've got

01:30 to make certain it's not dry between Auckland and Sydney", so he said "Anything that's left in your bottles, put in your raincoats". So the two of us aimed to do that to make certain that the blokes who weren't able to attend the welcome party that he had given us had the benefit of what he supplied us with anyway while we crossed the Tasman, so it was certainly not a dry ship

02:00 between New Zealand and Sydney .

Did you stay long in Auckland?

No, no

And then on to Sydney?

And then to Melbourne, no, no we disembarked in Sydney and went to Bradfield Park for a couple of days and then caught the train to Adelaide, South Australia.

From Sydney. And at this point did you feel that you had returned home

02:30 **for good or...**

No, no. We did then but not when we left England, by the time we got to Australia peace had been declared while we were in mid Pacific yes, so we knew it was all over.

And when were you discharged, do you remember that?

Almost immediately. 24th October I think it was.

Do you remember the procedure behind that, was it...

Well we just

03:00 handed in, what kit didn't belong to us still belongs to the Air Force and so forth, most of us kept our flying helmets as mementos.

And so was that in Adelaide?

Adelaide.

Was there a good party that night or did you just go home?

Oh yes a pretty good party that night yeah.

Well for you returning home...

Well, as

03:30 I mentioned I had really had a compassionate posting because my mother was seriously ill and she only lasted for a couple of months after I got back, she died unfortunately.

So in a way it was a joyous a return but quite difficult...

Well it was really, my father had died while I was in England as well, he died in 1943 just as I was beginning operations

04:00 on 460 Squadron.

Did your family or did Bunty meet you in Adelaide?

Yes.

And at the train station?

Yes it was quite a big greeting at the Adelaide railway station. There were a fair number of us on the train from the disembarkation depot.

It must have been quite a moment.

Yes, yes.

And your brothers, they also served?

04:30 **Yes I had another brother, a pilot he was 2 years older than I and was just about completing**

his training in Nairobi in Africa and one of his motors caught fire and he baled and injured his shoulder and hip and he didn't fly again, so he finished his

05:00 **war service mostly in the photographic section mainly I think, various parts, in Italy for quite a bit.**

Was he at the railway station?

No, no. Where was he? I really can't remember where he was. I saw him that day.

When was the first time that you saw Bunty again?

That day, yes.

05:30 **With the family?**

Mmm.

And then straight back to Streaky Bay?

Yes pretty well, of course the company had given us our jobs back. I was really keen on flying and was rather keen to get a job with Qantas because it wouldn't have been difficult in those days because anyone with

06:00 several hundred hours of 4-engine experience and especially, I had a DFC and bars so anybody with a few ribbons up was just about a monty to get a job with Qantas. As I had been away for over three years we were pretty keen to start a family and so forth, I went back to Goldsborough Mort anyhow and back to Streaky Bay as Branch Manager.

06:30 **And how was that, the change of lifestyle?**

Well we slipped into it pretty easily, everybody thought, I don't know about everybody, but some of the blokes thought because I had been knocking around for the past 3 or 4 years with Rolls Royce Merlin motors I would know all about anything mechanical, strictly speaking I didn't know anything about them.

07:00 The only thing I knew about Rolls Royce Merlins if you pushed the throttle as far forward as you push em, you went up, that was about the limit of my mechanical knowledge and that applied to most of the pilots as a matter of fact. We didn't have anything to do with the mechanical side of the job.

And your first year back, how were your recollections of that?

07:30 Well it was a matter of earning a living by then of course I went from pretty good pay as a Squadron Leader in the Air Force back to about 8 quid a week. About 8 pounds a week, you wouldn't remember that, you wouldn't remember much beyond dollars.

And so were you in a (UNCLEAR)?

Oh yes it was an average sort of a salary for

08:00 people my age and experience I went back as manager of the branch where I had started as a junior at and being pretty well known, we were a well known family and so it didn't take any time to mould back into the community, we were always keen on sport played all

08:30 the sports that were available then, so Bunty was a very keen sportswoman as well, good tennis player and golfer and yes we just moved back into it pretty comfortably.

So you were going to get a job, was that uncommon for a returned serviceman?

Well it was with companies like I was with, like Goldsborough Mort Wool Brokers for Dalgety's and all those people, yes they all guaranteed the jobs back

09:00 **So getting involved with sports and things like that and getting back into the community do you think that was helpful?**

Oh without a doubt yes, but even during the war we played quite a bit of sport, you know those who were keen on football, cricket and tennis and golf, you'd get a bit of that in England during the war and of course you could play tennis up to 9.30 up in the north of England

09:30 **Was it amongst the Australians or amongst the English?**

Oh not just amongst ourselves.

So did you have a house to come back to or were you back with your parents?

No had to rent a house.

So you set up…

The company didn't own one.

And when were your children born?

Pardon.

And when were your children born.

I only have one daughter.

10:00 I arrived home, I was demobbed on the 26th October and she arrived on the 27th August, so we didn't waste much time.

And how long did you stay in Streaky Bay for?

Exactly three years. We were transferred to what we called the mainland in South Australia, I was transferred as Branch Manager to

10:30 Kadina on the top end of Yorke Peninsula and three years there and transferred to Burra which is east of Clare on the way to Broken Hill that area, and then three years in Millicent in the south east near Mt Gambier and from there I was transferred to Victoria

11:00 as manager of livestock, real estate and insurance, had that appointment for about 8 years and then I was transferred to Geelong as Geelong Area Manager took in the area from Warrnambool to the Grampians across to Beaufort, Ballarat and Melbourne.

11:30 **And during the first years after you returned home did you seek out other returned servicemen to…**

Oh yes well I was the president of the RSL [Returned and Services League] in Streaky Bay for only about a year. I was only sort of settling into that when I was transferred. Oh yes, I played a fair bit of tennis and golf of course

12:00 and I was ultimately into Legacy. I was interested in Legacy, looking after the widows of our blokes who didn't come back.

And did you find that there was a real difference between your relations with people who'd served and people who had stayed at home?

Difference between?

Well sorry between,

12:30 **did you notice a, a marked difference between the men who'd come home and the people who stayed?**

No I didn't really. The fellows from the second war didn't seem to have the difficulty in rehabilitating as the blokes from Vietnam who had a really, a rotten experience, that didn't happen to us,

13:00 we were all accepted back immediately after the cessation of our war and that didn't happen to the Vietnam blokes unfortunately.

So you really felt the community rallied towards the men?

Oh immediately. Oh because they were pretty appreciative of the fact that we'd what we considered anyway,

13:30 we'd done our job.

I think I've read in your notes that you have since returned, have you been back to Europe?

No I haven't, no. That was all organized for when I retired, we were going to do precisely that and Bunty developed Alzheimer's and she actually spent 11 years in a nursing home.

14:00 No it was always a disappointment that I hadn't been able to do that, might even do it yet although I'm getting a bit close to a hundred now so…

You're doing pretty well for that.

I will be 88 in July.

That's amazing. So just backtracking now, thinking about the training, you told me an amazing story before of someone who had an accident

14:30 **in a crash, would you mind retelling that?**

Yeah well we had just about completed our conversion course on twin engine Oxfords and the middle of winter I had done 4 circuits and landings, bumps we call them, with the instructor.

15:00 My mate Jeff Edwards was waiting at the end of tarmac and I got out of the aircraft and I went back to our digs and next morning there were about 20 of us in the hut and when we woke up Edwards' bed

was unused and we knew that something went wrong and the water police

15:30 had found him at dawn on the shoreline semi conscious. He was able to tell them that all he remembers, about why they were in the water was that there was a hell of a bump and they assumed that they had hit a swan and the aircraft went into a spiral dive and

16:00 finished up in the drink and he was able to heave the instructor up on to a spar of the wing floating nearby and by the time he got all his winter clothing off, a couple of jumpers, helmet and flying boots and whatnot, the instructor had slid off the spar of the wing

16:30 and sunk and Edwards dived for him for about a quarter of an hour until he was exhausted then he realised that he was in trouble himself. So he set off for the lights on the shore, when he arrived there he collapsed but he would have only got there because he was a very powerful swimmer and he didn't ever fly again. He broke both knees in the crash

17:00 and severely sprained one ankle and he finished up the rest of the war in the met section. But he was a very powerful swimmer and a very keen sportsman, football player, tennis player, cricketer, so that's fate for you, one more circuit and bump it would have been me instead of him.

17:30 And the navigator was drowned, the instructor was drowned really.

So early on even at a training level you were seeing how luck played a part?

Oh yes. I think it is over 2,500 were killed in training, Australians.

Do you remember any other cases when you were training?

18:00 Yes, yes I was instructing at Lichfield, at Lindholme on Halifaxes and one of my strict instructions were always, was no smoking whatever in the aircraft but we knew that a lot of the blokes did. But quite a lot of these old Halifaxes that we were instructing on were clapped out from service squadrons

18:30 and they used to develop fuel leaks and so forth and the one I was instructing on was just doing circuits and bumps and I said "Now under no circumstances, you can smell this fuel, absolutely under no instruction, no smoking" and so I sent them off to do a couple of circuits and they got about half way around

19:00 on the circuit and crashed, so I can only assume that one of them lit up and they were on fire by the time they landed. Yeah that happened a bit. But on the squadron on two occasions fellows lost a motor, if you lost a motor,

19:30 one of four motors on take off it was nearly curtains because you usually had over 2200 gallons of fuel, high octane fuel and about 7,000 or 8,000 lbs of bombs under you, so if you lost a motor you could virtually say that was the end, that happened a couple of times.

And you said before landing was a major problem.

Well landing in bad weather was a major problem. By the

20:00 time you got to our standard to operational flying you didn't have the difficulty in judging heights as I said some fellow had with Tiger Moths for instance, if you didn't get beyond that and your couldn't land a Tiger Moth there was something wrong with your sight, your judgment, and generally the fellows who had that difficulty became

20:30 or went to another category either usually gunners or wireless ops.

And did you have a special technique for judging distances at landing?

No I don't think so. I just had a natural aptitude and I don't know whether it had anything to do with this but I did a lot of swimming and high board diving as a young bloke before

21:00 the war, so I had a pretty good idea of judging heights at low level. That might have helped a bit you never know.

And also with training, at what point were you allocated into either pilots or ground crew…

Yes that's a good question and I can't answer it because

21:30 the judgment of somebody was made very early in your career because by the time you left what was known as the ITS, the Initial Training School, you knew you were going, the next step was either to a navigational school, an initial

22:00 flying training pilot school or a gunner school and I don't really know how they categorized us.

Was there an interview, or one day did you just find out?

Oh almost everybody who joined the Air Force wanted to be a pilot and so an odd few who were say several years older almost knew for certain that they would be navigators

22:30 if their maths was good enough for instance. But almost everybody else wanted to fly.

Do you remember when you found out that you were going to be a pilot?

I was damn relieved I can tell you that, the last thing I wanted to be was a rear gunner but I've got to say that I purposely failed my Morse test because I didn't want to be a wireless operator and I could do Morse because we did it in

23:00 Boy Scouts and I could have passed that all right but I failed it purposely.

Were you older than most of the men there?

No, not most of them. I was a 1915 drop so I was

23:30 26 when I went into the Air Force. But I was about average I think, there were quite a lot younger and a fair percentage were a couple of years older too and as I say they became navigators.

So it wasn't necessarily the reason why you became a pilot?

No, I don't know any

24:00 reason because you didn't have, as far as I can recollect, we didn't have any aptitude tests or anything of that nature, no I think that the fact that most of the pilots anyway that I knew anyway,

24:30 spent a fair bit of time at sport and probably had a bit better than average general aptitude for quick movement and so forth, whether that had anything to do with it I don't know but I don't know how else they would have categorised us.

And at what point did you find out that you would be working

25:00 **in fighter command or bomber command?**

Yes well that didn't happen until we got to England by which time pretty well all of us had flown twin engine aircraft generally the older fellows who had their wings would be allocated to a bomber squadron

25:30 bomber training, the fellows who were around 20 to 21 had the opportunity of going into fighters. I actually applied to go to bombers as a matter of fact.

So there was some degree of choice at this stage?

Yes some degree, yes you could nominate that you preferred to be a bomber pilot.

26:00 I was rather hoping that I would get through the war and I would be able to apply to companies like Qantas or ANA [Australian National Airways] which was before Ansett and I had my mind set on that I thought when I get through this I'll become a commercial pilot.

So you think you had a career after the war?

26:30 Oh yes. I had it in mind.

So when you say the older men, the more experienced flyers, were allocated to Bomber Command were they more praised, did you need more flying experience to fly bombers?

Did you need any more what?

Any more flying experience because it was more difficult or…

Oh no, not at all. There was no degree of

27:00 skill applicable because the Lancaster was a very light aircraft to fly, trim them, you could trim them hands off and they would fly themselves without putting automatic pilot in even as long as you trimmed them properly.

And so going back again, do you remember the day that you got your wings, you showed me a great photo.

27:30 Mmm. The old Brigadier Ralph Royce presented our wings yeah at Point Cook. It was a very exciting day of course because you then could wear the double wings on your uniform and call yourself a pilot.

Obviously you felt some great pride.

Well that's what we all aimed for of course, mmm.

28:00 **And at the ceremony, you family and friends could be there?**

Yeah. Yes the relatives and friends were able to attend what was called the wings parade.

And you had a photo taken, did many other people have photos taken?

Well mine was actually in The Sun, I think they called it then, they got a copy of it, press photographers were there and got most of the blokes.

28:30 **About how many would get their wings at one time?**

I think there were about 40. I think about 11 of the fellows who I got my wings with got through the war.

And at that point were you socializing mostly with other pilots or was it pretty cross the board hanging out with people, ground crew,

29:00 **air crew, pilots, navigators etc…**

Oh we didn't see any of the ground crew at all, no it was all flying blokes. You mean prior to embarkation. Yes about all that you saw were other pilots.

Just going to check my notes through for a second, I remember writing down something else.

Mmmm.

29:30 **So during the training period, was Bunty renting a house in Melbourne, you mentioned some other people had wives in Melbourne.**

Yes, well at various

30:00 stations (UNCLEAR) we went into Victor Harbour as the initial training school in South Australia, so three or four of the wives rented rooms there for about 6 weeks I suppose, yes the wives were there at that time and then we moved to Point Cook, no not Point Cook, Parafield

30:30 and we had a unit in Adelaide then, from then on there was very little contact between pilots and their families but Bunty did come over and had a unit in Melbourne while we were in Point Cook for about 6 weeks and that was the finish, from Point Cook we were posted to

31:00 embarkation depot at Bradfield Park and expecting to go on to a ship any day really, so that was the last we saw of each other for over three years.

And I suppose for a lot of the wives it was the first time that they had left home as well, perhaps a bit of an adventure for them with their husbands?

Yes I suppose it was really.

31:30 Yes, some of the young wives they would have been away from home for the first time.

And how were you paid during your training did they keep you?

Oh magnificent pay really, we got 13 shillings a day.

How did that compare to your job before was …?

Oh about the same. Yeah some were about the same but when that sort of came up as a complaint

32:00 and the fact that we weren't getting enough pay, well they said "we're keeping you". Yeah. No it was pretty poor money but everybody else was in the same boat but some of the older blokes had been junior staff in lawyer's offices and so forth and school teachers, and some of the older fellows had been school teachers

32:30 for four or five years and so we were all in the same boat, they would have, when they went into the Air Force they knew, they probably knew that they would be getting to earn about as half as much as they were getting before, that's the way it is.

But I suppose for some of the men coming out of the depression it was paid employment?

Yes an odd few, not very many. Pretty well everybody who, that

33:00 I had to do with anyway, they had been in jobs right up until the time they were called up. See we were on the Air Force Reserve for about 10 months after joining up on the Air Force Reserve and just doing lessons getting us ready for our actual training, it was pretty elementary navigational

33:30 work mainly so it wasn't very onerous.

During that Reserve period was that full time RAF stuff or…

No, no we were still civilians we weren't called up until when, beginning of 1942.

34:00 **So there were night classes and weekends and things like that?**

No just handle it ourselves. We used to get a bit of help from school teachers and people who knew a bit more about it, at any rate it wasn't very advanced stuff that we were on anyhow, most of us hadn't done trigonometry,

34:30 and science A plus Square A and that sort of business, we had only done intermediate or leaving standard.

And you mentioned before that Bunty helped you with…?

Well she was a lot better qualified than I was and she helped several of us when we were at the Initial Training School particularly with Victor Harbour,

35:00 I'm sure she helped a couple of us to get through to pilot study.

Was she ever interested in joining the auxiliary services or anything like that?

No well she, very shortly before the war she had been looking after her father and brothers, her two younger brothers after her mother died, no she

35:30 hadn't done any actual service work. In fact her brother died only about a month ago, he was a Brigadier, he was OC [Officer Commanding], he was the commanding officer of the Southern Command from Adelaide. He was a good soldier.

Well we're actually at the end of this tape so we'll stop it then.

Tape 5

00:40 **So you mentioned before that there wasn't a farewell party as such, this is because you had to keep quite close lipped about where you were going.**

Yes, there was supposed to be strict silence about any instructions we had on embarkation,

01:00 obviously it was the sensible thing in war time because by that time the Japanese submarines had been into Sydney Harbour, do you remember the midget subs, mmm, that's when they came in 1942, so apart from that we didn't know, anyway we just had an embarkation depot,

01:30 we didn't know whether it was going to be tomorrow or a fortnight's time or what but we did know by then that we were going to the United Kingdom, we didn't know whether we were going direct or by South Africa or through Canada.

So how was the information passed down to the men? So was it officially or did you hear by word of mouth or…

That we were due

02:00 to embark? No it, I think it came just as officially "Have all kit ready in one hour and be on parade ground".

So during that period I suppose everyone's got ideas, a bit of speculation and..

Oh we kept our kit already packed and ready so there wouldn't be any delay, yeah. Yes we were all hoping rather because we'd see a bit more of the world and we'd go via Canada

02:30 and that didn't eventuate.

And were you excited to find out that you were going to the UK, England?

Pardon.

Were you excited to be going to England?

Oh we knew for a long while actually before we embarked, we knew we would be going to England but we didn't know whether it would be direct or not. Oh yes, almost nobody that I knew had been out of Australia

03:00 I don't recall anyone, it was most unusual in those days to travel out of Australia.

You must have had some sort of idea of what England would be like, were you surprised?

No I don't know that I was particularly surprised, I had done quite a bit of reading and so forth, no it was not unlike what I expected

03:30 **People considered themselves British subjects back then going to fight for England, was that your experience?**

Yes, because as I mentioned earlier I had four uncles in the First War and two were killed in France and two were pretty badly knocked about in,

04:00 during their service in France and so I think it was generally accepted and you were fit you ought to be in it.

Did you feel like you were serving Australia?

Mmm?

Was there any sort of division between Australia and the UK?

Well no, at that time Japan wasn't in the war so

04:30 we knew if we were going to serve it was going to be over Europe.

You also mentioned before that the Navy were dropping depth charges when you were being transported, what was that experience like, could you hear them?

No, just dropped into the sea.

Was there some massive vibration or feeling when they went off?

No, they didn't

05:00 detonate, they just went into the sea and they were just there to prevent the German warships from coming out, well hopefully get them if they tried to come out.

I'm just going to check my notes for a second.

But those operations were all in the same area in the Kattegat and Skagerrak. In the Norwegian fjords.

05:30 **And thinking about the Air Transport Auxiliary, were these places targeted for bombing, did you notice any of that?**

Oh some of the factories would have been I suppose, yes. I didn't see the result of any bombing but we certainly, we weren't under any bombing

06:00 attacks, in fact there was very little bombing of England after we arrived there, bombing from bomber aircraft, the damage that was done in London came from what we call the buzz bombs which, have you heard of those?

Are they the ones that make a noise?

Yeah, they were set by the amount of fuel that they had

06:30 and when the fuel cut out they just dropped, so that if you were in London and I was there a couple of times, if you kept hearing the motor you knew you were all right because they had gone past, but if you heard it coming and you heard the motor stop, you knew that you might be somewhere in the range and you would get under cover. And then they got what you call the

07:00 the next phase of that operation was to have them launched from sites in France, buzz bombs and they could actually aim them from there to London and of course you had no warning whatever of those coming, they were just silent and then finally

07:30 the master bomber that they could launch from Germany on a couple of our Berlin trips, we came back reporting that vapour trails were away on our starboard side just disappearing vertically and we reported this to the interrogating

08:00 officer and on each occasion he said "Oh, no it must have been something in the sky", and anyway whether they actually knew what was going on or not they didn't want to give it any publicity, I don't know but within about 2 months a major operation was put on Peenemunde which was on the coast of Northern Germany

08:30 exactly where the V3's were being manufactured [actually was V2's], these could have been launched from Germany, that's how perfect they were and the Peenemunde raid on the factory was very successful and that really cut out the V3's.

Were those your targets initially?

Well they could target anything, they could fire them

09:00 at almost any distance

And did you see much of the bombing that had gone on previously in England?

Oh a lot of it still obviously in London, yes. All they had done in most cases was to clear the rubble there were just vacant allotments.

And also the ATA, I suppose this went on throughout, did you every try to get transported to that again?

No because it wasn't operational, you see it was they were all virtually civilian pilots, they were in an ATA uniform but they weren't recognized as service people

Who would be involved with that, were they older?

Mostly older men and quite a few young women, yeah.

10:00 I had one experience. I had never been in a Whitley for instance and it was very old and still flying bombing operations in the war but not during my time but the pilot picked up a Whitley and with those aircraft one of us who had been allocated to ATA experience

10:30 and we would go in with them and anyway we'd been flying for about an hour I suppose and the pilot said "I think we had better switch the fuel cocks", he said to me over the intercom, "Do you know where they are?". I said "No, I don't know where they are." You know he saw the pilot's wings on my uniform, and I wouldn't know all about that going on.

11:00 I had never been shown and I'd never been in a Whitley before anyway. He said "Well, we had better do something about it", so he grabbed the manual and said "I don't know where they are either", grabbed the manual which was on the panel in front of him, checked through, it wasn't an emergency and he said "Well, they should be behind the second pilot's seat", so we found the cocks, but that's how they used to operate.

11:30 **And so you said before the first 10 missions were the really critical ones, if you made it through those you had more experience.**

Yes I've forgotten what the percentages are but they were very heavy between 1 and 5, slightly less between 1 and 10 and markedly less losses once you reached 10 operations.

And what sort of things would you learn that would keep you…?

12:00 Well evading search lights was a very important part of an operation because if you were anywhere near the master search light which is a blue colour, a pale blue, and the others were white, the master was blue, if they had

12:30 an aircraft coned with the master search light the others would come on to him from all directions and once he was coned he would be sitting up and camouflaged, he was jet black underneath, it would just look like a silver dish looking up at him in the cone of probably about 12 or 15 search lights including the master

13:00 and he almost had no chance of getting out of it so we had a strategy, I had anyway, if the master search light came on anywhere near I would be within about a quarter of a mile of it and keeping a pretty good lookout and making certain that any movement towards me I was into a dive quick and lively if it made any sort of approach,

13:30 of steadying towards our area, our aircraft in particular, I'd make a dive straight across and heading downwards and lose altitude and dive as fast as you could, out of the road and I fortunately was never coned, whether that was one of the reasons I wouldn't know but that was my strategy.

But until then you'd maintain a pretty steady course?

Oh yes.

14:00 You had to fly straight and level once the bomb aimer was in control. Once you got into the target area the bomb aimer said, he had it lined up the target indicators and so forth, you had to fly straight and level, but otherwise you would be weaving about every 7 or 8 minutes you would weave left and then right so that it gave the

14:30 mid upper gunner an opportunity to look down on both sides, the rear gunner looking up and down from the tail.

And all the time mindful of all the other planes in the area.

Oh yeah that's why you couldn't weave too violently, you would risk getting into the stream of other aircraft.

And so when the bomb aimer had the lock on

15:00 **you must have had fairly steady nerves to maintain a line at all times.**

Oh yes, it was a requirement you had to fly straight and level, so that he could aim his bomb sights properly and also you had to fly straight and level after he had given you the instruction bombs away, so that you could get a photograph, hopefully you'd get an aiming point photograph and you had to be straight and level then.

15:30 So it was about a 20 second interval between bombs away and photographs taken from that altitude.

It must have seemed like a long 20 seconds?

It did at times, yeah.

So who took that photograph, was that you?

No the bomb aimer did all that, that was automatic anyhow, you just set the bomb sights and hit and it would automatically take its own photograph

16:00 **And so once that was taken what was your action then?**

To get the hell out of it.

Straight up or?

Straight down. No nose down and point it down hill and you usually put on a bit of power to get out of it yeah.

It must have been a huge sense of relief when…

Well you'd feel the aircraft lift of course when 6 or 7 tons of bombs were let

16:30 go, incendiaries and so forth. Of course we always had what we called a cookie, which was a 4000 pounder, usually 3 or 4 one thousand pounders, 250's rather, one thousand and then some 250's and always some cans of incendiaries, 40 pound incendiary bombs, and there might be 20 of those in

17:00 aluminium cans and they would drop away in the slip stream of 700 or 800 aircraft. You can imagine how many fires they'd start with every aircraft carrying them, so no wonder there were firestorms in some of the targets that we hit because obviously the ground forces, fire engines

17:30 couldn't possibly handle it.

So how long would it take for all those bombs to drop, just a matter of minutes?

Oh no seconds. From 20,000 feet, yes it would be a couple of minutes, yes.

And what could you see as a pilot, could you see what was happening?

Well very often you couldn't see very much because by the time the bomb

18:00 aimer said "Bombs away", our vision was beyond the nose of the aircraft and you couldn't see the target area at all, you could see the target indicators often from 50 miles away, if you weren't in the first phase you could pick up the target indicators which were usually red, green or yellow

18:30 in ground target and the same colours in parachute drop and so you could see them from many miles away.

And did you have a strategy for avoiding fighter attacks?

The main strategy that I used

19:00 was for the gunners never to fire unless we were attacked in an emergency, if they saw them, leave them alone because they probably had their sights on another aircraft, we were never badly damaged by fighter aircraft. We were holed of course but we were never badly damaged

19:30 and never had anybody injured fortunately. But that was our idea, never fire unless you were certain that you were being attacked.

So each crew had their own strategy for these things?

Pretty well everybody. That was an instruction from the pilot on almost every aircraft but of course what happened towards the end on my first tour.

20:00 The Germans perfected a thing they called Schrage Musik, an upward firing canon by which they could aim, the pilot could aim it firing from behind him unlike most other

20:30 guns, machine guns and so forth you were looking at where you were firing, he could sight it with this obliquely trained canon underneath the aircraft with no possibility of us seeing him, he could just sit underneath us and wait until he got immediately below us and fire upwards, must have knocked out several hundred

21:00 by the time we found out what was happening. Yeah.

And you never had any close calls with those guys?

No didn't even strike them fortunately.

But you were fired upon, you said you (UNCLEAR)

Oh yes I got holed several times but nobody ever wounded.

And your gunners took heaps of photos anyway.

No they didn't, as I say they didn't fire

21:30 until they were fired on. Oh yes they got rid of (UNCLEAR). Of course we dodged into cloud several times from fighters

It must have taken quite a lot of discipline to stop firing in that situation.

Yes, they knew very well that they were risking their own lives if they did something stupid trying to shoot something down until they were fired on.

22:00 **And so you didn't lose any crew, did you have the same crew all through?**

Had the same navigator and wireless operator but all the others, the other fellows were second tour fellows yeah that I had picked up where I was instructing.

You said before the 460 was an Australian Squadron, did you have any other nationalities in there?

Oh

22:30 other than RAF?

You had English as well?

Oh yes. Quite a lot, quite a lot. Quite a lot of the gunners were RAF blokes: flight engineers and wireless operators only a very odd crew of all RAAF fellows.

And so you had the same navigator and flight engineer…

23:00 For both tours.

And how did the system work for other members of the crew?

Well they were at the same instructions school that I was at, they were instructing bomber instructors and flight engineer instructing and they had already done a tour

23:30 of ops and wanted to get back so they joined up with us.

And did you see much of your crew outside of operational hours, was it important to stay together?

Well in the first tour there was only the navigator and I who were commissioned so we didn't see very much of the other fellows, so they were in the sergeant's mess,

24:00 fortunately there were 5 of them so they teamed up but the second time the wireless operator was the only non commissioned officer and he was pretty lonely because he said

24:30 he recalls they were in Nissan huts and he said he changed beds with the wireless operator about 6 times because each time he would change a bed the crew would get knocked off and he'd have to move back and make room for another one, yes he was a bit niggly about that one but he got a commission during the tour anyway and moved into the mess with us.

I think I read somewhere that crews

25:00 **that spent outside of 30 hours together had a higher survival rate or chance of that, was that your experience?**

No I don't know that necessarily, you mean assist with the team work.

Yes the relationship between you all.

Yeah there was a possibility but oh no, we saw a fair bit of each other on the squadron and while we were operating of course

25:30 despite the fact that we were in different messes but we had a fair bit of training on the squadron we were on, gunnery, line bombing, dinkie drill, so we spent a fair bit of time together but I was an Acting Flight Commander during a fair bit of my first tour so

26:00 I didn't have any spare time at all really.

And were many of the men superstitious, there were so many losses?

Oh I think most of the blokes had some item that they always took or always wore, yes I had a scarf with kangaroo motifs on it and I was pretty,

26:30 I would never go without it if I could avoid it and I didn't, I wore it every trip. Some people had other superstitions.

Do you remember any of those?

Oh well, there was a rumour of some crews always to relieve themselves on the tail wheel before they took off but I don't think our blokes ever did that,

27:00 worried about that side of it. Always as we turned into wind and got the green light for take off I always wished “good luck chaps”, and you’d get that reply from each of the crew member “good luck skip”, and off we’d go.

So some sort of ritual before you go?

Yes, it’s the only thing that I can remember.

27:30 **Did you know of any other crews that used to have rituals like that or…**

No, not really I don’t know that any of them did particularly, they’d never talk about it anyway.

So was that common not talking about the operations when you got back, did you talk about it a lot?

Oh, yes yes. Oh certainly from that point of view yes.

28:00 You’d compare notes in case something was happening over the target area or on route and so forth or unusual light and so forth and when Gerry tried all sorts of things, we had one procedure with the Pathfinders to drop a target indicator,

28:30 type of light at turning point just to keep as close to the track as possible, so Jerry caught on to this pretty early and he’d put the same colour target light on the wrong turning point to try and put us off track but we soon

29:00 got, people who were designing the route soon got on to that and they discontinued it anyway and it wasn’t a real advantage if the navigators weren’t on the job

So the navigator was very important?

Yes, very important, absolutely most important. Early on we didn’t have the path

29:30 finders and if the weather was bad and the met section was faulty in their forecasts of the wind velocity and so forth the distant targets like Berlin and Nuremberg and those eastern German targets if the target, if the cities were cloud covered we

30:00 couldn’t be sure with just dead reckoning how close we were to the centre of the target, very often we were, we missed em. Early on, but later during the first tour we had a device called H2S and that was in the

30:30 the fuselage and it emitted a radio wave which was reflected to the individual aircraft and the navigator had a little monitor, the reflection came from the built up surface, hard roofs and walls and so forth and provided you approached the city in the same direction the image on the monitor

31:00 came up the same every time, if you approached obviously from a different direction you would get a different reflection on your monitor but the navigators were given at their briefing the shapes that should come up on their monitor for various targets that we might go near, like say in the Ruhr, say if we were going to Berlin and they would give us the

31:30 shape coming up on the monitor if we got too close to certain cities in the Ruhr and that was always a help and also the bomb through 10/ 10 cloud because they would get the correct shape on their monitor of the target that we were operating on and you knew within 300 or 400 yards through 10/ 10 cloud what you were hitting

32:00 **Were you able to see the photographs that you took of the operations?**

Oh yes, you’re supposed to because if you didn’t, any crews that didn’t get aiming point photographs regularly were suspect, the squadron commander would want to know why a certain crew wasn’t

32:30 getting photographs, aiming point photographs when others in the squadron were because there would be some suspicion as to whether they were going to the target or not. We had a device called IFF, Identification Friend or Foe, and that would be switched on in your own area and switched off when you got to the,

33:00 over the enemy coast, that allowed the radio technicians back at base to know whether the aircraft was actually going to enemy territory by installing another one, a double

33:30 IFF, an odd crew were found not going over enemy territory, not from our squadron fortunately but it was found.

It must have been difficult with so many men not coming back. Did any of your men say to you “I just can’t do it again?”

No, what we call, well extreme of that was to be charged with lack of

34:00 moral fibre. I didn’t strike anybody that I knew positively from the squadron I was on. In fact I didn’t

even know anybody who was charged with lack of moral fibre. Now which is pretty remarkable when you realize that a lot of these blokes particularly the period on my second tour

34:30 a lot of the pilots were coming straight from school, they were from college in fact I had an experience, flight commanders didn't have cars, didn't have vehicles, but they used to, they supplied us with a motorbike BL, BSA motorbike to go out and

35:00 check up with our ground staff how many aircraft were serviceable if we were on maximum effort for instance and twice I asked my pilots, two different pilots to do the rounds for me and see how many aircraft were serviceable and they said "Sorry we can't ride a motorbike, we've never been taught to ride a motorbike". He could fly a 4-engine bomber but he couldn't ride a motorbike

35:30 **It's amazing the experiences people must have had at war in such a short period of their lives…**

Yes that's right, all that happened in three years.

Have you ever flown since the war?

Yes as a passenger, I'm not allowed to take off and land but I fly once I get into the air, yes one of my friends,

36:00 Tony Street, the ex Federal Member, he was Minister for Foreign Affairs for 6 or 7 years I think and he's got a farm about 70 or 80 miles out and I fly up with him about 2 or 3 times a year shearing and crutching and so forth. Only about a month ago I flew up in an air rally

36:30 with about 120 to 130 aircraft, another fellow's son is a senior pilot with Cathay Pacific and he's got an aircraft at Bowen Heads and we flew in that and landed in three or four places in central Victoria and finished up at Shepparton.

It must be a pretty different story flying now?

Well his aircraft has got an automatic pilot, so

37:00 you got up to about 7000 feet and push the button for George to go in. A couple of times I checked him, I said "How far off Seymour are we?" He pushed another button which went to the what do you call it, anyway it was the direction and distance finder and he said "Seymour 13 miles 023, Shepparton

37:30 30 odd miles 272". That's how easy it is now.

I think we're just about at the end of tape again, yeah thanks for that.

Tape 6

00:44 **So Clarrie, let's talk again about the Lady Frances Ryder Scheme, could you remind me of how it worked?**

Yes, well during the First War as I understand it, that's when it started so that local hostesses through the United Kingdom

01:00 would take one or more, sometimes up to three of the dominion fellows as they called them in those days, so that they could get away from army camps and the air force stations and so forth and then after the war it continued on a much smaller scale I think, it was really for the benefit of medical students for instance who had completed their university studies here

01:30 and wanted the benefits of further studies in the UK and then of course when the second war started it expanded very considerably and made available to any dominion service people who were there and looking for a bit of home comfort away service stations and so forth but we had some marvellous hostesses, all we needed to do

02:00 was to write to their headquarters in London saying that we had two or three fellows who would like to go to Ireland, Scotland or Wales, anywhere in the UK really including southern Eire, generally of course they were elderly couples and in many cases with

02:30 a service family of their own probably in the Middle East or in bomber command or in the fighter command themselves and we would get a reply from their headquarters explaining how to get there, the full detail of rail and passes and so forth that was required and or in the event of Ireland,

03:00 go by boat and explaining in that instance that you wear civilian clothes, uniforms were OK in northern Ireland but many of those people particularly the hostesses we had in and near Dublin are very British people themselves and they were only too

03:30 glad to get the opportunity of hostessing somebody who had come as far away as Canada, Australia,

New Zealand, South Africa to fight their war really.

And so you went to all three Ireland, Scotland and Wales?

Yes I went to Ireland three times back to the same place, actually it was only about 30 miles out of Dublin, a place called

04:00 Castle Homer House. Our host and hostess had a very British name, they were the Prior Wandersfords.

That's very British isn't it?

Mmm. Just to illustrate the situation that they were in, their eldest son was fighting in the Middle East in one of the British regiments, he was killed, they were

04:30 allowed to put a death notice in only on the basis that he had died, to say that he was killed, would probably indicate that he was in the services, the Irish, Ireland wouldn't allow that, couldn't make any mention at all of his regiment or rank, no he had to be just referred to in the death notice as having been killed, I think they said they allowed

05:00 them to say that he had been killed abroad.

Were they upset about that your hosts?

No, they accepted it because it was the rule during the war. But any mention of royalty for instance during that period was not just frowned on it was disallowed, for instance place names like Queenstown or Kingston anything that referred to royalty

05:30 Queenstown had to be called Dunleer, it had to have the actual Irish name.

And do you remember your time in Ireland, did you meet many Irish people?

Oh yes, we were allowed to mingle and we were obviously in civilian clothes and the majority of people wouldn't realize that we were service people, some did because we only had black boots and a black raincoat,

06:00 which was pretty indicative to anyone who knew about things that we were Australians, in fact coming back on the boat we met and had a talk with an old gentleman and he bought us a drink and bought our meal and so forth and asked who we had stayed with and when we told him the Prior Wandersfords he said, "Oh we're in the same club

06:30 in Dublin", and I know him quite well, then he said he was a widower and had a very big home in Dublin and we were welcome to use it any time, he gave us his card and told us who his housekeeper was and so forth and it happened to be Sir Richard Aldane who

07:00 was Chairman of Guinness Stout.

So a good person to know.

Yeah. But we didn't take advantage of it because he died about three weeks later but they were most hospitable yeah. The same applied in Scotland and in Wales. I stayed in Wales with an old retired British army officer who had had a lot of experience in India and Malaya, yeah interesting people.

07:30 **And do you remember say example in Ireland, did you go out on the town, did you go out for a meal and a few drinks?**

Well as a matter of fact we didn't really because we were hosted about 30 miles out of Dublin and they entertained us each evening.

And how about in say Scotland, did you go out there?

Yes I had a couple of leaves, one in Edinburgh and two out in the Scottish Highlands but there again

08:00 the host was a widow at that time and all we wanted really was to get away from station life and enjoy a bit of life in a house.

Did you find it easy to forget, like a week away from base, kind of relaxing…

Well we got leave pretty frequently, when we were on operations we got about 10 days every 6 weeks

08:30 and we were allowed 6 leave passes per year I think from memory and they'd run out pretty soon and rather than go to the expense of buying a rail pass which anyway only cost about 2 quid in those days, the squadron would wait until there were 3 or 4 crews due to take leave

09:00 and fuel up a Lancaster that wasn't on operations, put the crews in and deliver one to Scotland, one to Wales, we didn't fly to Ireland, we weren't allowed to fly to Ireland but anywhere over the United Kingdom and instead of the bureaucrats forking out, well it wouldn't cost them anything for a rail pass but instead of giving them to us it probably cost them about 3 or 4 thousand quid

09:30 to deliver a few crews around the United Kingdom on their leave, yeah that's pretty typical of bureaucrats during war.

How did you find the accent in Scotland? The accent, did you remember having a problem with that? They're quite thick sometimes.

Yeah, we did as a matter of fact. It wasn't easy to cotton on to anyway because most of us or a lot of us anyway were country kids before we joined up and we hadn't really had any experience of other

10:00 accents outside of Australia. Yes they were difficult really, mmm.

And you said before that you had a Welsh wireless operator?

Yes, I had a Welsh wireless operator, yeah Taffy he was called of course and a cockney Flight Engineer and on the second tour had a Scottish flight engineer.

10:30 Oh they were all right, their accent used to get a bit difficult in times when you were in an emergency because they would talk quickly and generally we had to tell them to shut up and slow down a bit.

Have you ever travelled with any of those fellows to where they came from?

No we didn't, we used the Lady Frances Ryder, of course they were all

11:00 keen to get back to their families and so the crew used to go their separate ways.

Who did you mostly travel with, regular people or just…

On leave?

Yes

My navigator and I used to have our leaves pretty well altogether and one other pilot in fact he came from Geelong,

11:30 Peter Griffiths, he prior to the war, he was a racing car driver and he had a, I don't know whether you have ever seen one, a 3-wheel Morgan?

So he was interested in machinery?

Well he had it, and he used to come out to Point Cook with it and I was a bit of a loner at Point Cook because my people, I couldn't get back to Adelaide

12:00 for weekend leave and that sort of thing and he took pity on me and I used to stay with him in Geelong.

And any special memorable times, any trips away where you had a great time and you will always remember that time?

On leave? Yes, well a couple of the leaves in Ireland were most enjoyable because the owner of the property had

12:30 shooting rights and fishing rights and so forth and they were great opportunities for us to relax because very often after a period we might have done 5 or 6 trips over Germany in the past fortnight or three weeks and you were really looking for a bit of fair dinkum rest.

Did you find it really hard to unwind after that?

13:00 Not really, not at our age I suppose you accommodated that pretty easily, most of the blokes I struck.

You say most of the blokes did people have trouble with it, the occasional bloke?

No, I can't really remember anybody who was ill affected.

Now the other day you mentioned something about

13:30 **silence not like in the films you see, have you any comment on modern films that you have seen that depict what you actually experienced?**

Yes I don't know whether you have ever seen the Dambusters film, have you?

No I haven't actually.

It depicted the Pathfinder squadron, yes the Pathfinder squadron who dropped the bouncing bomb on to the Moehne Dam

14:00 and had suffered very severe losses, I think there were, I'm scratching my memory a bit now, I think there were 18 aircraft, Lancasters, on the job and they lost 8 but they had to after very considerable training, they finally perfected the operation of dropping this circular

14:30 bomb at very low altitude meaning low, 60 feet over a lake, or over a dam rather, it was the only way they felt they could smash the dam and after trying all sorts of devices to get down, this was in the

middle of the night too of course, they finally lit on

15:00 the idea of having shining two lights, one from either wing on to the water to meet at the flying of the altitude of 60 feet and finally they did it. It was such a simple device finally.

Do you think the film was accurate in portraying that type of operation?

Pardon

Do you think that film The Dambusters was accurate in portraying…

Oh yeah absolutely, absolutely.

15:30 Guy Gibson, you might remember Guy Gibson, no you would be too young for that, he was a Wing Commander, he won a VC [Victoria Cross] for that episode but I trained with 2 or 3 of them of those fellows on the same squadron.

Did you ever talk to them about the dam busting?

No they were killed, no I didn't ever see them after.

I'm just wondering

16:00 **about the portrayal of war experiences in films have you seen any other bombing…?**

Oh yes, I've seen a few American ones

What do you think of those?

Crazy of course, certainly nothing like that ever happened inside the aircraft with us, the absolute essential was no conversation unless it was absolutely necessary.

Anything else, is there anything

16:30 **they get right in those films, do you notice?**

The action from outside was probably pretty accurate, keeping in mind the Americans did all their flying in daylight and of course they flew in formation which we didn't obviously because it was pitch dark with us but

17:00 on their shorter trips when they had French air bases they had fighter cover from practically take off till the target, some of their longer targets they had to do without fighter cover when they got right over the target but that kept their losses to a minimum but they were still very, very heavy

17:30 **Did you do a couple of daylight operations?**

I did about 5 but that was at the end of my second tour.

How did that experience compare with…

Oh it was entirely different, you could see Lancasters and Halifaxes as far as you could see.

It must have been quite a sight.

Oh absolutely, it was marvellous.

And at that point of dropping the bombs as well.

You realized when you were doing daylights

18:00 and 500 or 600 aircraft were converging on the target from almost the same altitude within almost a couple of thousand feet, it made you realize how close you must have been during the night operations to several of the others among the 700 or 800 at times on the major targets so we didn't really know how

18:30 many losses were caused by direct collisions. I think I might have mentioned that I collided with a fellow, well that was an indication that plenty of others collided and both aircraft went in and of course there's no record of that

No one to tell the story.

Mmmm?

No one to tell the story.

No

Anything else about the daylight raids that struck you at the time?

19:00 Well by then of course the German fighter command was much weaker and it was about a year after

that I mentioned in the first part of our interview that the losses were so heavy when we lost 97 on Nuremberg and 79 on Leipzig in the next week and the total losses on the 16 trips we did to

19:30 Berlin were about 519 I think.

I'm wondering about a mission with those sorts of losses, obviously you dealt with it in different ways, how did you deal with it on an especially heavy night coming home?

Well for a start we didn't know whether any

20:00 other crews other than our own squadron losses, so if we had a heavy loss on our own squadron, we assumed that it would be about average for bomber command and you didn't know until next morning and read the papers. The actual losses that were quoted in the papers were only

20:30 to what the German air force could verify, they knew where the aircraft that had been shot down had landed and so they could count for instance if we lost, if the paper quoted that we'd lost 74 that was the number that could be verified by the German air force but what they didn't know was if we had a met

21:00 forecast that was inaccurate the conditions that we flew back to Britain in were much worse than anticipated and they didn't have any idea how many were lost over the English Channel or crash back over England because occasionally only very occasionally a lack of fuel but sometimes very

21:30 bad weather. I think I can only recall two operations where the forecast was so wrong mainly because the conditions came in from the west quicker than they anticipated and the wind velocities on our trip home were something up

22:00 towards 80 or 90 knots and flying into that wind and of course a lot of aircraft would run short of fuel and particularly if they had been damaged over the enemy territory, a wing tank holed over enemy territory and they were relying on fuel tanks and only one wing.

Did you ever come close to running out of petrol?

22:30 Not really, no we were very fortunate. I had one dicey trip pretty early, my navigator was in hospital and I had to take a navigator that I didn't know and he hadn't done any trips at all and he virtually lost himself unfortunately on the way, pretty well back, he

23:00 couldn't give me an accurate idea where the friendly coast was and the cloud base was pretty well down to the sea and I foolishly was feeling for the altitude and realized by the time I was out about 400 feet looking for the coast ahead

23:30 that I should have been at least a couple of thousand feet higher with sensible safety then the wireless operation was able to get us a direction to fly through to base. That's about the only incident and we were getting pretty low on fuel then.

And what was the worst weather that you experienced?

Well had 2 or 3 pretty hairy dos

24:00 from that point of view, the worse one was the one I was describing before, the met section who used to send an aircraft out over Ireland to get the latest report on how quickly the storm was coming and apparently the target we were on wasn't an important one and they sent us out despite the fact that

24:30 it was a very doubtful home coming from the point of view of the weather and we hit a very heavy snow storm as soon as we came back over the enemy coast and it worsened as we took off towards our friendly coast and worse still as we flew inland, really a very severe

25:00 snow storm, it caused a lot of the losses, we lost about 31 over England and the English Channel that night.

It must have been freezing in the cockpit?

Oh no, we had heating, no we were all right the navigator, wireless operator and bomb aimer were OK but the gunners were the boys who were freezing, used to

25:30 get down to colder than minus 30 minus 35, 36 they had electric heated suits of course.

They did the trick those heated suits?

Oh yes, yeah.

Can you tell me about those, how did they work?

They just plugged them into the electric circuit in the fuselage.

Like elements?

Yes like elements through the circuit.

26:00 **And what would have happened if…?**

Well if the electric circuit went flat they would then simply have to get out of the turret as early as they could, they wouldn't be able to do it over the target area but it didn't ever happen with me so

26:30 I can't be very accurate about what my gunners would have done. It was mainly the rear gunner, the mid upper gunner got some of the benefit of the heating in the front of the aircraft.

You mentioned before that statistics in the paper of what the German air force verified, were there communications with the Germans to get those figures, how did that happen?

Oh well, they'd announce it

27:00 the next morning, they'd announce how many foreign bombers had been shot down and they were reasonable, and you would expect them to be always exaggerating, they didn't, well not to my knowledge anyway, the figures always quoted in the paper could always be verified by German fighter command

27:30 the ack-ack batteries of course, there used to be some doubling up sometimes the fighter command would claim the aircraft shot down and it would be the ack-ack boys so there would be a doubling up sometimes.

And I suppose vice versa too, you'd report the amount of German losses to bomber command …

28:00 Oh yes, air gunners would report if they had shot an aircraft down or they expected that he was shot down.

Just going back to when you were on leave, did you ever hear of a case of someone not coming back, going AWL [Absent Without Leave]?

No. No our fellows

28:30 as far as I know were 100%.

It's so impressive because it would have been such a high stressed environment to go back into after a week away enjoying yourself?

Yes, well I suppose you knew, each crew member knew he would be letting the rest of the crew down if you didn't turn up on time because in that case a crew would have to make up if there were one or more crews

29:00 ever say in hospital or from what you just described, the possibility of not coming back on time, the crew would have to take in a couple of fellows that they probably didn't even know and so each crew member could be relied on generally.

I often get the sense

29:30 **that men were fighting or really putting in an effort for each other more than the country ever caused, did that ever feel like that to you that you were there for the other men as much as for the country?**

Yes, what an interesting question. No, I'd never given that any thought really. There was quite a bit of professional jealousy amongst squadrons

30:00 along the lines of how many aiming point photographs your crews came back with and if there were say 23 Lancs on a job from 460 Squadron. The adjoining squadron at Waddington would know exactly how many aiming point photographs you got.

30:30 The jealousy was such if a crew was coming back repeatedly with not a similar photograph to the rest of the squadron they would be a bit suspect and I've got to say on a couple of occasions we smartly had a crew or two posted to another squadron because they were suspect and they would go there with the knowledge from the squadron commander

31:00 that they should be watched and yes that occurred a couple of times with us.

And how did the 460 fare with the number of photos?

Oh well, not because I was on it. It was well known that we had the heaviest losses of any squadron in bomber command and in fact along with that there were the most decorations of any squadron

31:30 in the Australian Squadron mind you we had 3 flights, 3 flights of 10 operational aircraft. Most squadrons were 2 flight squadrons, yes they were pretty interesting days when you think about it then, haven't thought much about it until you people came for a long while.

And it's a long time ago.

Well 60 years.

32:00 **I've been wondering about, because of the losses, new crews and new Lancasters came in what was the system there?**

I didn't catch the question.

So in your squadron I'm not sure, you lose say 10 Lancasters, where do the next 10 come from?

The aircraft would come direct from factories mainly from the Midlands around the area,

32:30 mainly from around pretty much where we trained, Lichfield and Lindholme, that area Birmingham and those cities and the crews of course towards the end of 1944 fully trained crews were arriving from Australia and Canada very regularly and certainly sufficient to crew up

33:00 the aircraft as they were being delivered to the squadrons. So that there was never any difficulty in keeping our numbers up while I was operating particularly from the middle of 1944 onwards there was always plenty of crews to fill the vacancies.

You must have seen a lot of men come through the squadron?

33:30 We lost one thousand and eleven air crew on 460 squadron yeah, a lot of young blokes when you realize they all aged from about 20 to 23, I was an old bloke, I was 27 then.

That's ancient.

Yeah.

And you were involved in training a lot of those men?

34:00 Well afterwards, the method of training or converting crews on to war time aircraft, service aircraft, was that as you finished a tour, you were what we call screened, transferred to a training squadron and yes the idea then was then that anyone

34:30 who'd finished was able then to initiate what we call sprog crews to service situation. Well anyone who went back on a second tour probably have at least 5 or 6 or 7 months off operational duty before he went back

How long did you have?

I had about that.

35:00 I was instructing on the Halifaxes and Lancasters, mainly on fighter evasive action and search light evasive action, I don't know whether I mentioned the fact, I think I did, the experienced people had with the search lights at each of the heavily defended areas.

35:30 In Germany the bomb master search light was a blue hue, what do you call it, anyway compared with the smaller ones it had a bluish tinge, if it was able to cone a Lancaster at say 20,000 feet

36:00 and hold him in his light the other smaller search lights would hone in on him and he would be sitting up there exactly like a silver plate and I didn't ever see any aircraft escape from it because by the master search light holding him it gave the ack-ack an opportunity to accurately assess his altitude

36:30 that would attract several ack-ack batteries and he was just a monty to go.

It must have been quite stunning to see a plane lit up and the little searchlights come to it, it must have been quite full on.

Yes absolutely. Yes if a pilot happened to be unfortunate enough to strike that on an early trip

37:00 he was almost certainly a goner.

So you must have seen many planes go down.

Yeah all the time. Mostly in the getting on towards the target area, by the time we had been flying probably for about 2 or 3 hours over enemy territory you couldn't

37:30 cover up the direction you were flying toward, if it was say during the battle of Berlin they knew almost certainly that that's where we're going once we were more than an hour or so over enemy territory, the fighter squadrons would all converge on the Berlin area and it was on for young and old then.

Do you remember the first time you saw one of your planes go down on an operation?

38:00 Early on. Oh yes it was early on, our losses were so heavy then. Do you mean one from our squadron?

One you saw?

You wouldn't know, you would have no idea what squadron they were from because it was pitch black of course and you would assume that because it's at the same altitude as yourself there was a fair chance

that it might have been from your own squadron but no you would never know for certain until you got back.

38:30 I think we lost 5, 5 was the heaviest loss in one night from 460 squadron that I can recall.

Tape 7

00:30 **So I hate to get you to repeat yourself but could you tell me the story again of the approach towards the target area and what happened in the plane?**

Yes, well generally before you got to what you called the bombing run, the navigator would be leading up and making absolutely certain that he was on track according to the path finders target indicators that we had been briefed on and then

01:00 you realized that you had to fly straight and level at least 30 seconds after the bomb aimer said “Bombs away”, and this is after he’d said he had sighted the target indicators and so forth and he would be giving you his directions, “Left, left, right, hold it, hold it there, I’ve got it now skipper, OK, bombs gone”,

01:30 and then you had to make sure that you had to fly straight and level until he got his aiming photograph and so forth and that during one of the periods during the whole raid where anybody said he wasn’t scared, he was talking rubbish.

And how long would that last, that period “Bombs away?”

Only about a half a minute for absolute straight and level but generally speaking throughout the trip

02:00 we would be weaving, what we call weaving is just taking a slight port call for about 4 or 5 seconds and then central flying and then starboard side just to give the rear gunner and the mid upper gunner an opportunity of having a look down on either side.

And that 20 seconds over the sight

02:30 **when you had to keep it steady, must have been a long 20 seconds.**

Yeah it was. But as soon as that was over, as soon as that period finished you could do whatever you liked to get as far out and away from the target area as possible, you’d point the aircraft down and put on a bit of power yeah.

I’m also wondering the approach towards the target area, is it generally blacked out,

03:00 **what could you see before you were approaching?**

If you were on an early, what we call the first phase, among the first aircraft to take off to be over the target area except the path finders, all you would see would be the coloured target indicators on the ground, no there would be no lights at all and by then no fires either, no fires started, well bombs explode,

03:30 well the whole idea of the path finders was purely to make certain as far as possible that the indicators were dropped on the centre of the target area and then however many main stream bombers were on the target that night would be converging on the same point, at slightly different altitude

04:00 from about 18,500 feet up to 21,000 feet at 500 feet intervals, usually about 3 minute intervals each phase.

And how long would it take for the search lights to come on?

Oh very often immediately the target indicators drop and they wouldn’t only be on there you’d be,

04:30 you’d be getting search light activities almost as soon as you crossed the enemy coast in various areas, not necessarily, they weren’t necessarily aimed over a target area, the search light crews or establishments were all over Germany actually but they were generally concentrated

05:00 on the main cities like the Ruhr, Nuremberg and particularly Berlin of course.

Were the search lights ever targeted in a raid?

No, well not that I know of, no they would be such a tiny target to see the searchlight station probably wouldn’t be as big as an ordinary house

05:30 it would be far too small a target for any bomber to aim at anyhow.

And if you weren’t in the first phase would you be flying into smoke from the ack ack?

Oh well very rarely at 20,000 feet no, you see the entire attack would only take about 18 to 20 minutes

probably, that's provided the weather is good and

06:00 the aircraft have all stuck pretty rigidly to the target route and were obviously as close to each other as possible all the time they got to the target.

I was just saying before that I find it really hard to imagine seeing the attack from below or a plane going down what were your thoughts the first time you saw a plane go down in operation?

06:30 Probably how lucky I was that it wasn't me. Yes the first one, I don't know that I can really recall the first one in particular we saw so many of them and when you lose 70 to 80 of them in a night, generally they were pretty close to the target area

07:00 but if you had a long trip beyond the Ruhr across towards east Germany the fighter command fellows by then were alerted and the probable target was known, assembled fight squadrons were pretty well assembled in the same area and then if you were crossing

07:30 a search light area there would very often be a lot of losses before you got to the target area. You could see them from so far away, 30 to 40 miles if an aircraft was hit and blew up through his bomb load detonating and so forth and fuel tanks being hit

08:00 it was a pretty startling sight from, it could easily be 30 to 40 miles away before you, if they were 30 to 40 miles ahead of you for instance if you were in a late phase.

Did you ever see anyone bailing out of one of those planes going down?

In the daylights, in a couple of the daylights we had yeah, in fact on this daylight we didn't fly in formation but we flew

08:30 what we call a loose gaggle. We didn't fly in formation, because unlike the Americans who trained for it we didn't as being night bombers I arranged with another fellow, another flight commander to fly along side him in a set course over England, we were only 50 to 100 miles into

09:00 and the bomb aimer suddenly called "Dive port!" I didn't see any fighters around anywhere and no fighters had been reported to us and so I did and I got out of port hurriedly and said "What the hell was that all about?" He said "There was a cookie coming down." A cookie is a 4000lb bomb and one of our own fellows for some unknown reason and nobody can ever fathom why

09:30 had opened his bomb bay doors and dropped part of his load, anyway the cookie and it was coming down almost directly towards us anyhow Greenacre, the fellow I was flying alongside, none of his crew had seen it and it had hit his tail plane and knocked half the tail plane clean off, didn't detonate

10:00 and just the weight of the bomb knocked half his tail plate off and he went into a spiral dive immediately, both our gunners saw 7 parachutes come out. They were pretty lucky, that's the only time I had seen parachutes used and they were all prisoners of war, it was reported in about 3 days, they were lucky

10:30 **Did you ever find what happened to them, did they make it through the war?**

Yes they did, they were back on the squadron in about 6 weeks, it was right at the end of the war.

So you were very lucky again, another case of luck for you.

Mmm yes they were only about 50 yards from us.

Just to make it clear, the bomb aimer could see up as well?

No. The mid upper gunner and the rear

11:00 gunner saw what happened. No the bomber, his direction was down and forward.

And so generally when you saw a plane go down it was, you didn't see any people, you only saw the plane or flame.

Yes. No well practically all my operations were at night time and all you could see was the aircraft going down

11:30 in flames generally, yeah that's if you got a hit in the wing you would almost certainly would be ablaze in the wing tanks.

And at the time did you have the presence of mind to think about the people inside or were you just totally focused on the operation?

No, the concentration had to be on keeping safe yourself and keeping out of the way of other aircraft

12:00 but yes you often wondered of course, when you got back of course there was a blackboard in the interrogation room and as the crews came in they ticked them off of having arrived back safely

12:30 and there was always plenty of conjectures as to how many were not going to have a tick against their name and very often of course there wouldn't be any losses at all but it was fairly unusual not to have one or two missing from your own squadron

Did you do anything special to mark an occasion when

13:00 **everyone came back: a small celebration or recognition?**

Well if you weren't operating next night there would almost certainly be a bit of a party on but you always knew by the phase of the moon whether you were going to have a pretty active fortnight because we very rarely, never flew with a full moon, because your

13:30 bombers would be far too obvious from the silhouette for the fighters against cloud.

They were your nights, of the full moon nights?

No moon, I think you have probably read the book or seen the book No Moon Tonight. Well if there was no, you knew you were almost certainly to be on operationally.

Do you remember about how many

14:00 **operations you do a week or a fortnight you said roughly…?**

Yes, well strangely enough it happened only at Christmas time my daughter was down and she asked me "What were you doing Christmas 60 years ago Daddy?' I said "Well, I'll show you", and I got my log book out and in Christmas 1943 in 11 days we went to Berlin 3 times and then in the next fortnight,

14:30 I think three times again in about 16 days so that was a pretty active Christmas New Year period, I can't remember what the losses were in particular over that period, they obviously would have been very heavy because they lost 500 in the 4 months.

And they were busy periods,

15:00 **in the fortnight?**

Yes oh yes, it was unusual very unusual, a tour of 30 ops was generally, was for the average crew probably be done in about 5 months, it took a bit longer because I was only a junior officer, we were losing so many of our senior blokes,

15:30 I was an acting flight commander pretty well the whole time I was there because the squadron leader would be appointed and he would get a crew worked up and so forth and ready to fly and he'd be gone and that happened three times while I was there, the first six months that I was there.

What were your duties as Flight Commander?

I needed to notify the Squadron Commander how many aircraft were

16:00 serviceable, in case he had an instruction from headquarters that it was a maximum effort and a maximum effort for us meant 30 aircraft, 10 each flight, you had to be in touch with your ground staff to alert the squadron commander of any shortages in your serviceable aircraft and make certain that every member of each crew

16:30 was responsible to the flight commander for his crew being serviceable in the event of anybody being sick or unable to fly that night the pilot had to report to the flight commander one or two short in his crew and we then had to make up a crew from somebody else's, so that was one of the main daily responsibilities

17:00 and being able to report the actual number of the fully serviceable crews you had.

And so you would be in contact with ground crew with pilots and with

And with Squadron Commander.

And how were those communications made, were…

Oh well the officers were nearby, the officers were in one hangar and other duties,

17:30 say of operational duties you would have to allocate crews to be doing dingy, what we call dingy drill for escape in the event of being shot down over the English Channel and you had to make sure that crews were attending to those regularly, and generally instructing new crew, new pilots

18:00 in particular what was required of them on the squadron, allocating flight testing of aircraft in your flight after they had been serviced and repaired necessarily, those were the main sort of responsibilities on station.

Just wondering about your contact

18:30 **with new pilots and new people coming in and knowing that the first 10 operations were going to be very difficult, the first 10 were going to be especially difficult, did you find it hard watching them go off, wondering if they would come back?**

Yes very often, looking back I reckon I could pick a crew who wasn't going to finish a tour of operations, lax or a bit

19:00 reticent about doing boat drill. For instance we had a pond and an aircraft and what happened was they were given an emergency boat drill and they had to pile out of the aircraft and get into the dinghy and carry off whatever instructions were required when they got into the dinghy to preserve themselves and so forth. If they were

19:30 lax about doing those sorts of things you would assume that they were probably a bit lax in their management of a crew when they were operational and I certainly can picture 3 or 4 fellows who didn't get out, didn't finish, who I had picked as being probable losses.

20:00 **Young men are pretty stubborn too and I guess they would have been told if they (UNCLEAR)**

Well you couldn't pass on the experience you had yourself bearing in mind, on my first tour I wasn't any more experienced than any more of the other blokes really, I just had one rank a bit better than the rest of them because they had done exactly the same things as I'd done

20:30 on arrival at the squadron.

You mentioned just before tactics for survival in the English Channel, what were the main ideas behind that?

Oh well the air sea rescue people would get advice from each squadron if a wireless operator had

21:00 been in touch with base to alert air sea rescue that they were going to go down, either they were out of fuel or they'd lost motors and so forth and they would be a longitude of the local area they were in and air sea rescue from the British coast, the friendly coast would be out after them as soon as possible, out to try to,

21:30 try to rescue them, the dinghy would come out of one wing you see and it was each member of the crew had a duty to do if he was serviceable, generally speaking if they came to that the situation of having to go down in the drink, they'd been shot at and damaged then not being able to return to England and very often unfortunately

22:00 one of more of the crew members had been wounded. The essential thing was to get them into the dinghy first. I certainly never had to do that fortunately.

What was the pilot's role in dinghy drill, what did you have to do?

He was captain of the aircraft and responsible for, certainly for anybody who had been wounded but each member of the crew had

22:30 a duty in the event of anybody being wounded.

And the dinghy, it would not be like dinghies today, what was it made out of?

Inflatable rubber it was, self-inflating.

And it would be stored in the wing cavity somewhere?

Yes, folded up and when it hit the water

23:00 it would self inflate, yeah they could accommodate 8 to 10 people quite OK, 7 certainly in comfort. And they had food rations stored in waterproof sections of the dinghy and flares to fire off when rescue people were approaching

23:30 them, paddles yeah they saved quite a lot of crews.

So you knew some people who had gone down in the English Channel.

Oh yes, a couple from the squadron. Oh yeah. Early on we used to take a pigeon, homing pigeon for the first couple of trips I was on the wireless operator, had to collect the pigeon and

24:00 the idea of it then was in the event of being shot you would just tie a position on the pigeons leg and let him go.

That was early on?

No it didn't go, they discontinued it oh I think as radio and so forth became more popular and more able to locate any aircraft shot

24:30 down in those circumstances they relied on that.

Did you ever talk to anyone who went down in the English Channel about the experience of

crashing a plane which very few people must be able to tell about?

No, I must admit I didn't ever have that opportunity, no. The coastal command fellows who

25:00 were flying mostly from southern England Plymouth and that area rescued a terrific number of bomber command crews. Sunderlands they were flying mainly. Yeah, they did a great job rescuing blokes in the English Channel.

Planes, I imagined boats would come out to meet them.

The air sea rescue people were mostly in boats.

25:30 Coastal command rescued a lot of crews too, landed in precarious situations yes, they did a great job.

And the weather must have been a bit rough at times.

Shocking, yes.

I was just wondering about some of the practicalities of a Lancaster

26:00 **I was wondering is it roughly about an 8 hour return trip?**

It could do a maximum of about nine and a half, we had fuel capacity of 2200 gallons of 100 octane fuel and we would use at cruising speed of 210 we'd

26:30 used about 200 gallons an hour.

And generally what time of day would you leave?

Well it varied entirely according to the moon phase and very often our take off would be about 7 o'clock, about 7pm and which would

27:00 always get us back over the enemy coast in darkness, well clear of the target area before daylight, so that we were always out of enemy territory before 5am or 6am.

So you would have seen sunsets and perhaps sunrises as well?

Yes pretty well,

27:30 occasionally I think I had, was about eight and a half or eight and three quarters of an hour just before I arrived on the squadron they went to Milan and Turin and they were slightly over nine hours that I remember a Lancaster doing.

It's a long time especially in silence as you maintained.

Mmmm

Sitting in one spot with the constant

28:00 **noise of the plane.**

Mmmm.

Did it ever become overwhelming?

Oh well you obviously got pretty sick of sitting there just looking and you had to maintain complete darkness as well, the dials on the dashboard were illuminated but you had to be staring at 10 to 15 dials pretty well all the time when you weren't looking out for other aircraft

28:30 and fighters and so forth and yes it was very tiring when you had a long trip like that.

And especially say for a gunner by themselves in darkness.

It must have been very, very monotonous for those fellows because they virtually had nothing manually to do except

29:00 to move their turrets and look out into darkness, yeah it must have been very boring really if things weren't happening otherwise.

And terrifying if they were.

Yes. Because we used to say the poor old rear gunner hadn't a clue where he was going and knew where he had been.

29:30 **I'm really intrigued by the contrast of Bomber Command between being in a friendly coast fairly comfortable and then having quite an extreme experience of 9 hours and then back again did you find that overwhelming?**

Well yes the situation was that probably after take off you

30:00 would generally be in a circular motion until you got to an altitude of about 15,000 feet and you would set course to a particular point on the friendly coast, the English coast, Beachy Head or somewhere south of London if we were going on a southern course and gradually picking up another

30:30 2000 or 3000 feet until you were over the English Channel and then realizing that the ack-ack guns and placements the Germans had from almost Scandinavia to almost the southern coast of France and so you could virtually be shot at at any point as you crossed over into enemy territory, particularly

31:00 in the Brussels and the Netherlands area. They were very heavy gun emplacements there, mainly because they were protecting the Ruhr and if we got to the Ruhr we had to cross a fortified enemy coast, we were by then at maximum height usually say 18,000 to 21,000 feet.

31:30 So you knew you were going to get a hot reception and apart from that they had flak ships over, well out from the coast at times so that you needed to be aware that you were going to hit ack-ack up to 20,000 odd thousand feet well before you got to the coast sometimes, depending on the route

32:00 **It just seems such an intense contrast between a few days off at the base, not off, but off operation and then such an intense short term of 7 or 8 hours. Did it ever occur to you that the amazing contrast there?**

No, I never really thought about it much because we always knew that in the informative period that we would almost certainly wouldn't be flying

32:30 and generally they were the periods when the party messes were arranged and they were pretty good functions.

Do you remember any of them specifically?

There's a lot I'd like to forget, yes they were pretty willing parties I can assure you because the fellows could invite their girlfriends and a lot of the wives

33:00 were fairly nearby and so they were all invited to participate, yeah. We wouldn't have been a very fit crew to operate the night after a mess party but all the senior officers always attended those, station commanders

33:30 he was generally a Group Captain sometimes the Air Vice Marshal. He was Group Commander, I think I might have mentioned earlier that our Station Commander was Group Captain Hughie Edwards who was the highest decorated Australian in the Air Force. He was, he joined the RAF at the very beginning

34:00 of the war because he was there on a short term commission as a matter of fact. He was great fellow.

What were your impressions of him, did you have much contact?

Oh yes I did. I knew him very well really because he was a keen sportsman prior to the war he played district cricket and district football in Perth and he was a keen squash player and I was

34:30 keen and we had a squash court about 20 yards from the mess and very often in the middle of winter we would trudge out with snow up to our knees almost and put in about an hour on the squash courts and yes he had when in the process of winning his

35:00 VC I think he was injured and he crash landed the aircraft and so he had not a decided limp but a damaged foot but he was still a pretty good squash player. Yes we used to play quite frequently and he was a pretty good player too.

Did you play a lot of sport in the operational times?

35:30 Most squadrons had an Australian football team, cricket and tennis, there were tennis courts on some of the stations, not a lot but we were always able to get a bit of sport in the summer time particularly.

It must have been a great relief.

Oh it was yeah and a good opportunity to keep fit. Most station were equipped with a gymnasium and the blokes

36:00 looked after themselves from that point of view.

Were there any games or matches between squadrons organised?

Mmm.

How did the 460 fare?

I think they held their own yeah, yeah there weren't many stations where there was an Australian Rules football teams but we had one and we played a few games against neighbouring squadrons. Waddington I think was one

36:30 and we had a few fellows who played league football.

What was your favourite sport at the time?

Not football, no I was an umpire by then I had umpired before the war so I looked after the game when we played at Waddington.

37:00 But we were always looking forward to a game of tennis or golf or so forth when we were on leave in particular.

Did you remember playing golf, did you play golf in Scotland?

Yes, I didn't play at St Andrews but played on a few of the lesser known courses and also in Ireland

37:30 there were some very good courses near Dublin that we used to play on. They were very similar to our own local course, Bowen Head which is renowned as a links course, much more like the Scottish coastal courses

38:00 than almost any in club in Australia really.

And with the sports did you have a ground crew, air crew rubber?

No, no I don't ever remember that. The ground crew didn't of course get the leave that we had, I can't remember how frequently they had leave but nothing like ours and we didn't get as frequent leave

38:30 as instruction as we were when we were operating, I suppose that's reasonable to assume that they are regarded as the air crew to get clean away from the operational side of it as frequently as they could and that depended on some extent on

39:00 how many losses you'd had and how many new crews they were able to send to the squadron, so a squadron could not be left with aircraft serviceable and no crews for them, you know crews away on leave, that wasn't on, so occasionally you would have to go a bit longer than usual because there were no crews to fill the aircraft that were serviceable.

Tape 8

00:32 **I thought I might ask you, placing yourself back on the plane, you're about to take off for a mission and you know how you were describing before the commands and the procedures you would have to go through and the dials you would have to check I would like to hear about all of that in detail really as you are getting into the plane for take off.**

Well once after briefing and being delivered to

01:00 the parking area, each crew member would take his place and then it was the captain's duty to make sure that everybody was OK and hearing the intercom clearly and then we would, the procedure was that we would motor individually and this happened a quarter of an hour to half an hour before take off,

01:30 then having assured us the ground staff that each motor was right we would settle back into our individual positions and wait for instructions from the control tower to start of motors and we had already been alerted to our actual position in the take off rank according to the phase we were in.

02:00 Then ultimately operate from and then about a couple of minutes before you were due to take off start motors and taxi out to the runway and you'd simply wait there with your motors turned into wind, so that they wouldn't overheat waiting for

02:30 the instruction by light, by green or red light waiting for the green light signal to be given and usually or always I made certain that everybody was listening out on intercom, "good luck chaps", and get a reply from each one ready for take off, taxi on to the runway

03:00 and the flight engineer would gradually give full power and till you were getting about three quarters of the way down the runway and you felt the aircraft lift off and then you knew you were into it, then the idea was to circle in the general area of the station to get altitude,

03:30 ordinarily we would probably get to about 14,000 or 15,000 feet in the general area in Lincolnshire where we were and about, there were about 4 other aerodromes similar to our own then head for a reconnoitre point usually early on a southern target in Reading,

04:00 west of London and set course for across the English Channel to, usually to northern France before we made a turning point to say the Ruhr or targets further east, that's the general procedure of the early part of an operation, otherwise if it was a northern target we'd take a more northern

04:30 appointed say Beachy Head on the east coast of England and then generally we would break the enemy coast somewhere near Amsterdam, the Dutch coast anyway.

Can you tell me about some of the controls in front of you that you would be checking during

this time?

That was mainly the responsibility

05:00 of the flight engineer he would be watching coolant temperatures and oil pressures which wing tanks were required switching from, consumption and so forth and the idea being to keep the fuel equally distributed in the wings to make it more

05:30 hand off line, so that you could trim the aircraft so that it could virtually fly itself.

Did you have anything that you used to say to the engineer?

Oh well, you asked about the others, the other main dials which we had to watch of course were usually the take offs, were in semi daylight 7 pm in broad daylight, really if it was that time,

06:00 twilight might have been a bit closer to 9 o'clock in Lincolnshire and obviously the main one was the compass, if the navigator told you to fly on pre arranged course he would expect you to be there as close as, absolutely as close as possible to his time

06:30 logged into his pre arranged log, navigation log and we'd get to about 17,000 or 18,000 feet over the English Channel before we arrived anywhere near the enemy coast which was generally at about our bombing height would be about from 18,000, 19,000 to 21,000 feet

07:00 **Can you describe the noise at take off, what's it like?**

Well it was, the noise was quite loud and we could have a suitable discussion on the radio, telephone within the aircraft and getting instructions from control tower and noise within the aircraft was quite reasonable

07:30 **And when you were up in air?**

Well, when you got to cruising altitude and cruising speed you probably maintained that throttle control virtually till you arrived back home or at the odd time, immediately afterwards, if you had hit a pretty hot target,

08:00 you would give it a bit extra power to get out of the target area as quickly as possible, yes, but generally you maintained the same throttle control and altitude all the time you were over enemy territory in what we call, if you had a fighter scare,

08:30 one of the main actions that was taken was what we called corkscrewing, we would go into a dive of possibly a thousand feet to the port side and pull up to

09:00 regain the altitude you'd lost on the starboard side getting back to where you were before and if the fighters were still there and if the gunners were still inside of the fighters you would dive to the starboard and do that as quickly as you could, very often that was the best method of getting away from fighters

09:30 if there was cloud and you were flying anywhere near cloud cover you got into cloud as quickly as possible away from the fighters.

Are there techniques of evasion that you can describe?

Corkscrewing was the main one that everyone used but if you weren't

10:00 actually trying to escape as a result of a warning from the gunners, weaving was what we always did and that was simply flying at a slight angle to port and varying it to the starboard so that it gave each gunner the opportunity of looking under the aircraft, I mentioned about the German fighter pilots employing what they call

10:30 Schrage Musik, which was an upward firing cannon that they could sight from looking forwards, by the use of mirror sights they could fly in underneath us without the possibility of being seen by any crew member, they got countless victims, nobody would ever know, I don't think

11:00 how many they got because we never did see them.

Did the tilting help, could you ever see them?

They might have been able to have been seen if you continued to weave fairly abruptly, otherwise we didn't even know that that was any method,

11:30 the fighters were adopting of course until it was too late, they had already accounted for, I don't have any doubt that it accounted for several hundred bombers by the time we woke up to it.

What about searchlight evasion techniques?

Yes, well I have mentioned it a couple of times that the master searchlight had a blue

12:00 tinge and it was a bigger light, a considerably bigger light and once they coned an aircraft than for a fraction of a minute the white smaller white lights would hone in on him as well and they would cone the aircraft despite the fact that our

12:30 camouflage on the top, all the bombers were painted jet black and despite that they all looked like a big silver plate sitting up there, they almost never got out of the cone because what would happen when they were held like that in searchlights, the searchlight crew could give the ack-ack crew the exact altitude

13:00 and they heavy ack-ack just honed in on them from all sides you see and several batteries would be firing at them and they almost never got out.

When you were teaching searchlight evasion were there some techniques that you suggested to the young pilots?

Well what I used to do and it was satisfactory from my point of view

13:30 anyway and I don't know whether many others adopted it but if I saw the master search light anywhere in our area I would, and he was searching for an aircraft, I would fly towards it to within a quarter to half a mile or so and hoping that he would cone somebody else and not me then as the

14:00 the thing was waving around, if he didn't get any closer than about that I wouldn't go nearer, but if he appeared to be coming my way I would simply lose altitude and gain speed and fly across the path of the master searchlight then if necessary do the opposite to get back on to the original track we were on,

14:30 it seemed to be effective as far as I was concerned anyway.

You obviously reduced the time that you were in the searchlight?

Oh well, you'd only be there in a flash of a second and he wouldn't be able to catch you because there were so many other aircraft for him to try to get a still attraction on. And as flight commander I

15:00 explained my way of handling searchlights and I know that several of the other younger pilots followed that advice and they were certainly never coned, so it might have had the right effect you can never be sure.

Were there some other tips that were picked up that you felt were uniquely yours, passed on in your teaching that you can remember?

15:30 No, not in particular because they had already been through 2 schools, they had been through their conversion on to Wellingtons and then on to the 4-engine bombers, they had already been at school by fully operational pilots as instructors, no they were always well ready for the job by the time hey got there, as ready as they could be but as I explained earlier

16:00 the losses were much heavier between one and five ops than any other section of the 30 required in the first tour and then they gradually tapered off but they were still heavy up to 9 or 10 ops and from then when crews were reasonably experienced they seemed to, the percentage anyway of losses

16:30 was considerably less but you could never accept the fact that you were pretty experienced, as a guarantee that you wouldn't be, not in fact another flight commander and I were going along on our second tours about, even about 30, 40, 43, 45, 46, 47 and my mate went off on his 48th

17:00 and he didn't get back, very experienced pilot besides operational and he'd been instructing and he was a pilot pre war it think, a fellow named Eric Utes from NSW, yes he didn't get back from his 48th you see, so you could never be sure that experience would get you home.

It must have been hard to form friendships when you didn't know,

17:30 **as you said, who'd be there for breakfast the next day?**

Yes it was pretty tough I must admit I mean you were bound to get pretty casual about that situation otherwise you would be continually worrying if it was going to be your turn next but anyway you certainly didn't get callous about it because you know it meant too much, too

18:00 much to each other to be, not be concerned about when fellows were missing, it didn't always mean they were killed because every now and again we'd get word from the Red Cross after a week or 2 weeks that they'd been located, either they were OK or they were wounded and hospitalized and so forth and that was always

18:30 pretty happy news when it arrived. Unfortunately, it didn't happen often enough because it was pretty unusual for an aircraft to be shot down and any of the crew to get out, occasionally there might be two or three if they were lucky

19:00 **Was there any particular loss that affected you the most?**

Yes the very earliest ones affected me the most. Another pilot, 2 other pilots that I got my wings with,

one was from Adelaide a flying officer Syd Forrester, he and I arrived on the squadron and we were met in the ante-room by a

19:30 squadron leader and he approached us and bought us a drink and asked us which flight we were going to and I said “I had been allotted to B flight sir”. Forrester said “I’m going to A flight”. He said “That’s good Forrester”, and he introduced himself as squadron leader Callaher and he said “If operations are on tomorrow night I haven’t got a crew so I’ll go with you

20:00 or I will take you as a senior officer, you will be captain of the aircraft”. They didn’t get back from one, well I had done all my training, right from joining up on the same day, went to initial training school and initial flying at Parafield and Point Cook, advanced flying, right through with Forrester, yes I felt that and then another chap that I did a lot of flying with

20:30 and training, was a cadet detective in Melbourne and he was allotted to a different squadron but I knew he would be on the same day as I had from Lichfield and I rang the station to see how he was going, I had by the time I had done three ops, I think it was about 10 or 11 days later

21:00 and unfortunately got the news that he went missing on the same day as Forrester and didn’t get back from his first op and he went as a second dickie too yeah, so to do a couple of years pretty solid training and so forth and not even complete one tour, pretty devastating.

21:30 **They didn’t have in those days anyone to come and talk to you or give you the news or talk you through it did they?**

No, none of that, you simply slept on it yeah. But obviously it wasn’t very encouraging that two of your mates didn’t get back from one.

Did you ever dream about the war during the war?

During the war?

22:00 No you couldn’t get to sleep after the ops for a while but no, no it didn’t every worry me from that degree, from that point of view, no. Had a few nightmares since.

I was going to ask, what about after the war?

Yes, a few nightmares since yeah, quite obviously you had to wonder how it was you

22:30 that got through and not these other blokes, many of them you knew were better pilots and they didn’t have as good a luck.

Were there any particular beliefs that you relied upon at this time, beliefs, fate?

No, well I’ve always been a fatalist but not a very strong believer.

23:00 From a religion point of view I mean and seeing a whole lot of good well educated young fellows go off completely unnecessarily certainly didn’t strengthen any faith I might have had very much.

Can you elaborate on what you meant by being a fatalist what that meant to you?

23:30 Well pretty well everybody had the notion that the next fellow who was going to go off was not going to be him, he was going to get through and if you didn’t have that anyway, you probably didn’t have much chance of getting through anyway.

Some people have said in retrospect

24:00 **the losses of the bomber campaign were so significant that they wondered about the value of the campaign, can you comment on that?**

You’re probably referring to the bombing of cities irrespective of who was being killed below, is that what you mean?

I didn’t have that perspective in mind, I was thinking more generally but I would be happy to have your responses,

24:30 **your thoughts generally on how you look back on the campaigns.**

Well, a great deal of criticism of what we were doing in bombing cities irrespective of how many were going to be killed, we knew very well that the method of our bombing of cities there had to be hundreds, thousands of

25:00 civilians, women and children killed and there couldn’t be any way out of it because for one thing every raid would, if we hit the target properly would result in hundreds of fires and so there had to be apart from the deaths, there had to be virtually thousands of people unhoused and

25:30 Bomber Harris, Air Marshal Harris of pilot command came in for a lot of criticism from that angle but his answer was that the method he was adopting was certainly going to kill civilians but it was going to

kill also people who were working in factories, fuel factories

26:00 and in ball bearing factories, engine manufacturing factories and it all was going to shorten the war as many of the civilian workers he could get rid of was going to shorten the war and the rest of the German population, his vindication was what he was doing was the correct procedure, plus the fact that the Germans didn't have any

26:30 compunction about bombing the very centre of London , and other cities, Liverpool and some of the other major cities and so they were only getting back what they started.

What was your view of Harris and his decisions?

I was doing what I was told, no I've got to say we didn't think too much about it from that point of view

27:00 we knew that that was the end result of all our training, it was all that could be expected as a result of our five and half tons of live bombs that you were dropping, it had to be, it had to have that result and as a bomber pilot or bomber crews, that was what we were trained

27:30 for and hoping that the result of our action at any period, weeks or months hence would mean the end of the war and certainly from high command of the RAF they were absolutely certain that the war was going to be finished with the use of heavy bombers.

28:00 We firmly believed that they were right and I still think they were. I think it shortened the war very considerably because for one thing and this has been admitted by the German high command that the bombing of cities caused pretty well a million

28:30 of the best anti aircraft artillerymen of the German army to be bottled up in and around German cities just for their protection by having them man the artillery guns, the heavy ack-ack guns particularly that they couldn't be elsewhere on the western front or the eastern front. Yeah they've admitted that.

29:00 **I recall that you took a flight over Germany during the day after the war I think it was can you tell me about that?**

Well after VE [Victory in Europe] Day this is after we had flown a couple of daylight operations which weren't regarded as operations but as daylight trips dropping food to the starving Dutch that was prior to

29:30 the official cessation of war and the Germans allowed us to fly over The Hague at a maximum of 300 feet and in a strip of about 300 yards wide and we had our bomb bays filled with food and sugar bags mainly, sugar type bags, we were just dropping the food on

30:00 their playing fields, that was one. The other was daylight flights when we were picking up prisoners of war from Brussels about 27 or 30 per load and a lot of them had been in the bag for upwards of 4 years

30:30 they were taken prisoner at Dunkirk many of them or fighter pilots from Battle of Britain and bomber pilots from very early days in 1940, so it was pretty pleasing trips to be on and oh you asked about the trips after the war. We were given permission to take our ground staff

31:00 and the intelligence staff and headquarters staff for cross country trips at any altitude and the opportunity to take any photographs that they wanted, we could visit or we could select particular targets that we were interested in and we could go anywhere over western Germany

31:30 we weren't allowed to go to Berlin the Ruskies [Russians] were already there and they didn't want us flying over Berlin, so that was restricted yeah they were most interesting because we took some very interesting photographs of cities that had been really wrecked virtually anywhere from the French coast

32:00 to within 100 miles of Berlin, 6 or 7 hours yeah they were good.

Can you describe the feelings you had in seeing these locations which of course in the night with the bombings you didn't get to see?

Yes, well they were, the majority of the target areas that we visited and photographed were of course absolutely devastated,

32:30 the population had disappeared practically every building that we sighted was wrecked, goodness knows where they were living, underground probably because by then there was no sign of habitation, yes it gave us a pretty decent feeling of satisfaction

33:00 But we were all disappointed that most of those who had been during the Battle of Berlin were looking forward to going there and seeing what damage we had done, no we weren't allowed to do that.

Speaking of Berlin, can you tell me what happened, you were on the last mission?

Yes, the last one was to Berchtesgaden and we were told that that was Hitler's hideout in his summer residence

33:30 in the Bavarian Alps and an indication of the difference of the opposition that we were experiencing by the end of the war compared with during the Battle of Berlin days, whereas our losses would have averaged probably I suppose over the whole of the Battle of Berlin operation of 4 months we would averaged,

34:00 would have lost about 45 per operation, 45 losses, nearly all Lancasters. On the Berchtesgaden trip we lost one and he happened to be from our own squadron as a matter of fact, so we didn't, that was a daylight, and we didn't expect activity from the ground at all, no they had given up hope by then

34:30 That was the last op for bomber command of the war just before Anzac Day 1945.

What was your target on that day?

Hitler's hideout.

It was?

Yes I've seen it pre war,with Hitler playing with kids on his veranda overlooking the mountains, yes that's what we hit about 350 of us on it from memory, about 350 aircraft.

So it was daylight, could you see the results of that bombing?

You could see the result of the fires only by smoke, by the time I got there it was about, I think I was on the third phase and smoke

35:30 was up at about 10,000 feet by then, so the early ones must have hit it all right you could tell from our aiming point photographs that we did too because from the ground markers on the bombing photographs I got three of them and two of them were 7 minutes apart

36:00 and we could tell that our bombs landed in the middle too and because of the fact that we had absolutely no opposition there was no need to be other than flying just simply straight and level as we would in a cross country trip.

When did you find out that this was the last mission for you, when did they let you know?

Oh within

36:30 a day or two but of course Hitler wasn't there anyway, he was still in Berlin, he had committed suicide, so we didn't achieve very much other than being able to say and the papers spread it of course, that bomber command had obliterated Hitler's hideout in Berchtesgaden, I'd say virtually it was all a bit of propaganda that trip.

37:00 **Did you know where Hitler was at the time though?**

No, no we thought he was in Berchtesgaden. Yes, they told us that the German headquarters had moved there because Berlin was so devastated but he was already dead anyhow.

So when did they tell you that this was your last mission and that you didn't have to go up again?

I think we were pretty sure when we took off

37:30 that was going to be last, the indications were all over the place that the war was ended but as I say I think it was a propaganda trip as much as anything, they wanted to be able to say well we knocked him off at Berchtesgaden, yeah. Yes there was fair bit of hilarity that night I can assure you

38:00 **I think we are just about at the end of this tape.**

Tape 9

00:34 **I've just remembered something that I want to definitely ask you about, you designed a crest that became the squadron crest can you tell me about that?**

Yes the squadron moved from (UNCLEAR) in Yorkshire to Binbrook where we operated from in fact the ground staff, most of the WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] on the ground staff were delivered

01:00 to Binbrook by glider and that occurred, I didn't see any of that action, that occurred only a few weeks before I arrived there but after we had been established for a while it was made known that the squadron didn't have a crest, so we had a competition for it and although it looks fairly corny now,

01:30 it was mine.

Just backtrack a little bit because of the interruptions, I want to hear about the crest that you ended up designing.

Yes, well initially just prior to my arriving at Binbrook the squadron was established at Brighton they were then flying initially Wellingtons and then Halifaxes and they had just converted on to Lancasters

02:00 and quite a lot of the ground staff including the WAAFs were delivered to Binbrook in gliders just before I arrived there and then after we had been established for a while it was realized that we didn't have a squadron crest which has got to be approved by the Heraldic Society in England, any Royal crest, so we had a competition in the mess and so

02:30 although I can't draw very well my idea was a kangaroo jumping a boomerang and the squadron crest was going to be mounted over the Strike and Return. Kangaroo striking and boomerang returning, we had, fortunately we had a

03:00 a commercial artist there who refined my bit of an idea and in any case it was accepted, it looks pretty corny now but that's it.

Oh it's great we'll take a picture of that in just a moment because you've got it on card, we'll take a picture of that.

Oh yes. That was sent to me by a lass who came out for a squadron reunion. Our call up

03:30 sign was called Leary and she was always called Leary, she was an English WAAF, in fact as it happens her name is Betty Gardner yeah and she had been out from England for about 10 of these reunions, usually about every second year we get about 8 or 10 from Britain and usually a couple from Canada and in fact the last one

04:00 was in Queensland and I think there were pretty close to a couple of hundred both men and women of course but unfortunately there are rather a lot of widows now but I think the next one will be the final do, and that's going to be the unveiling of the rejuvenated

04:30 G for George which is in the Canberra Museum [The Australian War memorial], that's coming up in December.

Tell me more about those plans.

The??

The plans for that reunion.

For the last one, well I don't know if there are any actual plans out they are just going to be at Canberra as a result of the refurbished G for George.

05:00 **What do the reunions mean to you?**

Well, I haven't attended them all because of Bunty being sick over the past 10 or 12 years, they were great occasions, they usually lasted 5 or 6 days and they have them in different cities each every second year, the last one I went

05:30 to was in Perth I think, and oh it was a great occasion to get back with the old crowd who I was on the squadron together, most of us were on the squadron at some time, and during the two sessions that I had there but unfortunately they're dropping off pretty rapidly in the last 3 or 4 years in numbers

06:00 **Have you continued friendships with quite a few men from your squadron?**

No not close friendship because we've dissipated all over Australia but there wasn't any particular state, probably NSW would be the biggest number of people I have met up with again since the reunions

06:30 but there's only 3 of my own staff left, navigator in the NSW and my mid upper gunner in South Australia

Do you keep in touch?

Yes with both of them, I saw the navigator in NSW for the first time for several years

07:00 he's been in a nursing home for 7 years and he was pretty severely retarded in his…

We'll just go back a bit, you said of the men on your crew…

There are only three of us left, the navigator has been in a nursing home

07:30 for 7 or 8 years and we called there when I was in Sydney recently and he's in Glengarry Twilight homes in Mosman, do you know it?

Yes actually.

Yes well I saw the charge nurse and asked him how he was and he said "He gets a bit obstreperous at times", and I said "Do you think it would be all right if I saw him?" So she said "Oh yes",

08:00 so she went to the door and opened the door and said “Oscar, I’ve got a pleasant surprise for you.” He didn’t move his head, I could see through a crack in the door, he didn’t raise his head at all. She said “Oscar, I’ve got a pleasant surprise for you”, and still no movement, so anyway she pushed the door ajar and I said “Is that “On Track” Patterson, the Ace Navigator from 460 Squadron?” and he came up to

08:30 alert and said “Who else would it be.” He was quite a character anyway. Sue was with me and we had a good old talk for best part of an hour I suppose, yes revived a few memories. The only other one is Don Gardner, my mid upper gunner who lives in South Australia, we talked about him before.

A distant cousin.

Well he is a distant cousin.

09:00 Our grandfathers were brothers we established. But I got a last contact I’d had with Ozzie, Oscar was his name but we called him Ozzie Patterson, was a Christmas card and scrawled on the bottom was “Four gone, three left, who’s the next?”

09:30 **Would you call that dark humour?**

Yes, but that’s his form. No, the rear gunner died several years ago, he was a Pommie and came out as a farm assistant and set up a business of his own, he stayed in the Air Force and became a Squadron Leader and had a daughter

10:00 living in America and went there about 5 years ago and walking along the beach with his wife and fell over and didn’t move. Both of the flight engineers I had, I’ve not heard of since the war, one was a Scot and the other a Londoner and

10:30 rear gunner and the bomb aimer was a Victorian who lived in Melbourne but he’d been in a nursing home for about 6 years too and he died about a year ago.

What were the other nicknames you used for those blokes?

Well, the obvious one was the wireless operator, he was from Wales and he was Taffy the rear gunner

11:00 I didn’t give them these names, the rear gunner was a Yorkshireman he was Rocky, his name was Rothwell, he and the bomb aimer, he was a quiet bloke no he didn’t have a nickname, Patterson was Oscar, he was Ozzie and I was always just referred to as skipper

11:30 and Don, he was just Donald, the mid upper gunner.

Do you march with these blokes on Anzac Day the ones that are well enough or have been well enough in recent years?

The crew, no a few air force blokes, yes there were a few locals who were in the same area as I was, most of us were on the east coast of

12:00 England anyway, yes there were quite a few locals who were in the same area but not on the same squadron though.

How do you feel about Anzac Day?

Oh I’ve always attended it except I missed this year because my wife died and yes I’ve always attended a little march we have at Bowen Heads out on the coast and that’s always enjoyable. We usually

12:30 keep out of trouble by playing golf in the afternoon.

Are the memories you have of the war some of the strongest memories?

Yes, they are really you know, it’s 60 years ago now and sometimes and particularly now that we have been talking together, it really seems only yesterday

13:00 **What other memories in you life would be almost as strong?**

Oh obviously I have a terrific number of memories of my wife Bunty and my only daughter Susie and since then have two grandchildren Angela and Andrew, fond memories of family reunions and so forth.

13:30 But to get back to my own extended family I have to go back to Adelaide, they all live in South Australia, they’re thinning out a bit too now unfortunately my eldest sister and 2 elder brothers have died so there only 4 of us left now, the one next to me was also a pilot and unfortunately he didn’t

14:00 get into combat flying he was, one of his motors caught fire and they were flying in Nairobi and he bailed out and damaged his shoulder and hip and didn’t fly again, so he finished war in the Middle East and Italy finally

14:30 photographic section I think mainly. And he’s still alive.

And he’s still alive now?

Yes he's still alive, he will be 90 this year a couple of years ahead of me.

I was wondering having been recently married myself, how you coped going off to war with three and a half years recently after having being married.

Well we didn't expect it to be that

15:00 long of course I don't think any of us expected to be away more than a year or so really but yes it was obviously in our letters when I see looking back, our letters were pretty well all of the expectation that we would see each other next Christmas and the next one happened and the next one happened

15:30 and the next one happened, I was almost honest, I got home in October so it was a pretty happy occasion when it finally turned up but unfortunately at that stage my mother was seriously ill with cancer and she only lasted a couple of months after I returned and my father had died while I was in England.

16:00 **Yes I was going to ask you how you received the news about your father's passing.**

Beg your pardon?

How you received the news of your father's death.

Oh by cable. I think it got there a couple of days after. I knew he was in hospital and that he was near death. Yes he was quite young he was only 63 and my mother was only barely 60.

16:30 Oh well I knew that dad was in hospital as I say but I wasn't given the indication that it was likely to be fatal but I did know that my mother's situation was very serious and because I was OC of the dispatch squadron

17:00 in England at Gamston I was instructed to put myself on the list, so I knew it was pretty serious.

How did you cope with the loss of your father while you were away?

Well yeah, well again knowing that he was in hospital I had to expect that probably it might be that I don't have any recollection,

17:30 that I wouldn't see him again, yes we were a pretty close family and yes I must say I was pretty despondent obviously about not being home when his life finished.

It's just really hard.

Mmmm. But still

18:00 it happened to many others no doubt.

And when you came home you had a lot to cope with in just a few months you had lost your mum and then reuniting with your wife and a new baby.

Yes that's right she turned up pretty soon after I got home. Yes, well I suppose

18:30 my experience was pretty similar to several hundred other blokes in some respects and I don't know I think our fellow handled it better than the servicemen since then, I mean the Vietnam fellows had a really rotten war seeing their mates killed along side them, we didn't ever see anything of that,

19:00 I mean I was lucky enough for that not to happen at all with me but with other crews where there were crew members wounded and you know emergency actions had to be taken it must have been pretty devastating but we didn't ever see really any of the sort of rotten bloody action that

19:30 that the Vietnam fellows did and probably Koreans did, you don't read much about the Korean war.

It is perhaps less publicised.

Mmmm. But the Vietnam fellows seemed to have a much more effect psychologically on them than I realized that it had on the fellows in bomber command anyway that I know.

20:00 **You told me a funny story during the break about having to go to a psychiatrist for the pension they required you to, can you tell me what he said?**

Oh well, I had never had a pension for 50 or 55 years as it happened I met a fellow at last Anzac Day and we had our gongs on and he saw my DFC and Bar and he said "By the way

20:30 what pension are you on?" I said "I'm not on a pension." "What", he said "you silly so and so." I said "I haven't had anything really wrong with me and the only thing I could ever claim on I tried and I explained once to a doctor that I reckoned that it had an effect on me I had 2 very heavy falls." The Lancaster had a big steel spar going right across

21:00 at the base of the wings it was about 3 feet and I used to always give the navigator a hand with all his maps and gear for the operation, his helmet and so forth and lifting these and carrying them over, and I

had a couple of busters flat on my back and I always reckon I had an aching back ever since the war and finally and nobody would say that that couldn't have caused

21:30 by your war experience, anyway it was established when it was explained what these busters that I had had could quite obviously have caused some curvature and so forth trouble and so I decided that I would make an application and so the what does he call himself,

22:00 well the pensions officer at the RSL said "Of course, you are entitled to something", so he said he decided he would fill in an application for me and off we sent but the doctor, the local GP [General Practitioner], gave his authority and one of the requirements of the application was in addition to the damage I had done to my back

22:30 the doctor said "You must have been under a certain amount of stress weren't you?" I said "Well having done a couple of full tours of ops I'd say that I was under a bit of stress at times". He said "Well we'll put that in", and back came the reply to the effect that it would be a requirement and that you had nominated or your doctor had nominated stress as one of the requirements

23:00 on the application and you will have to go to a psychiatrist and finally I got an appointment with the shrink and it was about virtually, about two and a half months after the application went in and he had been on leave and so forth and so, and anyway after about an hour and a half interview with the psycho he

23:30 said the result of it, if it had been recommended that there was a stress factor in this application it would have meant an extra amount on any pension I was on, so that applied to my own physical situation, so after about an hour and a half he said "Well Clarrie, I've got to be straight out with you on this, and on my usual form

24:00 to any applicant", he said, "As far as I can see you are not entitled to any points at all", so I didn't get anything from him, whether he was genuine about it or whether I didn't have any stress I don't know but I don't get anything for it anyway.

A mixed blessing?

Probably, yes. He

24:30 only saw me for an hour and a half he didn't see me for the rest of the week. No I'm pretty reasonable I think, I don't think I'm very psycho.

I haven't had the chance to ask you that when you actually got home I think you were coming on the rail and Bunty was waiting for you. Can you tell me about that scene?

Well it was a pretty happy reunion.

25:00 It was over three years, it was nearly three and a half years since I'd seen her and there were plenty of people on the Adelaide railway station, there were quite a lot of, I came home on the ship with 1400 ex prisoners of war and there was a big crowd on the railway station when we arrived, yeah it was a pretty happy reunion, most of my own family were there as well

25:30 including my mother at that stage but she had lost that much weight that I really didn't recognize her, I thought she was one of my aunts who was much smaller and then when I went away my mother had lost so much weight that I really didn't recognize her, I really thought she was one of my aunts

26:00 at a distance.

Did they have a bit of a party for you that night?

Oh yes it was a good party.

What sorts of food?

I don't remember too much about food, there was a bit of grog there I can remember that part of it. Now that I come to think of it I always loved crayfish and there was a big crayfish I can remember that, yes I hadn't

26:30 seen one for 4 years or more perhaps.

Ianto [interviewer] might have a couple of questions that he might like to ask. Ianto was interested in

27:00 **hearing about the wakey wakey pills, how did they affect the men who did take them?**

Well, generally if you were on a long trip most of the fellows waited until they got to about the target area which is what I did, I only ever took a couple and they were on a seven and a half and eight and a half hour trips and I waited

27:30 until I got to the target area and took one then to make sure that I was absolutely alert by the time we got back over the sea because that was part of the difficult period of an operation when you were, after absolute 100% concentration on your panel of instruments in front of you and in complete dark

28:00 and then with the flying back almost due west to England and you had the northern star coming in as a real bright star and it was very difficult not to nod off, so I used to leave it to just before the target and take one, Benzedrine I think they were, does that sound right?

What about the side effects?

28:30 **I think they can be addictive?**

Well they'd keep you awake after you had landed too, you couldn't go to sleep that's why a lot of the fellows didn't use them at all, I used them only a couple of times and people who had used them said damned if I can get to sleep when I get back. But about eight and half hours would be the longest

29:00 trip that I did and just prior to my getting to the squadron they did a trip to Italy, one to Turin and one to Milan and they were about nine to nine and a half hours, one interesting thing that always amused me was that when they were routed back over the Bay of Biscay

29:30 the German fighters were already in France and our fellows were instructed to, the best way to dodge the fighters over the sea area was to get down at low level and two of our fellows came back with sea weed in their tail wheels yeah, they'd got down so low that they misjudged and hit the crest of the waves.

They're lucky they lived to tell about that.

Yes,

30:00 that's getting a bit low.

With all that, you might say adrenalin, doing this did you really have trouble falling asleep when you got back?

No, not really I can't recall anyhow, you'd still have the droning of the motors in your head until you dropped off usually but after our debriefing,

30:30 that's what the Yanks call it, debrief, we called it interrogation after that and having got rid of our parachutes and flying gear and so forth we always had a breakfast before we went to bed, that was always a good opportunity to

31:00 let down a bit before we went to bed and you, unfortunately you did never know that you were going to have a long sleep because if you were on the next night which occasionally happened you would be roused by the girls looking after the sleeping quarters,

31:30 we were a bit lucky, being the fellows who had a commission, had a batman or batgirl and they'd look after our clothes and the ironing and that sort of thing and they won't wake us up because they were alerted that possibly operations were on and they'd wake us in time to get up and get the news that we were on again or we weren't on.

I was wondering if anyone ever got airsick?

Yes my navigator did for the first 3 or 4 trips I think he got over it afterwards but yes he got sick on each occasion I think, it wouldn't be easy to be navigating in those circumstances but I don't know of any pilots who had any difficulty

32:30 **How did you cope with airsickness when it occurred?**

Well you had to carry a tin and there was a portable loo at the back of the aircraft of course.

Was there much time to use the loo?

Well, I did never use it, no I didn't go back, I had a tin under my seat.

33:00 No, well it was back towards the rear of the aircraft and as we didn't normally and there was only one pilot unless at the very beginning of your tour of operations you usually had one trip as a second dickie but apart from that unless you were after being a bit experienced

33:30 you were allotted another new pilot to take instructions to, I took one or two on 2 or 3 trips at what we call a 2nd dickie which was his first trip to give him a bit of experience, yeah so they were always interesting too because of the reaction too of a fellow alongside you who had virtually

34:00 had nothing to do but to observe, but they always expressed their gratitude whatever they were able to pick up from you actions and reactions, emergency situations.

Were some of them quite afraid?

Oh no, no I didn't

34:30 ever encounter that, no I took 3 separate second dickies and purely by coincidence they all got through that was on my second tour and then the losses were a lot lighter then of course.

Are there any aspects of your

35:00 **experience of the war that I haven't asked about or Ianto hasn't asked about that you'd like to talk about?**

No, I think you've covered it from that point of view very well really, yeah.

Are there any message I guess I could say, that you would like to put out to the general public to utilize this archive

35:30 **about the war and your experience of the war.**

Well I think that it's a great project that you're on because blokes my age are obviously in 2 or 3 years time it's going to be too late, I get a newsletter from the 460 Squadron in NSW after their Annual General Meeting

36:00 and they always have an obituary page and there were 13 on this year, there were blokes that could have given you a lot more interesting stories than I have given you because their experience would have been, some of them anyhow would have been quite different and now they're gone, three of those who have gone in the last 6 years were Squadron Commanders, they were Wing Commanders

36:30 and had more of a responsibility than I had on a squadron and it would have been ideal to have captured their experience.

So we are very lucky to speak to you Clarrie and we so appreciate the time that you have given us and this wonderful information.

Well it has been a pleasure to meet you both

37:00 and I hope that the project is as successful as it ought it be from your enthusiasm.

We hope so too, thank you.

Good, you're very welcome.