

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Harry Mason (Ace) - Transcript of interview

**Date of interview: 17th September 2003**

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/599>

### Tape 1

00:45 **Well, good morning Harry.**

Good morning.

**I was wondering if we could start this morning with just a brief introduction to your childhood, and where you were born and grew up?**

01:01 Well, I was born in the year 1916 in Collingwood. I was the fourth child to be born in Collingwood, and we moved from there to Kew. I think the main reason for us living in Collingwood was the fact that my father was a driver of cable trams. He was called the 'grip man'.

01:31 Cable trams have been out of use for some years now, and this was a cable that ran underground in the middle of the road. Under the road. There was a powerhouse in Carlton, which drove the cable, which went around down Victoria Street, Richmond, to as far as Victoria Bridge,

02:00 and Bridge Road, where they intercepted the Yarra [River]. And for that reason there was only those three roads that had the cable tram. And my father grew up in Hawthorn, and his parents were rather well-respected and spoken; my father

02:30 moved to Collingwood because it was adjacent to the tram lines that he worked on. So when they...I don't know the reason they moved to Kew, it was never discussed. Children were seen, but not heard in those days. So I can only remember the period beginning from Kew. But with

03:00 the association of Collingwood and the football team that grew from that, I am a strong devotee of the Collingwood Football Club, and very proud of them and my association with the subject. Well, in later days, after I had finished primary school, I attended a Catholic technical school, which is a junior technical school, and not very far reaching. And I only

03:30 did twelve months there anyway. I used to walk from Kew to the Abbotsford Technical School each day and back. Which would have probably have been about six kilometres each way. So I became very much associated with exercise and walking. Going

04:00 from there, when we moved to Kew, and I attended the Sacred Heart Primary School in Cotham Road, Kew. I left there and I sat for the merit certificate and I did not gain it, but I think I was pending or something. I didn't understand it in those days.

04:30 I didn't care. But I went from there to St Joseph's Technical College, where I gained a little more knowledge, but then that was only for twelve months. And then Depression was on. So my brother was apprenticed in the boot trade, and the boot trade was covered in Collingwood and Fitzroy by factories, all in the

05:00 leather goods area. Boots and shoes and whatnot. So, my father had a brother who was a manager of a firm making boots and shoes for Easywalking. A well known firm for the sale of boots and shoes. And I suspect from that that we got some free boots and shoes, at times.

05:30 Depression came. Uncle Vic, who was manager of William Peats, the firm that my brother was apprenticed to, was dismissed from that with so many others, as they Depression got worse. And I left school and I got a job at Riorts[?], which was a big steel firm.

06:00 And there was no overalls, they gave you nothing. And they became greasy and oily with the manufacturing of nuts and bolts. It was a thrilling job. I would get a bolt and I'd screw a nut on for about five threads and throw it in a bin. And then I'd get the next one and do that. Well, the action of

06:30 screwing the nuts on the bolts, and the new machinery, had sharp edges on it. So my hands became cut and bleeding, so I only spent about two weeks there, and I went home and I was unemployed for a few days, or a week, I can't remember. Then I attended a place that advertised for some young men,

07:00 of my age, fifteen, fourteen fifteen, and I went to this place, which was a watchcase manufacturers. And when I got there, the crowd of applicants for the job, stretched across the road, fully, and there must have been easily three hundred youths, all claiming the job. The factory manager and the

07:30 general manager walked through this whole crowd, looking closely at everyone for some form of assessing them. And, as I found out later, manufacturing watch cases was done in nine carat gold, and also white carat, and nickel and chrome cases.

08:00 And so they had to be rather cautious about whom they employed, which I found later, was brought to my notice. I was one of six selected, and after twenty years, I was the last of that six to work there. And in that time I had six and a half years in the air force. But getting back to the value

08:31 of the material we worked, all the dust swept up from the floors, wooden floors, there was no air conditioning in this days, and all the dust was swept up and put in bins, and it was sent away to be refined. Because there was specks of gold which came about from the machining of it all, which dropped to the floor, on our shoes possibly.

09:00 And we washed at a basin, a long basin, every day, and that water ran into a big tank underground, and a mud formed in that, and I became part of the maintenance team later on. We had to get into the tank under the ground, and shovel out all the mud, fit it into drums, and it was

09:30 sent away to be refined. They retained the gold from it. That went on for some times. But a lot happened in the intervening years. And during the time that I was there....My first week there, that finger went under a press, which I kicked down. And it should have put a radius in the buckle

10:00 of the strap of a watch, making this slightly...to form the curvature of your wrist. I put my finger under the thing and didn't take it out in time, so it removed all that. And I had to walk from Abbotsford to St Vincent's Hospital to get that attended to. And walk back. And it was only a matter of

10:30 some short time, when the manager came up to me in the room where I was working and he said, "Could you come with me, please?" So I didn't have a clue what was going on. We got in his car and we went to a jeweller's in Glenferrie Road, Glenferrie. This was in Melbourne, of course. And he took me into this jeweller and the manager was behind counter and he

11:00 said, "Is this the chap?" And he said, "No, the person concerned had the bandage on his left hand." So they took me in the car, back to work. No apologies or anything. And then I had a friend there that I used to walk home with, at times, and he was there for some years. And then his brother

11:30 started there, his older brother. And the word came through that...Oh, there were round sections in a watch, smaller than this one, but the centre of the piece of gold, was punched a hole, and the watch movement would fit in that. That meant that the centre of the watch would

12:00 be about, in those days, before metrics, up to three sixteenths of an inch thick. And as it was nine carat gold, it weighed a bit. It was of some value. But the piece that was dropped out of the centre of the piece would drop into a bin in the press.

12:33 We worked over-time, and if we worked over-time, we were given one shilling tea money. So we were told that we were working this one particular night, then they changed their mind, and the office girl used to come around and hand the shillings to us...And in this case, to retrieve the shillings because of the over-time not being

13:00 on. And this chap, the brother of Ken, put his hand in his pocket to give the money back, the shilling, but he had some of these pieces of nine carat gold. And of course she told the manager, and he had been taking these and going to a dance on a Saturday night, making himself a big man, and giving them out to people, which

13:30 distressed the management, and he, I don't know what the finish was, but he was certainly sacked from there. But it turned out he was already out on a bond for stealing money from an electrical firm that he worked before coming to us. So it was inevitable he would finish up where he was. I don't know what happened to him, but we didn't see him again.

14:01 Time went on. It was a miserable job, it had no future, and I got some misgivings about it. But there wasn't much opportunity of changing my job. I'd had no training in any other thing. The work that I had done at a technical school for twelve months, took me into sheet metal work. I only had a knowledge, a

14:30 slight knowledge of that. And so from there....No, I was still working there on the press, and war broke out. Which, as well all know, was 3rd of September, 1939. And I thought "This is my opportunity. If I join the air force I will get some

15:00 of the technical training which I will be able to put to some advantage. Should I be able to come out of it all right, of course. And so I had to wait, because I couldn't waste the money of leaving my job and going applying for a position in the air force, I waited until the first day of my Christmas holidays of 1939. And I went in. They interviewed me,

15:30 and of course I had the glamorous idea of aircrew, pilot. And every boy's adventure. And they assessed me, and there was a medical test, and they said, "Righto, come back on 15th of January, 1940, and you will be classed as an aircraft hand rigger."

16:00 In my bewilderment, I didn't know what that was or what it entailed. Anyway, my brother Ron, the next brother to me in age, he married, and I was best man at the wedding. And he went to a place where we'd been staying there at Christmas holidays for some years, for his wife's family, Balnarring, on the western port bay

16:30 of Victoria. And it was their honeymoon, but I was there with them. And we came 15th of January, I went off and went into the recruiting office in Melbourne, and a number of us got aboard a [UNCLEAR] and we went down to Point Cook,

17:00 no Lavington. Point Cook was a similar station, but it was further down on the beach. Lavington was back towards the city. I went there and there must have been twenty of us. We went in and we did drilling, marches, saluting, up and down. And then after about a fortnight.

17:32 we were all transferred to the showgrounds in Melbourne. Which became a technical school for the air force. And also we had to finish our drilling, on the big concourse where they would have all horse trials and everything. The army at that time, occupied the front part of the showgrounds, which was

18:00 the main entrance, and the air force took to the back end. So I had my motorbike then, I'd had bikes for a couple of years, and I was known as a ratbag. I probably was, but I was living in Kew with my family, and I was associated with a lass. I'd been

18:30 courting her for twelve months. And I went home from the showgrounds one night, on my bike. I went to see this lass afterwards, and leaving, we had leave up until twelve o' clock that night. So I got down and I came to Glenferrie Road, Glenferrie.

19:00 Because the engine was still cool, it cut out. I kicked the engine over again, and the last thing I remembered was crossing Glenferrie Road. I woke up some days later in an ambulance, being taken into Caulfield Military Hospital. And I sat up and looked out of the window. I was transferred on a stretcher to a bed.

19:31 And I was there for a few days, and I wanted the toilet. So I called a nurse, and she came and I got out of bed, and she stood on my left side to support me there. And I took one step with my right leg and down I went on the floor. Then I found out my right leg was paralysed. I was devastated. I played hockey

20:00 for a number of years. I thought, 'There's no more hockey.' Forget about walking, of course. I was really devastated. I spent six weeks in the hospital. And I was able to get around, walk, only a shuffle, holding onto physicians. Until I was to disregard any support.

20:30 I got a walking stick and then I was able to walk, or sort of definitely limp. But after the six weeks, I went back to the air force, back to the showgrounds, it was. And it was recommended I be passed out from completing my drills. I never touched a rifle; I didn't do any rifle drill. But I was familiar

21:00 with it, because my two brothers had been in the army at one time, and they had rifles, and I used to imitate them, when I was about thirteen or fourteen or something. And I was familiar with the rifle drill, so I went immediately into the technical side of what kept an aeroplane in the air, and what was necessary for the maintenance of it.

21:30 I found out that an aircraft hand rigger was attendant of the wheels, brakes, tires, all the hydraulics, the control cables, the flaps, and elevators. And any cables that had wear, you had to detect that. The only wear came

22:00 was when the cable ran round a pulley, which was necessary if it was going from the cockpit, down to the elevators, at the tail end, it had to pass around a number of pulleys. It was around those pulleys that the wear came in the cables. And we had to be very careful, rigid on it, that no more than four strands of the wiring were broken, it was to be immediately

22:31 replaced. It necessitated pulling the whole cable out, and associating a bobbin, which would take a screw or bolt, holding it in. All the fabric of the plane, there wasn't a great deal on the....Well, the Wirraway, which was the first aircraft I worked on. That was almost all metal construction, with the exception of

23:00 the elevators, the rudders and the flaps, where there was fabric. If, at times, the aircraft was running down the runway, and there were bits of bitumen or stone broken off, those pieces could come up and put a hole in any of the fabrics. And it was necessary, on our inspections, every forty hours, or eighty hours, or one

23:30 hundred and twenty hours, there was an inspection came up. And each advanced hour it entailed a further examination, covering more of the aircraft. So when it came to, I think it was two hundred hours, then the aircraft was taken into the workshops, and it was out of our hands. A greater inspection was carried out and replacements where necessary, specifically

24:00 in the engine, because there wasn't a great deal in the airframe. We spent some time, because I was six weeks delayed in my incapacitation, and instead of being number three aircraft hand riggers course that I was on, I became a member of number eight. And formed a

24:30 new companionship. When I first went into the air force, every man was given a number. My regimental number was 5924. Which was pretty low, and you could designate or you could work out, how long a person had been in the service by the association of his number. Well the crowd I joined, their numbers were in

25:00 the twelve thousand. They mainly came from New South Wales, but there were a few from Perth and a couple from Queensland. So we were sort of a cosmopolitan mob. But I had never been engaged in a body of men before. Living with them. There were strange characters, some nice characters, but we had

25:30 a number didn't fit in with me, but you worked out who you selected as a friendship. And okay, there were some that I established and lasted for a long time. In our course, which was probably three months, then they said you will be posted, on completion of

26:00 the course, passing the exam. And I think everyone would have passed anyway. Pleased to get the people out and put them on the aircraft. So, we came to the time when we completed our course, and we were waiting a posting. Then the word came around that we might be going to Darwin. Darwin was written up...

26:30 it was where they expected the forefront of anything to come, if it did come. They thought it was pretty remote, but it was possible. Because they knew that Japan, should they ever get adventurous enough to attack us, gain our large area of land. They were very familiar; there were Japanese pearling luggers, which were all around the northern and the western coast. And

27:00 it was very well known the possible association would arise. But an article in Smith's Weekly, which was a radical newspaper of those days, any scandals, or whatever, Smith's Weekly had it. And when it was mooted that Japan would be a possible assailant of us, they said, the Smith's Weekly said, what possible chance

27:30 would they have? He said, "They've been fighting China for six years and they haven't been able to defeat them, So I don't think we expect much from them." How little we knew. Our postings came. I went to Number 12 Squadron Darwin, with a number of others who had been on my course. And we had Australia's frontline fighter, the Wirraway. Capable

28:00 of one hundred and forty miles per hour. And in a dive, I was a passenger in the seat, I'm rather getting ahead of myself, but to demonstrate what the capabilities of the Wirraway were, they had a bombing section. Practice bombing. And this one particular place, off the coast,

28:30 in the vicinity of Darwin, and it was only visible at low tide. But they had a large white circle painted on it, and in that circle was a metal triangle. A pyramid. painted white. Now for practise bombing, you can have low level, where the aircraft would come across and just drop an eight and a half pound practice bomb,

29:00 which was a smoke bomb. And it was quite visible when the pilot dropped it. And they would want someone, sitting in the back seat, such as a ground staff member, such as I was, to look and pinpoint where the bomb hit. But more generally the pilot themselves looked around, and they could plot how good they were. Sometimes, if the bombing was low level, they would just come

29:30 over parallel. But if it was high dive, they'd be up to seven thousand feet, and they could dive onto the target, drop the bomb, and then pull out of it. One trip I was on, sitting in the back seat, and we pulled out of the dive. And the pilot was looking around, over the side, I'd seen it, but I was watching the speedo. It had been up to three hundred

30:00 miles an hour, and he was still looking back, and he's still climbing, and I'm thinking, 'We're going to get a stall out of this, and at this height we won't get out of it.' So I kicked on the rudder pedal, it woke him up. He threw the control column forward and we came back to level flight. And I breathed again, but it could have been a disaster. For both of us.

30:30 And they would have lost an aircraft. But when, as I said, became familiar with the Wirraway, and its incapacities. And especially when talk came through that Japan were building an aircraft, the Zero, and it was doing rather high standing figures.

31:00 As proved out in Pearl Harbor. That was the real awakening. I had eighteen months in Darwin, and there was one part about that that I very much enjoyed. We had the hockey team up there, of course I was into that. And instead of just one season a year, we played two seasons

31:30 a year. The wet season and the dry season. So in the normal course of one year I got two seasons of hockey playing. So we had a very good team up there. We played the army and the navy, and a couple of other civilian teams. And the army were very strong with us. There was....you wouldn't say jealousy, but

32:00 a difference between us. We were known as the Golden Boys, the Tizzies, and I suppose that earned us a reputation. Pansy, if you like. But we were different. I remember we had a fellow playing with us, came from Queensland. Tom Moody. He was big, he was boisterous, and

32:30 he played everything. Every sport. I used to have the gloves on with him, at times, with some of the others. And oh, he was good with me. He pansied me. No trouble. But of course he played hockey... everything he did was hard. And I remember playing against one team one day, I forget now army, navy, whatever,

33:00 and this chap said "You've got a good team, apart from that bloody Moody." He earned their respect by the vigour of his game. Anyway, time came, they were told down in the south, "You will spend twelve months in Darwin. And then you will be transferred to Singapore."

33:31 We all wanted action, and Singapore was, they thought, was going to be the forefront of that. Europe was going of course. So we thought that after twelve months we'll be transferred to Singapore. But, twelve months came and went, and we staged some sort of a protest about us

34:00 because I was in grade three I think, in pay. The wages....We were getting about six shillings a day. And we couldn't get any advance or any promotions, being in the grading that we were. So having served our twelve months, we wanted to get down south to Melbourne

34:31 and do an advanced training course which would put us into higher wage group and also possible advances of our service. Of reaching, say, corporal stage. You wouldn't get much more anyway from our training. So, they staged

35:00 a sick parade. It was figured that on this particular day, we were all formed up in our different flights. There were three squadrons in Darwin. 12 Squadron, which were Wirrways, 13 Squadron Lockheed Hudsons and bombers, and the administration, the headquarters squadron. So we selected a day, when there was a big parade, and

35:30 after they called the roll, orders are read out and figures for the day, what the duties were, and then the commander of each flight would say, "Fall out the sick." Those who were going on sick parade about turned and went off and formed up at the rear of the column. So everyone knew about it, the officers

36:00 and I remember the officer in charge of us, he said, "Fall out the sick." With a big smirk. With the exception of about two, we all turned and marched out, and so this happened with the other three squadrons. Until there were about three hundred assembled at the back. So I thought now, from the way they

36:30 worked it, I was going to be first in. I thought, 'What's wrong with me?' I get in there, and there was the chief squadron leader in charge of the medical section, and then a group captain and a few others, all in there. Where normally there is only the one medical officer sitting. And he said, "What's

37:00 your trouble?" And I said, "I have trouble with my eyes, sir." He said, "In what way?" And I said, "Well, the sun is playing up with the outside. I have to shut my eyes. And when I go the theatre at night, the figures on the screen are jazzing about." So he came and made a very, very close examination of my eyes. And

37:30 then they went into a huddle, the doctors, and he said, "Drops in the eyes twice a day, and go to be bed every night at eight, for a fortnight." A form of CB [confined to barracks]. So I did that, and the others had various things. And I remember, while they were waiting outside, to go in to see the

38:00 doctor, one of the chaps said to the corporal or sergeant in charge, "May we smoke, Sir?" And he said, "No, you're sick." He said, "You can't smoke." He said, "I think that depends upon your illness, Sir. I'm going in because I have a bad ankle. And my smoking doesn't affect it at all." He still couldn't smoke.

38:31 They finished up anyway....It was blown over and nothing eventuated from it, until three months later, it was about three months, when we were all posted, our replacements had been up there for some time. And we were all dispatched down south. Well, in this time,

39:00 Japan had themselves known of their intentions, because it was just after January or February, and Pearl Harbor had occurred. And then we got the realisation of what the power the Japanese were going to be. With their three hundred mile an hour cruising speed

39:30 of the Zeros and whatever, and up to six hundred in a dive. The poor old Wirraway. I shuddered for our pilots. But as it turned out, we were transferred down. I went down to Point Cook for about a month, I think it was. And their aircraft, they were an elementary flying training,

40:00 and they were twin-engined, can't think of the name of them now, an English aircraft, twin engine, low monoplane. And fifty percent, a lot of night flying was done; fifty percent of one course crashed into the sea and killed. Fifty percent. The runways ran north and south, and that

40:31 took them over the sea. And it was said, and I don't know whether it is correct or not, that when the aircraft, especially at night flying, they took off over the sea and they lost their horizon. They should have the instruments there. They would have, too, to my knowledge. I wasn't a pilot. But they lost it,

and that was accepted. So one day...

## Tape 2

00:33 **I was wondering Harry, if we could go right back to the beginning for a moment. And you mentioned very briefly a bit about the Depression, but I was wondering what ordinary life was like, and maybe the hardships you saw, during the Depression....**

Well, I've thought of this, and I was reminded that someone mentioned

01:00 bread and butter sandwiches, some time, and it revived my memory because we frequently had bread and butter sandwiches, taking to school. Fruit, we never saw on our table. There was, in the family, my father was working in the first stage, but when we transferred from Collingwood to Kew, he worked with John and Waygood[?]. A big

01:30 steel place, steel manufacturing. And our situation wasn't bad then, I don't think. Of course, I was so very, very young, and I didn't realise any of this. I had my eldest sister, two elder brothers, well the younger of those two brothers, he was the only one...he was an apprentice,

02:00 working. The eldest brother he worked at Damon's, the tobacconist, in the city of Melbourne. Phyllis worked in a clothing factory, and we went on....Then for some reason, I don't know why, we moved. In the same street in Kew. Which was Fitzwilliam Street. We

02:30 went from number 67 to 43. And we had an improvement. They had electric light in number 43, where we had had gas light previously. And we thought that was wonderful, and indeed it was. We didn't stay very long there, I don't know how long, but we moved to Edgevale Road, Kew. Which was

03:00 only about half a mile difference. And there was a well known baker, bread baker, factory, in Fitzwilliam Street, where we lived. And in the early stages, my eldest brother Oscar used to go on the baker's cart with one of the drivers. And he fell off the cart one day, and the wheel

03:30 ran over him and broke his leg. Then he was in bed for some time, and his boss, if you could call him that, employed him on the cart, gave him a banjo-mandolin, to occupy his mind. And that set him up in music. From that, over the years he developed, and he had

04:00 that ingrained into him, that he grabbed music and he became interested in other things, amateur theatricals, writing, story-writing, singing even, and he was doing a course of radio announcing. And from...Oh, the Damon's job

04:30 that he had, it petered out. He got too old. They employed youth labour, when he got too old and they had to pay him full money, he was dismissed, so he had to join the ranks of the unemployed. He spent some time in fruit picking, he got around doing that. And he did a correspondence course of foreign languages

05:01 and I think he did French and German. He taught himself shorthand and became associated with a few musicians. One who became well known in Australia, Adrian Ronsburrow[?], a pianist, playing jazz. And he advanced

05:30 to the degree, where he thought he would get away from Melbourne, and go to Sydney. So he asked if I would give him a ride on my bike up to Albury. Which I did. I took him to Albury on the bike, and left him there. He worked around New South Wales. He worked for a surveyor for a while. Then he got a job at a

06:00 radio station. I'm beating myself, I think. He worked for 3TR Sale, in Victoria, as a radio announcer, and then 3AJ Hamilton, he worked there. And then he went to New South Wales, and he got a job at 2HR, Hunter River, as radio announcer and manager. And he was only in that for perhaps

06:30 two years and then the call up came for the war. And he went into the air force, and he was shot down, or crashed, in Yugoslavia. They were engaged in dropping supplies to [General] Tito. And the plane was missing for nearly twelve months. And then it was found, when the snow thawed, the plane had crashed in the Alps. And he's

07:00 now buried in the Belgrade cemetery. Is there anything further I can...?

**I was going to say just on that, what news did you have of Oscar while he was away?**

What news?

**Yes, how much contact could you have with him while he was...**

I was posted to Darwin, and he was employed then at 2GB, as a radio announcer.

07:30 And on the way to Darwin, we went by ship, I called in and saw him, and then we progressed up to....we

went into Brisbane, Thursday Island, Moeresby, just stopping there, and then onto Darwin. And he was very good. I loved the music that was then. Jazz. Artie Shaw, Bennie Goodman, Duke Ellington.

- 08:00 And he sent me records up to Darwin. An interesting thing about these records, they're popular. They built the theatre on the new aerodrome in Darwin and the projectionist lived in the same hut that I did. And he would borrow my records to play in the intervals, in the theatre.
- 08:30 And a particular record came up; it was Fats Waller, playing Honey Hush. So, we had one of my mates there, Francis Charles Butcher, lovely bloke. And he came home in the grog [drunk] one night and he said, "Harry"....this was about eleven o' clock. Lights out were at ten o' clock.
- 09:00 He said, "Harry, play Honey Hush." I said, "Oh, turn it up, Butch! You'll have us in jail." He said, "No, no, no. Put it on." So we put the light on and played Honey Hush. And a voice came from outside. "Put that light out!" And Francis Charles made an impolite reply, and a voice came, "Who said that?" He said "Francis Charles Butcher."
- 09:30 So the service policeman came. He said, "Who's that?" "Me." He said, "You'll go." He said, "It's Honey Hush." Anyway, that closed the night, got us out. And ever after, when that record was played, "Ah, there's the CB record." He got a week's CB for it. And Francis Charles Butcher,
- 10:01 last year I read of a murder which went on in Queensland. And there were two fellows arguing something about the volume of the noise coming from a TV. And one of them was Francis Butcher. A disturbance occurred, and a knife was produced and Francis Charles fell on the knife and was killed.
- 10:32 Now it's most likely because he lived in that area. He was a wheat lumper. Big bloke, genial, oh, he was a great bloke. We had a great rapport with each other. And I've been waiting for a trial to come up to give just more positive identification whether Francis Charles was that bloke, but gee, he didn't deserve that.
- 11:00 But they always remember Honey Hush. And since then of course, with Roger [Mason, composer and Harry's son] being in music, although his music wasn't jazz, which is my show piece. I never got around to learning anything in music. I had three children, I'm getting ahead, I think.
- 11:30 **That's okay, what I might do is just ask you, you mentioned a little bit about the day you heard that war was declared. But I'm wondering if you could tell where you were and what you were you were doing when heard that war had broken out on the 3rd of September?**

Now, if we go back to something like 1932 or '33

- 12:00 when Italy invaded Abyssinia. And they invaded there, and because it was adjacent to the Suez Canal, that was the main shipping route from England to Australia, and Africa. That was the short cut. And when Italy took that measure, Britain
- 12:30 said "Now, now. Be good." And pulled them to order. So Italy got out of that, but the stage was set, I think, for when the Second World War came on, Italy did the same thing. But they had the assistance of Germany. But that's when the Australian 9th Division went into that area, and cleaned up the situation
- 13:00 very nicely. But when it came to the declaration of Second World War, I don't know....Oh, I forgot that. When that invasion of Abyssinia, I had only just started work, I think, about 1932. Well, I started work in 1932 with this firm, and it was '33 or something that
- 13:30 the invasion occurred. So I thought, 'Ah, here's a bit of excitement. I'll join the army, and get into this war business.' So I joined an artillery unit in Melbourne. And as the war fizzled out over there, I only attended drill, which was one camp I think. Then they asked me to send my suit back. And
- 14:00 I withdrew from the army. But then when the larger Second World War came along, I was working at JW Handley's, where I had been working for seven and a half years, at that time. And I thought, 'Now, here's an opportunity.' Because I had misgivings about the job that I was doing, and
- 14:31 I thought, 'There's no future in this. I'm not doing any training, no skilled work.' My qualifications were zero. So I thought if I joined the air force, I've got some sort of technical training that will fit me for a better job. This is a theory of course that I was going to come out of the war all right. So on the first day of my Christmas holidays of 1939, I went in and
- 15:00 I did the necessary examination, and they said, "Come back on the 15th of January, you will be an aircraft hand rigger." I didn't know what that was...

**I wonder Harry, just before you go on. What did you know about the First World War, or what had happened? Did you know anybody who had served? Anyone in your family?**

No, we only....my father wasn't...

- 15:30 I think he was too young, possibly for that. I don't know. 1914 that was. Well, I was born in 1916, and he'd already had three children prior to me. It was strange. They referred to people as, "Oh, he's a returned soldier." We grew up with

16:00 that, he must be an old bloke, because he was a returned soldier. He had survived it. But, when I had my accident on my motorbike, and I was six weeks in the Caulfield Military Hospital, I saw the results of some of those victims. Especially those who suffered from gas. And victims, they'd survived

16:30 the 1914 war and come out of it, and they'd been in hospital all that time. Up to 1939. And I saw a number of them carried out. So I became well aware of what could occur.

**Can you tell me a bit about some of those men and what they were suffering from?**

The patients in the hospital,

17:02 gas. I was courting a girl and her father had been gassed. He was in the First World War. And he was in and out of hospital. As a matter of fact, he was in the hospital when I went in there. And when I became able to walk a bit, I used to go around and see him in his bed. And eventually, my association

17:30 with her faded, and he died, I heard. After I had lost my association with Margaret. But it was brought to my notice, very much, that the war wasn't funny. That they played for keeps. But in the spirit of adventure,

18:00 what the hell? I'm in. Never of course thinking that it was going to happen to me. But anyway, from that...anything further?

**I just wonder, seeing men suffering for so long, after the war, I just wonder if you did want to leave the air force?**

Well, I thought there was a better opportunity of learning something technical to fit me, on

18:30 the assumption that I'm coming out all right. I never thought that I wouldn't come out of it. But, of course, aerodromes were bombed, and many of them. But I went in and joined. I started the training, I came out and I was posted to Darwin, yes. That's right. And then, we protested our long stay in Darwin, because we were being denied

19:00 advanced training teachings, and the possibility of elevation in ranking. So, I didn't think of ranking very much, or to advancing my own capabilities. So we did this course, I was posted to Point Cook, and from there I was posted to engineering school to do the advanced

19:30 course and become a fitter, in the big time. That went on for about three months, I think, the training, and I learned a bit more about fitting, the steel work and metal work, and I was posted to Number 2 ANS. Astro Navigation School, which was in Nihill, in Victoria.

20:00 Mid-Victoria.

**Harry, you mentioned earlier that you wanted to be in aircrew, but obviously you were in ground crew.**

Yes.

**I just wonder, how happy you were with, once it was decided that you were to be in the ground crew, doing the technical...**

Well, I didn't query it. I thought, 'They know what they want, and they know my capabilities.' Everyone was greatly assessed.

20:30 And, I realised, that my hearing was a problem, even in those days. And doing this advanced course....oh no, I did a welding course later, after I was out of the air force. And I thought I'd do a welding course, to improve my capabilities. This was done

21:00 at the Working Man's College, in Melbourne. And the lecturer sat in the chair, the pupils were there. He sat back, and he sat "The metallurgical capabilities of...." And my notes would have a blank of two words, until I thought the theory was out of

21:30 my control, and then I just didn't bother attending the theory courses, but my practical business, advanced me greatly. I hooked onto it. But then, I wasn't fully aware that my hearing was that bad. But it was an embarrassment, and it still is.

**Do you know what had caused your hearing loss at so young?**

22:00 They called it Bilateral Latoclerosis. That was the....but it appears that the bone structure, runs over and it presses against the stirrup. It's shaped like a stirrup of a horse, inside your ear. One in each ear. And I had an operation on it, and they cut out

22:30 the original and fitted in a plastic job. Well, for some time it was all right. But now it's deteriorated. I've got the advanced hearing aid. Which are still not good. And I saw the hearing aid people. I saw them and I said, "Look, I've got to go back to the original

23:01 of what I had." But it's more advanced. He said, "Well, it's very expensive." I said, "Look, I will pay for it myself." He said, "You can't do that." I said, "Well, I think that's a bit wrong." I said, "Here I am being



handicapped by the situation, I become an embarrassment, and I retreat from society because of that.” And Roger is very good, he carts me around and

23:30 he’s been down to see the fellow, to no avail. He said, “He’s not due for it.” I said, “I can’t understand why it’s a necessity. And if you’re interested in improving my lifestyle...regardless. Give it. And if I’m paying for it...” “Can’t do it.” What was I getting around to? Oh yes, the hearing.

24:02 They did that operation and I was satisfied with that....

**I wonder during the war how loud was the work you were doing?**

Not the work that I was doing. But each aircraft had an engine man. And an airframe man, to tell you the (UNCLEAR).

24:30 And if the aircraft was going out, you had to go out, and the mechanic would start the engine and get the temperatures right. And I’d have to be there for any checkings. They had the wheel chocks holding the aircraft. They had to run it up, get the certain revs, make sure the temperature is right and that it is reaching its correct revs. So I was adjacent

25:01 to a six hundred and fifty horsepower engine, and it was so much. And until, it was in Darwin, it was all the time. Then I came down Nihill. Pretty much the same thing. Avro Ansons, twin engines. And I was there at Nihill for nine months.

25:30 And I was posted to Mildura. I was there for twenty seven months. And there we had the more advanced fighters, Spitfires, Kitty Hawks, Boomerangs. And from those attending the aircraft with the trainee pilots in, it was an operational training unit, where they were taught all aerobatics, and diversions,

26:01 And they used to do what they called shadow shooting. Two aircraft would formate, one wing would stick behind the other, they’d go out to a certain area, one aircraft would fly over the water, and the other aircraft, on its shadow, made diving attacks.

26:32 I don’t know that they were firing. But anyway, at one stage, two aircraft were going up, and it was a Spitfire and a Kitty Hawk. And the Kitty Hawk had to come in and formate, to go out to there. But he came in too close. And his propeller chewed away all

27:00 the end of one, mainframe, leaving the aileron of the mainframe flapping loose. And then his wing was dug into the fuselage of the Spitfire. Chocking him in, because he couldn’t pull back the canopy and get out. But the Kitty Hawk just went straight into the ground. And the Spitfire came staggering back, over the airfield. With the ambulance and the crash handler and

27:30 everything going out. Because, as I said, the pilot couldn’t get out. And they had to get the axe and cut away a section of his canopy, enabling him to get out. But one bloke died, you see. All that sort of thing came up. And there was a terrific number of trainees killed at Mildura. They had a big centenary celebration a couple of years back, and they quoted the number

28:00 of aircrew that were killed, and it was astounding. And when you consider that this was only one station, and that went on all the various stations around the training programs. So the number of people who were killed, even in training, was absolutely astounding. So I had to revise my opinions, but anyway, I did go back and I applied for aircrew. I didn’t even get past

28:30 the eyesight test, so it sort of indicates....I was spurred on a bit by the fact that my two brothers had been in the call up and they had both gone into aircrew. And I doubt whether my mental ability would have coped with what they had to learn. All the technicalities and figures. They were smarter up here, than I was. So I was resigned to what I was doing, and be

29:00 thankful for it.

**I wonder, how much pressure did you feel? Working on the planes, to make sure that everything was right?**

I think we became a bit blasé about, really. We knew the importance of it. That if

29:30 you made a blue, it could have been on your responsibility, if someone died over it. But, it never got to....We had a familiarity with the....In Darwin, we were quite familiar with the sergeant pilots, not so much

30:00 the officers, because not even the sergeant pilots would be matey-matey with the officers. There was a distinct line, but those people who were sergeants in Darwin, later on, as history as been written up, that several of them advanced, one

30:30 in particular, we had a group, there were about five of us, and we’d go out and socialise a lot. It was only drinking. There was nothing else to do up there. And we five set ourselves....I don’t know if we instinctually did that, but we just formed apart from the others. We had something more in common. And one of them

- 31:01 converted to aircrew, and became squadron leader with a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross]. He's been featured in Australians At War [TV series], Graham Stroute, and oh, he was a good bloke. He was married to a camera. Someone even said he took it under the shower, but I don't that was right. But I had a lot of photographs taken by him, and he had some beautiful
- 31:30 cloud formations. And in the wet season, the colouring....Of course, we didn't have coloured photos then. Black and white. But the cloud formations in the wet season were absolutely fantastic. Graham kept on top of those. But he was a good bloke, and we had many enjoyable times together. It was quite sad when we split and dissipated around the various places.

- 32:02 But I've got the memories, and I'm still living. And those blokes, the squadron leader with the DFC, dead. Dead and gone.

**I wonder, where you always working in the same group, the same crew?**

No, they split.

- 32:32 Well, it was more general. Like at Nihill. Being an Astro Navigation School, which was all night flying, so we tended the aircraft that would go out, like Avro Ansons they'd go cruise for five hours. And we'd see them off, and then we'd go to bed. They'd take off at eight o' clock at night. One particular bloke,
- 33:02 we had to refuel the aircraft when they came back. But one particular bloke who used to forget to get up out of bed. So we conspired and we snuck into the hut, he was asleep, and very, very gently the four of us, we lifted his bed and took it out to the shower. And we just it under the shower and he woke up.
- 33:35 I will remember that. But, responsibilities, I never heard it spoken of, really. You did your job. If the aircraft performed, well the pilots would let us know.
- 34:00 But I don't remember anything that can pinned down to bad workmanship. I know I was very conscious of it. And I'd assume that the others were, too. It was funny. We got WAAAFs [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] at Nihill, they were the first we'd seen. Women. And a lot of people,
- 34:30 they had to watch their language, because they were rather free with it. But then, a chap was working on a Kitty Hawk, this was at Mildura and this short stubby exhaust, it only came out that long, and he was trying to take a sparkplug out. And he had his hands on the spanner, ratchet spanner, and all of a sudden it went. And
- 35:00 his fingers, there, hooked on the short exhaust pipe, and sort of severed them all. And the language that he came out with at that time. And the WAAAFs, they were....bewildered. But I think they were pretty worldly wise, after a short time anyway. But one particular thing, we had long racks
- 35:31 along the side of the hangar. And if you were working on the aircraft, a lot of cowlings had to be unscrewed off, and placed on these racks. Of course, when there's no work done, when there's no aircraft in for inspection, we used to sit on those, and Readers Digest came out, we'd chatter, and juggling around. And
- 36:00 there was a particular sergeant came along. And I was sitting there, reading, with a couple of the others. Girls, too. WAAAFs. And he looked at me, and I him but said nothing. And there was inspection being carried on further down in the hangar. And he came back again, and he said,
- 36:30 "Go down and help them on that inspection down there, Harry." And I said, "Okay." I put my book down and went down. And there were enough there to eat it. And I said, "How you going fellows?" They said, "Oh we're just putting the finishing cowls on." "Then you don't want me?" "No, shove off." So I went back and resumed my position. And sergeant came back, and he said, "I told you to go down there and work with them." I said "I've been down there, and
- 37:00 they've only got one cowl to put back, and there's enough there to eat it. They don't need me." And he said, "Go! I told you to go down!" I said, "You give me a pain in the guts." And he said, "If you don't watch it. You'll forfeit your weekend leave." And I said, "I know what you'll get." I came close to disaster. I'd have been in the jail.
- 37:30 Anyway, that blew over. It wasn't very long after I was posted away from there. And the warrant officer in charge of our hangar, and the sergeant underneath him, and the corporal, they were excellent. Lovely blokes. And people from the other hangars, NCOs, would come along and have afternoon and morning tea in our hangar. And I was posted to
- 38:00 Mildura. So they were all seated in the office, including this one I'd had the brush with. And I went around and shook hands with every one of them except him. And I hoped he was embarrassed. I hate to say it, but being brought into that situation which I didn't earn. And I got along with everyone. But
- 38:31 human nature. It would be too monotonous if we were all the same. But from there I went to Mildura, as I said. And there was a girl at Mildura, and she got a hair broom, and she came (UNCLEAR),
- 39:00 she came across and she had the hair broom under her arm. And she said, "How do you like my crotch, Harry?" And I said, "I'm sorry, Gwen. But I've never had that pleasure." She fled. But we got along very

well. The WAAAFs were quite good. There

- 39:30 were some funny ones. That's human nature. But generally, they were good. But when we first saw of them, we thought 'Women'. But their capabilities were equal to ours. I don't think that they would have got higher ranking, on the airframes or the engines.
- 40:00 The war finished up before we finished that, before I got to that reasoning. But from there...
- I wonder, you mentioned a few of your postings within Australia. I just wondered how keen you were to possibly get a posting overseas, or how much you were hoping to be...**
- Well, I have a diary, in my wardrobe there
- 40:31 of my postings. I would have liked going to England, but I thought, 'Well, it's so late in the game.' It was 1945, late 1945. My posting came through from Mildura. And I thought, 'Well, that's a certainty
- 41:00 for me going up into the jungle.' Which I didn't relish. But I thought, 'If it's to be, well, okay.' Malaria and all the mud and slush, I wouldn't appreciate that. So, from Melbourne I was posted to Sydney. And when we were in Sydney, the group of us who were to go wherever, we found out that we wer
- 41:30 getting winter dress. And they said, "Well, we're not getting winter dress to go to New Guinea. It's England." And then we were told. So we headed for England. My brother was still over there. One brother had already been killed, but the younger one, older than me, but younger than the other, he was still in England, he was...

## Tape 3

- 00:35 **Harry, I'm wondering if you can tell me how you came to get the nickname Ace?**
- Ace. It came from my motorcycling. When I was stationed at the showgrounds, at engineering school, and I would go home at night on my motorbike and come back by eight o' clock parade the next morning.
- 01:01 And a lot of crowd, fellows students you might call us, travelled by the tram. Well, the tram was passing Flemington Racecourse, and I was approaching on my motorcycle, and a person jumped off the tram and ran across the road, and I had to swerve wildly
- 01:30 to get around them. And one of my fellow classmates, Ben Setchers, he saw it and he said when we got to class, he said, "I saw you riding up there, Ace. Just like an ace dirt track rider." And it stuck, and I acquired that nickname and I carried it up to Darwin, because there an associate
- 02:00 sometime in my course, down there. And hence, and even when I went to Mildura, a former member of the Darwin mob came there. And he said, "Oh, hello Ace." And it sort of carried. But from there, I didn't take it to England. I got my posting to England while I was at Mildura. And
- 02:30 we travelled via ship....Oh, while we were waiting in Sydney, to go on the posting, then I found I was going to England. Prior to that I thought I was going to New Guinea. So I thought, 'If I go to England, I can get a game of hockey.' So I took my boots. I sent down to Melbourne, to my sister, where my
- 03:00 clothing was, and I said, "Would you send me my hockey boots?" And I got a reply back saying, "Hockey boots on the way. Tom," her husband, "died this morning. Which was a Sunday, and they were having a sleep in, in bed. A Sunday morning sleep-in. And Phyllis said, "I'll go and get a cup of tea, Tom." So she went out to get that, and when she came back he was dead,
- 03:30 in the bed, so it was rather anguishing.
- Before you go on to tell us about your time in England. I'd like to ask you a little bit more about your time in Australia. I understand when you were younger; you were a bit of wrestler? Can you tell me about that?**
- Well, yes, I can. I belonged to the Harriers Club, Kew Harriers.
- 04:00 And someone brought along a set of boxing gloves. So a few of us had the gloves on. And I hit one of my mates, whom I still correspond with, and I broke his nose. So on the strength of that I thought I would go into amateur boxing. So I entered a competition, beginners, that's people who
- 04:30 have never fought in a competition before. And I was done like a dinner. I took my breakfast the next morning out of a straw. And my brother said to me, "Get away from that." He said, "You'll get your brains scrambled." He said, "Take on wrestling." He was into wrestling then. And he was training at various gymnasiums, and
- 05:00 no one in particular, no. This wrestling chap, the boxing, the one whose nose I broke, we decided we'd take up weight lifting. So we joined a gymnasium over in Fairfield, lifting weights and also getting

wrestling instruction. And the wrestling instructor there wasn't the best.

- 05:30 So, Eric went to another gymnasium, and I joined the Victorian Railways Institute where my brother trained. And I went into that, and entered the wrestling tournament and there's the trophy I won. And that was in 1939, and I have never been on a wrestling mat since then. I have
- 06:00 no call for it. But the gymnasium there, it held all the Australian champions and Victorian champions, so it was a wonderful lot of fellows. And if they saw you wrestling, they'd correct you, if you were doing something....They were marvellous blokes. They were really good. I'm sorry I discontinued that, but the war broke out. I joined the
- 06:30 air force. And my physical activities were restrained to strictly hockey. I had three seasons in Darwin and I'm being posted to England, I was selected in a team and we played one game. We were done like a dinner. Because the people we played were all ex-prisoners of war. They'd just come back. And they'd all
- 07:00 been playing hockey together for a number of years. And they were well disciplined and they did us. But then, from England, I was posted to Germany, and I thought, 'I'll get a game here.' So I was selected in the team, but unfortunately the ground was frozen, on the day we were to play, and no play was available. So that completed my service hockey teams.
- 07:30 But when I came back and I was discharged, I played hockey until 1951, until I married. And I was living in a suburb, a bit remote from Kew, and my wife didn't agree with my travelling so far, for hockey, and being away from her. So I quit playing in 1951,
- 08:00 after about eighteen years of playing. But I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it. And I'm grateful for the health that it's given me, and the ability to last as long as I have. And I continue to remain that way for some time yet, I hope.

**I was just wondering, when you joined the ground crew in Darwin, whether your athletic**

**08:30 capabilities stood you in good stead, to bond with the other blokes?**

No, the hockey team was sort of.... the members we had a sergeant pilot. He was the only aircrew. No, one was an observer. There was an observer and a pilot, who were members of our

- 09:01 hockey team, up there. But the rest comprised other members of the ground staff. But the pilot, Lou Wettinhall, he had played with Melbourne University, before, and he was a very good player. And we had a good team there, in Darwin. And the fact that we played two seasons in one year, I enjoyed.
- 09:31 I loved activity and I've always thought, I've loathed smoking, I always have. But we had an incident, if we go back to my primary school days. I had a good friend, whose father had a garage. And there was a lolly [candy] shop, just adjacent to the school.
- 10:00 And outside this lolly shop, they had cigarette machines. This is going back, of course, to 1931. Earlier than that, possibly. So sixpence for a packet of Capstan cigarettes. Well my friend who always had two shillings in his pocket, I never had a penny, and he brought a packet of cigarettes. And we were going to go around the paddock, at the back of the school, after school
- 10:30 and smoke these cigarettes. So, for some reason, and I can't understand why, he was kept in. This was in grade either five or six, so he was kept in so I wanted one of the cigarettes. So I went over to him and I said, "Give me a cigarette, Ron. I'll see you out around there in the paddock." So
- 11:00 he gave me the cigarette, and I slipped it down inside my jumper, thinking it was going in my shirt pocket. But as I walked past the teacher, it dropped onto the floor. This cigarette. So she went immediately into the head nun and brought her back, and I got six cuts for that. Now, whether that was anything instrumental in my abhorrence of
- 11:30 smoking and cigarettes, I don't know. But I have never touched a cigarette, since then.

**Well when you were posted to Mildura, to the OTU [Officer Training Unit], you mentioned that the ground crew work was a lot more interesting. Can you describe a typical routine when a plane would touch down?**

We would know

- 12:00 if it was our particular aircraft. You were generally assigned to an aircraft. But it was a little bit different, because they had different instructors, and there wasn't the familiarity between ground crew and air crew that existed in Darwin. We became pretty close,
- 12:30 in Darwin.

**And why do you think that was?**

We were more closely associated with the staff, with the pilots. It was entirely different, and the camaraderie was there. Not so much with the officers, but with the non-commissioned officers. Whether that was

- 13:00 brought about by....the non-commissioned aircrew were remote from the officers. In Darwin, the particular group I was associated with, all ground staff, but we also mingled with some of the non-commissioned aircrew. In fact, I have some photos
- 13:30 taken in the Hotel Darwin, where our particular little group mixed, and we had lunch and we had beers, at the new Hotel Darwin. It was great, but that camaraderie didn't appear at Mildura.

**I also understand, and maybe this was in Darwin, that you had nicknames for pilots?**

- 14:04 Well, yes. This sergeant pilot, Lou Wettinhal, he was known as Piss In The Passage. Wet In Hall, see? The chief commanding officer was Eaton.
- 14:31 He was nicknamed 'Moth'. Moth eaten. I can't think of others....there were some, but I haven't thought on those lines for some time. And perhaps if given time I may remember them.

**I'm just wondering, first of all, whether the pilots**

- 15:00 **knew about those nicknames, and how did those nicknames help you?**

Well, Moth was a group captain. And we would never, never mention that. Lou, well, he wasn't that sort of person that you could....talk like that. He was a very nice bloke; I got on quite well with him.

- 15:31 And I found there was a particular group of us, ground staff. We were a little remote from other ground staff. Now, this might sound snobbish, I don't know. It wasn't intended, but it just turned out that way. They liked their ways,
- 16:00 we liked our ways. We liked the company we kept. And we enjoyed it, and it was the way of life as it turned out. But in Darwin, especially in the early stages when we were housed in the situation we were, tin huts. And being adjacent to the
- 16:30 buildings of the civil aviation crowd, which was Guinea Airways at that time, only a three strand wire fence separated these four houses occupied by the Guinea Airways people, and in the hot weather of course, in the summer time, nudity was quite common. Because it was so hot. We had no
- 17:00 air conditioning in the huts. And....The disciplinary warrant officer lined us up after parade one day. He said that something has come up, among the people occupying the Guinea Airways. He said, "Because they're so close to us, and things
- 17:30 very offensive are going on." And he said, "We've had complaints from these people." He said it escalated to the point where a little girl of three said to her father, "Oh daddy, look at the f-ing frog." And he said, "I want you blokes to watch your language and think of other people, the civilians there." And when it reached
- 18:00 this stage, he said the F word and it rather broke them up a bit, but it brought the reality back. We only spent nine months on the civil [aero] drome, and by that time the permanent drome was occupied. And when I came back from leave one time, I found I had been transferred over to the main drome, so
- 18:30 that didn't occur again. It must have been pretty hard for those people who had nudity thrown in among them. Well, they attended our hospital. And one chap, I remember his name. He was a short fellow, nicknamed Shorty, and his surname was Butt. Shorty Butt. He acquired a lot of skin diseases,
- 19:02 all the tropical ailments of skin, and he would have to be painted with red dyes or blue dyes, standing up there, completely in the nude being painted one day, and one of the females from the Guinea Airways walked in. That sort of thing became commonplace. She fled, though. As I said, that situation
- 19:30 was just finished up, we went to the main drome. But after that....

**And what did you know about the Japanese at that stage? Up in Darwin?**

Well, we saw the Japanese. People of Japanese descent. There was talk about it, but they said they know more about this place than

- 20:00 we do. It was common knowledge. And while I hadn't seen any known Japanese, because Darwin in those days, was just like a little country town. And I went back there just recently, and it's astounding. One chap, he had an occurrence, where one of the air crew married, and he
- 20:30 went for his honeymoon to Adelaide River, down from Darwin. So some mail had arrived for him, and a couple of other parcels, and they decided one of the pilots would take his mail, and other parcels down, and drop them at the hotel. So it was my aircraft, too, number 132, Wirraway.
- 21:01 And Pete Smith was the pilot. Lovely bloke. And he took the parcels, went down, dropped them over the hotel, then came back and did a shoot up, along the ground. And his wingtip hit a tree, and he spun into the ground, and he was killed. Oh, look, we were devastated. He was such a

- 21:30 wonderful bloke. And two days later, at the funeral, he was buried at the cemetery in Darwin, and the pilot came along and asked me if he could go for a ride in the back, when we do the funeral formation. Three aircraft flew over, and dipped over the grave, as the ceremony was going on.
- 22:01 But that was the only one that I was associated with. One of the Lockheed Hudsons went to Broome on a trip, and they crashed. And I didn't know anyone associated with that, but I have a photo of that in there. But, generally, we were very lucky.
- 22:32 Damage. There was one chap, an officer, and he was doing a run, take off, and he had the habit of taking off and then sinking a bit and then zooming up. He sank a bit and he dug the propeller into the tarmac.
- 23:02 Which was pretty upsetting. Especially for the CO [commanding officer]. But he did it another time. This was on the civil drome. and the civil drome had a runway laid for the civilian aircraft until we came along. One runway this way, one runway like that. This runway ran directly over Long Bay Jail....
- 23:30 Fanny Bay Jail, and when we had night flying, there wouldn't be much sleep for the inmates with us taking off like that. But I was stationed in Darwin when...I'd left my motorbike at home. It had been repaired after the big smash. And my brother sent it on the boat, up to Darwin. So I got that. And not unnaturally,
- 24:00 here's this aircraft strip, and I got the bike out and flat chat [sped] down this runway. Next day came a notice, on the notice board. "There will be no travelling by any vehicles, other than aircraft, on the runways." Suitably chastised, I sold the bike up there.
- 24:30 It went well, too.

**I can understand the temptation.**

Oh yes, I attracted quite a deal of attention, there. And also, bringing the bike up there, they had broken the bracket holding the silencer on. And of course when it came back there's

- 25:00 silencer (UNCLEAR). And I went into town on the bike, with no silencer on the bike. To see if I could buy a contraption to put that back. And the Darwin constable, sergeant, he came up and he said, the bike was ticking over, and he said, "Have you registered that bike?" I said, "I didn't think it was necessary." He
- 25:31 He said, "Shut that thing off." He said, "Go around to the police station and register that motorcycle, and get that exhaust fixed straight up, or you're in trouble." So I got that fixed. And having the bike there, there was a motorcycle club, mainly army chaps, in Darwin, and if a new bike
- 26:00 came into town, they approached the owner to join the club. So they dutifully came and asked me if I'd join the club. And I said, "Okay." He said, "We've got a race meeting on." down someplace, on a lagoon. In the dry season, it was all dry land of course. But in the wet season, it is a lake. I've forgotten the name of the lake now.
- 26:30 But anyway, he said, "Come out and have a look at it anyway." So I took a chap on the back, Graham Strout. He's written up in your archives. Squadron leader DFC, deceased now, of course. And I took him on the bike. And because the road was all corrugated, you had to be doing about fifty miles
- 27:00 an hour, to get a smooth run. So we went out, I sat on the tank, and he sat on the saddle, to get a better ride. We went out and had a look at the track, and I rode around it and thought, 'Oh racing. Not for me.' I said, "We'll go back." So we were going down this road, and as I said we had to do at least fifty miles an hour to get a smooth run. And we passed a chap on an old Douglas motorbike.
- 27:31 And as we passed him, he's moved slightly to one side. And Graham said, "Oh!" And I said, "What's wrong?" And he said, "I've hit my knee on his handlebars." I said, "How's the bloke going?" He looked around and said, "He's wobbling over the road, but he's all right." So.....but I came close to a little peril there, too.
- 28:00 And Graham survived that, flying. But I sold it soon after that, to a fellow on the drome. Got rid of it anyway.

**Well, I'm wondering. The Wirraways were known to have a few vices. As ground crew, what did you need to look out for especially, when a Wirraway came back?**

Well,

- 28:30 they were pretty much trouble free, really. And the damage was done by the bloke holding the control column. But no, they were only a training plane. That's all they were. The idea of fitting and combating them against a Zero was absolutely ludicrous.
- 29:00 And if we had a secret service finding out all these things, it was absolutely farcical, to send them up into the front line, wherever we are, and knowing they were a training plane, and these guys were going to go up in combat with them. It was absolutely farcical.

- 29:30 The Lockheed Hudsons were all right. There were bombers, and they wouldn't....although their speed was inferior to the later bombers. Actually, this was displayed. A senior person in the Netherlands East Indies died, and they were bringing him back to be buried in Darwin, on the mainland
- 30:01 and it was the NEI, Netherlands East Indies Air Force. And they had this body in a Glen Martin bomber. So they had communicated and said they were bringing him, so our Wirraways went up to escort them in. A courtesy job, of course. They went and they met the plane, the Glen Martin.
- 30:31 And then it went away, and it came in ten minutes or so before the escort. And when they got there, they got in a big conversation, and asked why they sped up and got away from the escort, they said, "Your fighter planes, and we thought that our speed would be too slow for you."
- 31:04 At that time it was an obsolete bomber. And yet it got away from the Wirraways, and the Wirraways were expected to compete with Zeros. Absolutely farcical. They had been used. I spoke to some of the aircrew, Bob Crawford I spoke to.
- 31:30 And I asked him about flying against the Zeros when Japan attacked Darwin. He said, "Oh, no by that time..." In the short time that I had left, which was about a month, they got some Spitfires. Actually it was an English squadron that came out, and they were occupying Darwin, too. And then they got Kitty Hawks and
- 32:00 those pilots who had been there, when I was there, came down to Queensland, did conversion courses and converted to Kitty Hawks, and Tomahawks, and the rest. Far better machinery than the poor old Wirraway. The Wirraway served its purpose as a training plane only. And they did a lot of (UNCLEAR) work around New Guinea, later on, I'm told.
- 32:30 So, they had their value, in their course.

**Well I'm wondering, after Nihill you were then posted to Mildura, how did your ground crew work change with the new planes?**

Well, every aircraft has its own peculiarities of course, different construction.

- 33:05 Well, the rudimentary things are the same, control cables. You read the book, the specifications. And there was always a senior man. I was only a leading aircraftsman, until I got my corporal stripes, just prior to going to England.
- 33:31 And the controls were the same, the fabric was the same. The fabric was only on the elevators, the ailerons, the rudder. A limited amount of fabric that could be damaged. But if it was damaged, you stitched it, sewed it, then pasted a covering
- 34:01 of canvas, or....a fabric, airframe fabric. Giving it several coats of that, and complete sealing, perfect. But if that tear was allowed to go, it could mean the whole force of air would drag it up and tear all the frame.
- 34:31 And create, God ever knows what. But it would never reach that stage. The limited time that a fighter plane was in the air, different to a bomber. There could be four, five, six hours in the air. If such a tear occurred, it could create damage.

**Well, I'm wondering if you could**

- 35:00 **just describe a typical inspection? When you were at Mildura, what were your specific tasks?**

There was a daily inspection carried out. An aircraft could not take off unless that sheet was signed. And see, in a daily

- 35:30 inspection, it's assumed that the plane had been flying previously and no report of anything adverse had been made. You'd do wheels and tires. Other than that, if the brakes were faulty, only the pilot would know that on landing. And he would have to depend
- 36:00 upon him to let you know if there was something wrong. Unless it was hydraulics, with the brakes. Every inspection, every daily inspection, apart from the mechanical pump, which was automatic with the engine, building up a pressure in the hydraulics and operating the hydraulics. There was an emergency hand
- 36:30 pump in both the front and the rear cockpits. And in fact, the day that I did the ceremonial funeral formation, when the pilot selected undercarriage down, when we were coming in to a landing, he couldn't move the lever. And he
- 37:00 tried several times and couldn't budge it. So I kicked on the rudder pedal this time, too. And I indicated to him that he get on that, and I'd get on that. And he pushed and it came into the down position, and the undercarriage came down. When we got down,
- 37:30 I said to him, "You had me a bit frightened up there, then." He said, "Oh, you're safer with your wheels up than down, actually. In the case of an emergency, this is." Because if you were to land in say, a

ploughed field, or something, with your wheels down they could catch onto an obstruction and turn you over. But when you come down on the belly, you just glide in and

38:00 scrape a few odd bits and pieces off the belly of the aircraft. But as he said, you're safer with your wheels up in an emergency landing than you are down.

**You mentioned earlier, and I am aware, that there were many training accidents at Mildura. I'm wondering if you had the misfortune to actually witness any of those accidents?**

No,

38:30 but one, I was brought into....contact, you might say, I was working at Mildura and it was late afternoon. And you'd hear.....They'd go out from the drome quite a bit just for instance, to do aerobatics. And a lot of looping the loop as they called it, would go on. And you would hear

39:00 a plane away in the distance. They'd dive, you'd hear the engine scream up, flat out, and then get up, and then as it reached the top, they shut the throttle and come down. So that the aircraft would be going "Aiiiiiieeeeeee" then as they get to the top of the loop, "ooorhhhoowww." Now this night,

39:30 the scream came higher. Instead of evening off it came "oooohhhhhh", and then, boom. He's gone in. So I thought, 'Oh well.' I was part of the party that went out to retrieve the aircraft, as it came back that the pilot had crashed. When I got out there

40:00 with the rest of the crew, the plane had hit before a fence. Now I don't know the cause of this. Whether they'd already been out there and brought the body back, but I found his boots, flying boots, were over the fence about thirty metres, on the other side. Now I doubt very much they would have just taken them off the body and jumped them there.

40:30 Because the plane is there, this side of the fence, and the....so, but....Getting onto that, too. Redcliffs was a town, down about fifteen miles from Mildura. And every Friday night the women in the town put on a dance, for those girls remaining in the town, or mothers or wives or whatever. And

41:00 a number of aircraft men would get down there. Well, I did. I became known in Redcliffs, mainly through these people and the associations. So I went to this dance, and there was a girl in a black frock. So, I went over and asked her for the dance, and I said, "You look as though you're dressed for a funeral, not a dance." And she said,

41:31 "I went to a funeral today." She said, "I was to marry a chap who died (UNCLEAR)." But instead of being married that day, she went to his funeral. But I could never; I thought of it frequently, how she could go to a dance and be in distress?

## Tape 4

00:38 **Harry, you spent two years at Mildura, that's quite a long time. I'm wondering, how you got to know the place?**

Quite well. Through the association of the

01:00 dance on the Friday night, I got to know several who owned fruit blocks, grapes. And in fact I went out fruit picking a couple of times for them. It was very, very hot out there, of course. And the grapes were dusty. The dust storms at Mildura....One in particular,

01:32 it was reported that the dust from there went to New Zealand. It was so bad you could not see a yard, metre, in front of you. And I was in town that day. But, it must have been absolutely devastating to own a home there. A continuous state of brushing out the dust.

**Well, I'm wondering if the**

02:00 **dust, or indeed the weather, caused problems for you in looking after the planes?**

No. In the living quarters there, tin huts, exactly the same as were in Darwin. And, of course, no air conditioning. And you'd come home and find a layer of dust all over your blankets, the bed blankets, and any clothing you had...oh,

02:30 it was really bad. And, of course, I could have mentioned, that with the hot temperatures, we could go back to Darwin in this, concerning the heat, was we had no refrigeration or ice-chests in the mess

03:00 room, the cookhouse in Darwin. And the food was brought, for our meals, from the main drome which was in the process of being built then. This is my first nine months in Darwin. And the food was brought in a truck, and placed in the cookhouse, then the truck would disappear until next day's cooking. So a few of the people got a bit concerned



- 03:30 about this, and after the truck had left one night, they went up to the cookhouse to see what....And there was the food on the shelves and benches, littered with cockroaches. Absolutely covered in them. So they went and got the orderly officer, and showed him the situation and protested loudly. And it was adjusted after that.
- 04:01 But one particular day, we were having the mess, and it was a stew. And I heard "maggots!" mentioned. And then someone else, "maggots." And then I looked closely at my stew. Sure enough, maggots. It sort of tossed me off eating then. But it was remedied, and as I say,
- 04:30 it wasn't very long after that, that we went to the main drome, and that situation ceased to exist. In fact, we had very cold beer there, too. Much better conditions than....They were very primitive in Darwin, in the old civil drome. But this was, after all, this was where Sir Ross and Keith Smith landed on their first trip from England to Australia. And there's
- 05:00 a plate in the ground up there, beyond the drome. Very interesting, too, to be part of that.
- Well, you've told us a story of how you marked the passing, or the death of a pilot, because there were so many deaths at Mildura, I'm wondering in what way did you mark each passing?**
- 05:32 We didn't hear of it, because we, ground staff, working as we did, were so very remote from the aircrew. Absolutely remote from them. There was no association as in Darwin. No familiarity. Because there was so many trainee pilots and
- 06:00 I can't remember meeting anyone. Oh, some of the ground staff at Mildura had been in 3 Squadron, in the desert. And a couple of the pilots, they'd been sergeant pilots, in the desert, and they'd gained a commission and they were going through a revision course of fighter
- 06:31 pilot stuff, and they knew some of the ground staff who had been with us, up at Mildura, and they'd been over with them in the desert. So that particular one, when they were going out doing the shadow shooting, and that pilot of that one that survived, had been in the desert with some of the ground staff there. So they
- 07:00 had met before, and it was a very jolly reunion. But apart from that, there was no association, whatever.
- And how many ground staff did it take to look after one plane?**
- Well, there's generally a crew of two. One for the engine, one for the airframe, that's all. But that person, looking after the daily functions of the aircraft,
- 07:30 would not be associated with any deep troubles of the aircraft. That aircraft, to be serviced, pull the engine down, were always taken to the workshops. They were more specific, much, much more specific. But nothing changed much from the airframe....attainable to
- 08:00 get to it, and there was no great divulging, and digging down into the innards of it. Unless cracks appeared in the metallic frame. And then they would be withdrawn from service.
- I'm wondering if you had responsibility for refuelling the plane?**
- They generally had the crew doing that,
- 08:30 alone. When I was at Nihill, I even attained the position of tanker driver. When they came back at one, two, three o' clock in the morning, and I had to drive the tanker. I didn't even have a car driving license in those days. Plenty of motorcycle licences. And then they'd refuel and then the next crew would take
- 09:00 the aircraft off. And they wouldn't come back until probably eight o' clock in the morning. The second lot of training. Then, the normal staff, the day staff, took over. And I would go back into the hangar and do whatever maintenance work was necessary.
- And what sort of skills do you think, or qualities, did you need to a**
- 09:30 **good ground crew?**
- Not greatly specific. You were taught the rudiments of the aircraft. Where the wearing points were. As you became more familiar, so you'd know there were parts which you would never touch. Nothing ever went wrong with them.
- 10:06 I know some. One chap, I don't think he was a ground crew member of an aircraft, but he was a guard. And he asked one of our chaps, "Where's the drive from the engine to the wheels?"
- 10:32 Now that, to anyone, with slight knowledge, the wheels are absolutely free and they're quite remote from the...they're not engine driven wheels. And when I heard that I thought, 'He's not very familiar with the aircraft.' But they are there. There's the amount of skill. His skills were negligent. You could hardly
- 11:00 imagine him converting to aircrew, or not even to ground staff, but he was only a guard, that's what he did.

**And what did you need to know about a plane? To look after it? As ground crew...**

Well, you knew the stresses that were placed on the various parts. How dependent they are that the undercarriage is satisfactorily

11:30 working. But then you depend upon the pilot. If he feels that one particular brake is dragging, which is causing the plane on landing to veer to one side. So you're dependent upon the pilot for that knowledge. And he tells you what he's doing, where the brakes are grabbing. Or the hydraulics are not giving.

12:01 Hydraulics operated your flaps, your undercarriage. If your undercarriage is not coming up quickly enough, or you might have some hindrance, and you have to check thoroughly the hydraulics, when he gets down and lays the complaint.

**And how would you carry out these tests?**

12:33 The only way you can raise the wheels, without getting it up in the air, is to put it on these jacks. And they would have a jack that would go under each mainframe, and one on the tail. And you'd get it up there. And then you could drop your undercarriage and test it in that way, without the engine.

13:06 **Well I imagine it's nothing like a car jack, what would the jack be like?**

Oh, generally, there was a triangular frame, or square frame, coming

13:30 into a triangle. And then there's jacking points under each main plane, and the one at the rear. And in the case of....They'd jack up the main part of the....I'm getting out of it. The main part of the aircraft was jacked

14:00 up to a height sufficient to raise the main planes, then they would put that jack underneath that. As I say, a big triangular thing, one of both wings. And then the jack under the tail would already be up before that, lift that. Then they were able to pump on the emergency hydraulic systems, and

14:30 raise or lower the undercarriage, or the flaps or whatever. The flaps can be done independent of the undercarriage, of course.

**And what do you think was the most difficult aspect of those tests and inspections?**

Well, I don't think

15:01 there's anything really that I encountered. There were some....I had one incident where I was working on a Spitfire. This was at Mildura. So, right down the end, of the tail end. The main part of the fuselage came down, the body of it, then that part back there housing

15:30 all the elevators and the rudder could be in this section. And that was a number of bolts. Say the body of a Spitfire was almost cylindrical, going down, tapering down. And in this area, down near the rudder, there were so many bolts attaching the shorter end to the main plane. And

16:00 there's an opening, and I had to go in and into this aircraft, and take off the good part of the tail, and transfer it to another aircraft. The one I was taking it from was bent, up the front, and it was US [unserviceable]. So, I got in this and taking out all these

16:30 bolts, and I had a light, an electric light. And I smelt clothing burning. Well, how I got out there in that time, I don't know. But it was my overalls on fire, and I had this area like that to get out of. I scrapped off a bit of skin getting out there, but there was a magnifying glass in this

17:00 light, and that brought out the flame. But, I don't know who finished that job, but I didn't. But that was the part about the crash hangar. They salvage parts from there and transfer them. Another one that I hated doing. The cables from the elevators and the rudder came up inside

17:30 the fuselage and right up into the front part of the cockpit and down around the rudder pedals. Well, those cables came around a pulley, in that corner, and this one around that corner. And the wear, as I said before, is on that section of cable passing around the pulleys. Well, I had to get, anyone had to get headfirst in there and wiggle around through all that apparatus,

18:00 move that cable, feel it to see if there's any cable broken, worn through. And then, feel it and then if necessary, unbuckle it from the rudder pedals, and do the necessary repair. Well, that was a hell of a job. One I hated. But it had to be done. But otherwise,

18:30 of course that was only....of course there wasn't much room in the Spitfire to , you could never have a party inside it, very restricted there. But in the bigger aircraft, Halifax, the four engine jobs. I had pretty limited work on those, really. But it's the metal fatigue in the aircraft...

19:00 vibrations, and you'd walk over the mainframe and you would check for any cracks which occur. And there are so many rivets in it, if you'd see a crack you'd drill a hole in each end of the crack. And you rivet a plate over that crack, and it's well riveted there.

19:30 And then in the case of fabric, you sew the fabric up, then you get a strip of the fabric to cover the rip, there, fray the edges out all over, paint the plane with the...I can't think of the name of the stuff now. The paint. Special

20:01 aircraft paint, and then give it a couple more coats, she's ready for action again after that. But I was surprised at the Halifax mainframe, so big of course, but there were quite a few cracks in them.

**And when you were at Mildura, where would most of your tests and inspections take place?**

In the hangars. They had

20:30 three sets of hangars. One which did the daily flights, and the aircraft operating from there. They would have about six aircraft. Pupils coming up and they got a fair bit of work. One pupil might go up for an hour, then somebody else goes up for an hour, then there was night flying, too. So there were lots of hours. And then

21:00 our section of general maintenance and write-offs, we were a bit remote from all the daily servicing, but we got the more involved inspections and repairs, which was a bit better than just pumping up tires and all that.

**And I'm wondering how you reported**

21:31 **your inspections or your daily jobs?**

The person doing the job would complete it to his satisfaction, and he would let the corporal, there was always a corporal in charge, he would have to check it. And then the flight sergeant, the chappie in charge of the hangar, he would have to check it so

22:00 it was pretty rigid. You'd have three inspections of a particular job. And if you do the inspection, you must sign for it. And identify yourself, and that goes right through the records to headquarters. In fact, when I got to England, to get a bit ahead, I was doing office work, I didn't do any

22:30 dirty work then. I had my corporal stripes and I was elevated. And I would have to check through the sheets, the maintenance sheets, and check that every job was done and signed for. And because one particular job had been done, apparently, but not been signed. I raised the

23:00 ire of a fellow when I tried to get him to sign that. He was a Pommie [Englishman]. RAF [Royal Air Force], I was RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], and there was resentment. "Bloody Aussie, telling me what to do. Blow on home." But I over-rode that anyway. We got out of that, no disaster. But things, you carried out to the letter. And

23:30 whatever is done or not done, there is a check on it.

**And when you were at Mildura, what were your regular working hours?**

Half past seven to....eight o'clock, eight o'clock to four, or half past, I can't remember that now. But...

24:05 yes, if you had been on guard duty that came up too, for everyone on the ground staff, you might be given the day off if you were on a late shift.

**Can you just tell me what was involved in guard duty?**

Guard duties, well, not a great deal.

24:33 I was involved in that, I think I told you about going out on guard duty. They had petrol dumps and bomb dumps scattered around, dispersed around the whole drome. And they would have a guard on those, be it a bomb dump a petrol dump and

25:01 you just stayed awake to see that no theft occurred, or anything controversial to good order or discipline. But in the daylight, there wasn't any guard on it. But an incident in Darwin. We had a, I think I mentioned him, the adjutant was

25:30 squadron leader Moffat Pender. He was quite old with grey hair. And Tom Moody, whom I've also mentioned. He was on guard one night, and if you're on guard duty and you hear a sound, someone approaching, you say, "Halt! Who goes there?" This is at night.

26:00 And in darkness. And the rifle bolt can be moved up. If you put a cartridge in the barrel, ready, and then the bolt is thrown down. Well, the action of throwing down the bolt, locking that cartridge in, can sound ominous. And Moffat Pender came along, checking this particular point, and he

26:31 got the challenge. "Halt! Who goes there?" And he heard the bolt be slammed down, and he thought, "There's a shell gone into his gun." He thought, "This bloke will shoot me!" Of course, such was not the case. There was no cartridge. Tom Moody, in his Moody mood, he slammed that down. And ever after that,

27:00 when Moffat Pender came, he said, "Is Moody on tonight?" "No, Moody isn't on tonight." Oh, it was little pranks....But Moffat Pender, if you were short of a bob...People went to him and borrowed ten

shillings, because ten shillings in those

27:30 days was astronomical. One of my ground staff borrowed ten shillings from me and I never saw it again. And I have him included in the photos, always reminded, 'Where that's ten bob?' That was almost a week's later.

**Well I'm wondering, you've mentioned a few pranks that you got up to in Darwin, I'm wondering if you were**

28:00 **able to get up to any pranks in Mildura, or if the situation was so different that....**

No....There wasn't a great deal to do in Mildura. Nightlife was only the pub, ten o'clock.

28:30 **Well, I'm wondering then how did you keep in touch, or abreast, of what was going on in the war?**

We didn't. Only in the newspaper. And the newspaper didn't go into any great detail, just the general news. But nothing intimate. The workmen's

29:00 club was in Mildurra. That was a pub. And they had the largest number of taps in the Southern Hemisphere. And, of course, I don't think....No, we didn't have a wet canteen in Mildura. I used to go down to Redcliffs, because they had a beautiful swimming pool there. And

29:30 one Sunday, I was walking down to catch the bus. The bus used to come to the gate at Mildura. And the Catholic priest came past. He'd done a service on the station, and he was going back into town, and he said, "Like a ride?" And I said, "My jolly word." So he said, "I've got to go around the sergeants' mess, first."

30:01 and he came out and he had half a dozen bottles of beer. He said, "I'm going on a fishing party. You can't drink Murray water, if you go on a fishing party." That was the good harmony. But Redcliffs was very good. A beautiful pool that I loved.

30:30 And of course the grapes available.

**Did you and the ground staff and the other men you mingled with ever talk about the war much?**

Not a great deal. Only restrictions that were brought about by the war. Which was general anyway.

**Like what?**

31:04 Well, the war brought about restrictions in food. No butter, no beer. The only jam available was quince jam. Clothing shortages didn't worry us because we had them free.

31:30 General restrictions.....mainly food, I suppose it was. Or theatres, no lighting at night, no lighting in the cities, candlelight, in parts. Especially in Europe.

**Well, I wondered if you really noticed those restrictions when you were in Mildura?**

No, nothing at all.

32:00 Fruit was....freely available. We used to get away from the camp cooking, and they had snack bars in Mildura. And I used to delight in going there on a Saturday morning, and going to the snack bar and having something. Something that wasn't regimented.

**And when you were going**

32:30 **into town, I'm wondering, would you be wearing your uniform?**

Oh yes, always. You don't take any civvies [civilian clothes], you'd be shot. They'd think you were an invader.

**Well what did the ground crew wear when you were at work?**

Overalls. Ordinary, common, full length overalls.

33:00 Matter of fact, one of the WAAAFs said to me one day, "Harry? How is it that you always look as though you can sit down at a table, and yet you do dirty work?" I said, "I don't know, it's my way of life." In Darwin, we used to have to take a kerosene tin and build a fire outside, by this

33:30 three strand fence I told you of, and boil up our clothing in that. We still washed...when we go to the main drome, we had hot water there, laid on. But not in the civil drome. Very, very primitive. But the main drome was all right and they had....In

34:00 Mildurra and Darwin, they had louvered walls, any breeze came, especially in the wet season in Darwin, get a cool breeze through.....Oh, we sweat out there. Just the action of brushing your shoes break you out in a sweat. So it wouldn't have mattered had you showered thirty seconds previously. It was always on. It was a very sweaty atmosphere there.

- 34:32 **Well I'm wondering, how did you cope, looking after yourself? I'm imaging when you joined the air force, this was your first time away from home, and now you're having to wash your own clothes and look after yourself...**
- Something that illustrates this....I knew nothing about ironing.
- 35:01 So, went to Darwin. And a lot of the chaps took their clothing out of the laundry to an Aboriginal woman and they did it very, very well. She lived closed to the drome, apparently. Lucy, Lucy was one. Anyway, the chaps went there one day to pick up their laundry,
- 35:30 and Lucy wasn't there. So they said to the other one, "Where's Lucy?" She said, "Oh, that girl. She sick. She turned black in the face." But they did very good laundry. So I got them to boil up my shirts. Only shirts and shorts up there. And
- 36:00 I didn't bother about ironing. And I had a photo taken of me, I'm leaning against the fence of the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] in un-ironed shirts and shorts, and I thought, 'Mason, you look bloody awful.' So ever after that, I brought an iron. And I carried that iron through...It went to England with me. And
- 36:30 as this WAAAF said to me, "How is it with filthy work you do at times, and yet you always look as though you're going to a ball?"
- Well, I'm wondering, you've talked a little bit about the difference between aircrew and ground crew. I'm wondering if there was a kind of sense of being a little bit undisciplined, if you were a ground crew?**
- It was shown, yes.
- 37:00 Not undisciplined. If you didn't show discipline, you wouldn't be there. You'd soon find yourself in trouble. But, you might say, familiarity. A little familiarity, not ever much shown by a big percentage of the aircrew to the ground staff, but there were some who were pretty rigid.
- 37:32 "Yes, you know your place. Keep there." But it's general human nature. "You're my mate. You're not."
- Well, we've also heard plenty of stories about pilots' great respect for ground crew, and in fact, dependence on ground crew...**
- Yes, and so they are, too.
- 38:00 But with the inspections, as I've said, you've got the rigger, or the mechanic, they do their part of the job. That is checked by the corporal, who should pass it on to the sergeant. He checks to see that it's done. And so it goes up,
- 38:30 on the scale. So, I suppose....you're pinned down. A sense of respect. In my case, I couldn't leave a job half done, gone, and I was built that way. But I suppose there was some who didn't have the same degree of
- 39:00 diligence, or whatever. But I can't say that I know of anything that came up, or where anything was questioned. Sometimes a fault may go out and even might cause the crash of a plane, but I never heard of it and being some person responsible for it.
- 39:31 But even before getting the....the plane is daily inspected. Of course, there's also inspections between the flights. It comes back, from one pupil driving it, and puts another one in it, and an inspection is done. Specifically by the airframe person. If the airframe's not right, it doesn't
- 40:00 get off the ground. But the engine, of course, that can come about when he's halfway through the flight. But I never heard of anything, any disaster occurrence through that.
- Well, you've mentioned normally it would take a ground crew of two. One for engine, one for the frame. What were you mostly doing?**
- I was only attached to the airframe.
- 40:30 I was an airframe fitter, in the finish. Then I was corporal airframe fitter, where I would check over. Because I had this incident of this fellow in England, who resented me questioning him, because he had not signed for that job. I said, "What do you want me to do? Report you? Put you on a charge?" I forget now how that
- 41:00 turned out.

00:34 **I was wondering Harry if you could tell me, we've spoken a lot this morning about your service in Australia, but I was wondering if you could tell me when you found out, or you got your posting for overseas?**

Well, I got the posting and naturally enough, I suppose, to me, anyway, I'd assumed I'd be going to New Guinea, where Japan was still battling on, and I wasn't looking forward to that.

01:00 But when I got to Sydney and we found that we had been posted to England, I thought, 'This must be the consolation prize for the time that I've all spent in Australia.' And the only two shots I heard fired were those fired by me. And so we got the ship from Sydney. We went to New Zealand, Wellington.

01:30 We were picking up a lot of passengers who had been in Singapore, when Japan came. And they evacuated to Australia, quite a lot of them. And the ship we were on was the Sterling Castle and we got to....we called in at Wellington, we were there for a week.

02:00 And the night before we sailed from Wellington, we had strict instructions, "Be on board by midnight, or else you will forfeit your leave in New York, when we get there." Assuming of course that we were landing in New York, when going across to San Francisco, and then from there to England. So came the night, and I thought 'Oh,

02:30 these poor girls, left behind by their soldiers friends and what nots, and they don't know what to do with themselves in Wellington. So I accommodated one, and at midnight I was otherwise occupied, so that when I got back to the ship, they said, next morning, "Where did you get to last night?" I said "I was otherwise occupied."

03:01 He said, "Well, you know the thing, you do your leave." He said, "I'll give you the option. You can work in the galley from here to New York. Or forfeit your leave in New York." I said, "Oh, what do you think? Where's the galley?" So they told me where the galley was, and I went down to see what my duties were going to be. And there was another chap involved with me. I wasn't with him on the

03:30 night but he was in the kitchen of the galley, and all the preparation, the scraps from cooking the meal and the general untidiness was left for we two to dispose of. So I had big bins that I had to empty into, they had a scuttle. A scuttle is an opening

04:00 in the side of the ship with a sort of a slope and it goes out into the sea. The goods were placed in that shuttle. Alongside the shuttle were about six big cauldrons of porridge cooking. So we got to point of discharge, I unwound the lid from the thing. First of all he said, "Put it down the scuttle." I said, "Where's the scuttle?" He said, "Over there."

04:31 So I unscrewed the lid, put that back, turned around to pick up the....and a great wave came in the scuttle, boosh. All over me, drenched me, into the big cauldrons of porridge that were being cooked. He said, "You bloody fool!" He said, "Why don't you see which way the sea is running before you open that?" I said, "How do I know which way the bloody sea is running? I'm not a sailor, I'm an airman!"

05:00 So, you go and see which way the sea is running before you open the thing, accordingly. I learned, then that waves come in this way, as you see them, which way the sea is running. Anyway I got out of that and we went on. We had to do that for three meals. And we progressed up through the Panama Canal.

05:30 And a group came on board and they said, "We'll give you a bit of music." All the war-time jazz stuff. And they didn't like the sound of the piano on the ship, so four or five of them went ashore and came back carrying a piano onto the ship. And they entertained us. It was jolly good, too. And we went on and we got to Bermuda. Not

06:00 Bermuda as I was calling it, but all the locals refer to it as 'Bernuda.' So we anchored off the shore....oh, going back. The boss of our troops he said, "Well, you've done your penalty. We're not going through New York as you know now." So he said, "Do you want to come out of the kitchen?"

06:30 And I said, "Is it okay with you if I stay down there?" And he said, "How's that?" I said, "Well, I reckon that I'm eating as well as you, down there. And apart from that, I'm getting a bottle of beer a day with the crew." He said, "Okay." So I stayed from there to England. But, we got to Bernuda, and I'd done my duties,

07:00 I was doing my duties when half the crew went ashore. So, then I finished the job. And the water was lovely, the sun was shining and everything. So I thought, 'Oh, me for a swim.' So I got my togs [swimmers] on. And there are two methods of entry into the water. You dive off about three decks up....The Sterling

07:30 Castle was the largest passenger ship of that time to go through the Panama Canal. So it was twenty-five (UNCLEAR) tons weight. So rather than climb down the rope ladder I dived off. And I was swimming around, oh, lovely. And then after I'd been there twenty minutes or so

08:00 I thought, 'Well, I better get back and do my job. Finish off the job.' So I climbed up the rope ladder, got dressed, went down to the kitchen. And when I was swabbing the decks, I heard shots being fired. So I went up to the top deck, the dining, I said, "What are they firing at?" He said, "The sharks."

- 08:31 I went and had a look and here are about five sharks, all cruising. They wouldn't have known where I'd been, nobody saw me I don't think. I'd been in the water there not ten minutes, so the fates were looking after me. As I said, I committed myself to the galley for the rest of the trip. We got to
- 09:02 Liverpool, and from there....It was about eleven o'clock at night, still broad daylight because of the twilight there, the summertime. And we were given a mutton sandwich. And I had one bite out of my sandwich and the seagulls were all swooping around and one made a
- 09:30 deposit right on the sandwich. I didn't continue it. Anyway, we caught the train then, to Brighton. And, that was the....embarkation depot. And the receptionist bloke in the RAF, he lived opposite me in Kew. Incredible. The Stafford family.
- 10:00 And then we were given a week's leave, disembarkation. In that time I met with my brother Ron. I had a week's disembarkation leave and he had a week of pre-embarkation leave. He was leaving England to go home. So we had a week in London together and I have a photo of him there in Trafalgar Square with me. So then,

**What did you get up to in**

- 10:30 **that week? What did you and Ron do?**

Well, there wasn't a great deal on of course. Restrictions, England, it was tight. They'd had restrictions for so long and the foodstuffs in various restaurants, and we ate at one place and of course my brother had been over there a couple of years. He did ten trips over Europe. He was in

- 11:00 some of those one thousand bomber raids. And we went to a place and we had steak. And I said to him, "This is not bad." I said, "I thought restrictions were on?" He said, "Well, can't you imagine what it is?" He said, "You're eating the milkman's horse." So I felt a little bit nauseous, but nevertheless it was cooked meat.
- 11:30 Anyway he got his posting. He was posted home. And while we were down there the skipper of his ship was not posted home at the same time, though he lived in Sydney somewhere. So I met him and we had a couple of days together, browsing around. Emptying glasses mainly. And
- 12:01 we both went into a place, and I can't think now where it was but two officers met in this place, some building, and they greeted each other. And one said something like, "Hello Charles! The last time I saw you was at the Champs Elysee." And
- 12:30 Ron and I, the tone and expression, we looked at each other and....aristocratic stuff. A couple of levels over us. Anyway, Ron was posted; he had to leave on the ship. And I was posted to his squadron. Which was up in Driffield, in Yorkshire. So I got there. And having met his skipper,
- 13:02 he came down to the hangar one day and he said, "Would you like to go for a ride, Harry?" I said, "My jolly word." So he said, "Get yourself a chute." So I got a parachute and we got up in a Halifax bomber, which was in the mid-upper turret. And off we went. We went up the west coast of England, Scotland, and back down to the Thames Estuary, then back up to
- 13:30 Driffield, in Yorkshire. And oh, the scenes. We flew over Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Cologne Cathedral. And the devastation around Cologne Cathedral, it was as though it had been ploughed over. But the cathedral stood out. There was one hole in an ancillary wing of the church. One hole, everything else was devastated.
- 14:01 And they probably say that was accurate bombing. I have doubts. But it was great. And sitting in the mid-upper turret and flying through cloud, we left a tunnel of cloud. You could look down this long tunnel. It was fantastic. Anyway that done, I thanked Bill for a nice trip, and
- 14:30 I said, "Come again." Which he did later on. And we flew more over Europe, then. And oh, the damage, it was absolutely astounding. And I've seen film of bombing raids in Germany, lately they've been shown and you could believe that. Oh, it was
- 15:00 ghastly. To experience the actual bombing? I would never want to be anywhere near it. Anyway, after that I was posted to...I was there three months then I moved down to Cambridge. And that's where I had a nice office job.
- 15:30 I checked through all the data, the sheets, the flying sheets, the work sheets, of every aircraft that came through. And I would check and see that all the modifications had been carried out. That they'd been done and signed for. Oh, nice job. The only ones in the office were a pilot officer, RAF, and a WAAF.
- 16:00 And the officer was a nice bloke. I was, "Aussie." Everything was, "Aussie." "What do you think about this, Aussie?" And then one day he said to me, "You're going to Ireland tomorrow, aren't you? On a trip?" I said "Yes." He said, "There's an aircraft over there at the control tower, he's headed for there. Do you want to catch it?" And I said, "My word." I got my bags and went straight over there, and got a ride
- 16:30 to Belfast. And without going through the thing of travelling by train down to London. Anyway, here was

I sitting in a big American job. A cargo transport plane. The only one. It was like sitting in a big tin shed. And got to Belfast, and I got a ride in a Jeep from there into the town

17:00 of Belfast. And had an evening there. I met a couple of people. One wanted me to stay for a week. No, I came over here to see the cities. Not gallivant in one room. So I caught a train down to Dublin. And

17:30 my grandmother came from Dublin. She was associated with a tobacco firm. Her maiden name was Barrett. And the tobacco firm, it would be going back a few years, it was chewing tobacco, and they called it Barrett's Twist. So when I got down there, I had of course to kiss the

18:00 Blarney Stone. Which I did. It's a strange sort of a place, not easy. I can't remember now if it was part of a bridge. But there was a stone way, and then there's a stone wall, and then there's an opening cut in that wall, so that to kiss the Blarney Stone, the Blarney Stone was you go down....So you lay on your back, put your head in, and kiss the stone.

18:30 And it was absolutely covered with lipstick. But I kissed it anyway. It may have done good for me. The gift of the blarney. And so I've done that. That was a job that I heard of, kissing the Blarney Stone, for a long time.

**I wonder if you could tell me, Harry, how you got along with the English in the RAF?**

19:01 Oh, all right. I think they looked upon the Aussies as a little bit quaint, I think. I don't know if Ron would have found the same, but there was great camaraderie with the crews. They were very closely associated. You get ten members in a crew, you were close. If you were distant, well you are distant from

19:30 any individual. Generally speaking...oh, in occupation in Germany. This thing about relations between English... we were stationed at a place near Voonsdorf. RAF Spitfire Squadron. And we got called up, we were on parade

20:00 and we were, because most of the blokes had had discipline in the air force in whatever shape or form. They wanted to get back to civil life. To get home to Australia, the preference. With all the food restrictions that there were in England. As I said, the cafes and restaurants, you're eating horse, well, other than that....So anyway, the CO got up

20:30 this morning, this day of the big parade....Oh, and they had a flag. Hauling up the flag. So they got the party, the parade ground. It was rather small on this, it was occupied by the German Air Force before we came there. And they had this area for hauling up the flag, but when they got there,

21:01 the flag had been stolen. And the authorities were very, very upset. "You bloody Australians..." And in fact, the night before we left there, there was an armed guard placed on the flag, that night. They produced a newspaper on the station, and

21:30 there was a character. Mr Odd. His hands on the rail, "What? No flag?" Came out in this newspaper. I don't know whether I've got that. I have a newspaper there. But there was a letter in the newspaper thanking the Aussies for their presence on the station,

22:00 and the different characteristics we had. Friendly manner, etc, etc, etc. "We're sorry that you're gone." But this CO, he said, "You're an undisciplined mob." And he said, "I will be glad to see you go." And there were murmurings in the ranks.

22:30 We called them The Great Unwashed. You don't have any English descent in you, have you? There was a joke that went around. A new bloke came onto the station, an Aussie, and had his towel over his shoulder, and he's looking around and he said to an Englishman, "Where are the showers?" "Here, I don't know, mate. I've only been here a fortnight."

23:04 See, they would work, oh this is....perhaps I'd better....they worked in their uniform, this will be edited anyway.

**What were you going to....**

They worked in their uniform, they'd come back at night, wash their face and hands and go out

23:30 romancing. But anyway...

**What did you think of that at the time? Would Australians have done that sort of thing?**

No, the English did.

**No, I wonder what you thought of that at the time, and what the other Australians thought of that?**

Oh, we abhorred it. We didn't work in our uniform.

24:00 You wear overalls. And everywhere around here. But I have to confess. I did my wrestling at the Victorian Railways Institute, as I said before. And I came into the Mildura place, and the bloke opposite me, in the hut I was assigned to, he said, "Hey! I know you!" He said,



- 24:30 "VRI. You were wrestling up there." And I said, "Yes, that's right." I saw him come home from working, and you know the atmosphere of Mildura, in summertime, sweat in every pore. I saw him come home from work, wipe between his toes with his towel then dress up and go out. Anyway, I didn't know anyone in
- 25:00 Mildura, in the town. So he said....oh, this is before I'd seen him do this, like that. He said, "What are you doing tonight?" I said, "What's to do? I don't know no-one." He said, "I've got a couple of birds in town. Would you like to come with me?" I said, "Okay." So we got a taxi, no, we got a bus in.
- 25:31 And we met these two girls and we went to a pub over the Murray [River], so it was in New South Wales side. I've forgotten the name of it now. The pub was about the only place in the village. Oh, there was a well known boxer, Billy Grime, a well known old time boxer. And
- 26:01 he was the barman at the big workman's club, in Mildura. And someone, said "Oh, there's Billy Grime." So I sat at the table with two girls and the other bloke, and the drinks came, and my drink had no sooner been there and she turned around with her elbow and accidentally of course, she knocked the glass of beer all over
- 26:30 my uniform, which did not make me happy. So I went over and sat with Billy Grime all night, talking about boxing and etcs. And we got the...I said, "We'll go home." They closed then. And this other bloke, wanted to get off with his bird somewhere. So we got a taxi back into Mildura. And he went with her and I
- 27:00 just caught another taxi, and I went back to the drome. And I left her to...Sometime, a short time later, this other fellow had to go on a visit to the VD [venereal disease] clinic in Melbourne. So it might have been most advantageous that I didn't linger with the other one. But so, and
- 27:30 then he was sent away from there. He must have contracted the disease. And I don't know what I did then. I was on my own. I didn't develop any other friendships....Yes, I did. Yes.
- 28:00 A lass whom I'd known when I was down in Nihill. she transferred to Redcliffs. FNG Stores, there were Gibson stores, well known. And she was manager at Nihill and she got this transfer to...She was at Echuca for a while. And I took some leave out...I had to go down to
- 28:30 Melbourne, to see my Mum. And I wasn't married then. And then I went back up to Echuca, for a couple of days with her. And she was quite charming, too. Smart businesswoman. They would send her to various branches that needed a bit of a lift. And she put them in order, and transferred somewhere else. A very
- 29:00 mobile job. So anyway, she posted to Redcliffs. And then, when I got my posting to England she asked me to marry her and I said, "No." I wouldn't do it. But I might go into an area I said, not knowing then I was going to England.
- 29:31 I might have gone to New Guinea, been knocked off, or some sort of injury or disability. Lose a leg or an arm, anything. And I wasn't prepared to batten her down to such a situation. But as from then, that night, we dissolved the partnership. And she sent me a letter when I was in England saying she was
- 30:00 knitting a scarf. Would I like it? And I said, "No, you can give it to your airman friend over there." Which was wrong. I'm sorry for that afterwards, that attitude. Haven't seen her since anyway. But she was quite charming.

**I wonder, Harry, we hear a lot that the thought of going away to war, often spurs people to get married rather than put them off.**

- 30:30 Yes, well, when you see the results of it. We all knew the results. We'd seen them in newsreels, devastation, bodies, and the mutilation would be bad enough. Well, say one arm even. To be married to a one-armed bloke who hasn't got his full capacities. Or even the mental stress they might gain through that and other attitudes,
- 31:00 drinking habits, or even, as has developed, drug habits. I wasn't prepared to put my associate for life into a situation like that. But she didn't see it that way, so regretfully we parted. And anyway I had no ideas of marriage at the time. In the mobile life I
- 31:30 was living. And anyway with the training I'd had, it didn't give sufficient warranty in my mind that I could support someone and the eventual children which might come. I didn't feel capable, until I got back and I used all the instruction I'd had been given of
- 32:00 fitting and what not. I went back to the same firm that I had before going into the forces. But I told them when I went back that I wanted to change my job into something a little better. So they put me into the melting and rolling department. All the gold and scrap bits were melted down in a furnace at
- 32:30 that firm and they came out in bars. Well, these bars were put through a session of rollers until they became up to six or eight thousandths of an inch thick for the manufacture of watch cases. I did that for some time. The chappie who was doing the firm's general

- 33:01 welfare, like repair work and what not, he was a pretty smart boy and he said, "Look, Harry, I would suggest you do a welding course." He did all the welding and general welfare of the place, and fitting. And he said, "I'm going for my inspector's certificate." He said, "I know I'll get it." He said, "When I get it,
- 33:31 I'll be leaving here in a flash, and I'll get a job as an inspector, doubling the wages that I'm getting." So I said, "That sounds good." So I went to the Melbourne Tech [technical college], and this is where I just had to....I think I had to wait until the January, but I put my application in as a student for a welding course, and then on the
- 34:00 thirteenth of January I married. So it became quite evident that I needed a boost in my capabilities.
- Harry, if you don't mind, I might leave it there for a moment with all your training after the war, and just go back to some of your war-time experiences first? And we can talk about all your qualifications a bit later, if that's okay.**
- Yes. Okay.
- I wonder,**
- 34:30 **you were talking a little bit about England, and I was just wondering, you mentioned to you were there for the end of war celebrations?**
- Yes. In Trafalgar Square. There were millions there. Millions. And I have a photo of us but it wasn't taken on that night. I had two photos. One of my brother and I at Trafalgar Square, with the fountain,
- 35:00 etc, etc. And one with Stanley, my friend from Tasmania. And, oh, it was unbelievable. But then they dissolved so quickly, too. I had come down from Yorkshire to London for that and it was quite a riotous time. But
- 35:30 it just dissolved and everybody got back to complacency, I suppose. And things carried on. With the reconciliation by Germany, prisoners of war were coming home, and the eventualities of that. So many women staying at home, needing home comforts without their husbands. And
- 36:01 were quite distraught to find that their marriage didn't exist. And all that sort of thing went on. But I could only read of that in the papers. I didn't have any intimate knowledge of it, but I realised that it did go on. Rob went home then, he was posted
- 36:30 home, and I had the diversion of going to Germany, in occupation there. Which proved interesting, too. And I was with one of the workers; they had a lot of German civilians, working around the drome that I was stationed on, which was again Spitfires. There were two squadrons of Spitfires
- 37:00 over there in occupation. 451 and 453, I belonged to 453. Well, they had been going on train busting, they did a lot of that. Follow the trains and bomb them off and knock off. And as a bit of a diversion, when I married and we moved, we brought a house in East Bentley, or we had it built in there. And
- 37:30 there was a street here and one here. The main road here. And I was the first house in this street, and one hundred and fifty foot depth. And where our side fence, there were other houses in this street. The bloke in this house was a pilot with 453 Squadron. We didn't know each other. But when I nicked off from my drome in Yorkshire,
- 38:00 and I went to Voonsdorf, I'm in Germany now. And I took a trip in the black market, and I acquired a Leica camera, and a Voigtlander camera, and a ceremonial sword, like this, and a few other things. I was getting six hundred cigarettes a month, which I never used. I hated them.
- 38:30 But I used them for bartering. And you would get ten shillings sterling for one cigarette, in Berlin. But at Voonsdorf where I was, Hanover, you would get five shillings. And I think it was the devastation of Voonsdorf, things were flattened, awful, and I think the situation was people weren't earning any money there, whereas in Berlin
- 39:00 they had some means of income. How they got it I don't know. But you would see people scrambling through rubbish bins in Germany. Especially round a service place like our aerodrome, coming around and picking at things....A cigarette butt, if it was dropped it didn't have time to hit the ground. It would be taken. And
- 39:30 tobacco was used for barter, or their own enjoyment. So I went up to Berlin, I had a few things, cigarettes mainly, which I had in my battle jacket. And I was up near the Brandenburg Gate. Of course, Russia on the other side of those gates. And all their servicemen carried arms. None of the Allies
- 40:00 carried arms in there. And of course, if you're dealing in black market stuff, it draws a crowd. And I was disposing of cigarettes and getting various things, as I've said, the Leica camera, though that was going into a house. I had this crowd at the Brandenburg Gate, and
- 40:31 someone said, "Ruskie come." A lot of English was spoken in Germany. Not perhaps so much by the

adults, but young kids, because the British had been there for some time, and they grabbed the language quicker. And of course I packed up shop and got out of the way. I went out to the drome that was

41:00 just outside Berlin, 451 Squadron. To have lunch. And I think this was Christmas Day, and the officers, while you were waiting in the line for lunch, the officers came round with beers, and poured you out one while you were waiting. And they gave out an orange. So when I left there and I was waiting to go and do my bartering,

41:30 I took out the orange, and people came round wanting to buy it from me. You can't believe the devastation that was over there and the denial of everything to the civilian people. But they didn't get my orange. I hadn't had one myself for about twelve months.

## Tape 6

00:34 **Harry, you were talking about your posting in the middle of '45 to England, to Yorkshire. I'm wondering if you could tell me about the work you had to do with the Halifaxes?**

The....

**With the Halifaxes.**

Not a great deal. Just a check,

01:00 really. I had to familiarise myself with them first. As you may imagine, four engines for a start. That interested me, but that wasn't in my field. But generally, it was just a larger area. And I was only on them a short time. And I was transferred down to

01:30 Cambridge, and that's where the.....the big American transport plane. So I had to try and familiarise myself with that also. But it was so brief. So then I was transferred to the office so I did no manual work at all. And

02:00 it was heading that way at Driffield, on the Halifax. You might say I was in the ascendancy towards....although I hadn't got my stripes in Driffield, I had them down at Cambridge. From then though, I was transferred to Germany and back to Spitfires. Later models, of course. And

02:31 whilst I was working there in the office, in Germany, they had a lot of German civilians working around the place. And I was talking to one and he said, "I was working here when the war was going on." And he said, "I was up in the control tower and we heard a screaming of an engine and

03:00 we were all looking up in the sky." It was an English fighter, the later job, it came up almost at ground level and they're looking down on it from the control tower. It was one of the Typhoons I think it was. He said he was astounded at us. But then they got the jets, which originated over there. And

03:30 we saw a couple, might have been their experimental models, that had crashed and they were in the crash hangars on the very drome I was stationed on. But after that things were folding up and I was headed...

**I was just going to ask you, before you tell me more about Germany. When you were in Mildura it was**

04:00 **1945, which was very near to war's end; I wondered how you reacted to being posted to England?**

Well, it was in Mildura that I got the news of my brother, Oscar, having gone missing. And of course that caused me some grief. I was over dramatic about it. But I was very, very

04:30 sorry and hurt that so late in the period, and they had only been, both Ron and Oscar, had only been in the air force a matter of about, no more than two and a half years and where here's me, six years service in. And I thought that was terrible that Oscar should have had so short a time in the air force.

05:00 And to be gone missing. Well, we didn't know for about another six months or so, until the snow thawed, they found the plane in the Alps. All dead, of course. And later on, several years later, my mother received a letter from a woman whose son was in the same plane and

05:30 telling her, telling my mum, that she was going over there. They had been buried in the Belgrade war cemetery and she was going over to see his grave. And she offered to take a photograph of Oscar's grave too. Whether it was in a multiple grave or not, I don't know. I've often wondered what eventuated from that. I don't know whether

06:00 Mum got the photo or what happened. So, a bit sorry about that. But I was hurt. At least Ron had come home. He had survived ten trips, bombing Europe. He was in some of those one thousand bomber raids. And he told me that on those

06:30 bomber raids, with their being a thousand or more aircraft in different layers, different altitudes, there was a specific time when they were over the target, they were to drop those bombs off. But he had actually seen bombs dropped from above and gone through some of our own aircraft. So

07:01 this was to be abhorred really. But a lot of them...it was known that some wanted to get rid of their load of bombs and get away out of it, from all the anti-aircraft fire, and possible fighter fire. So, to give that the consideration, which must be given.

**Well, it sounds like that would have**

07:30 **been a very deep shock for your family, hearing the news that your brother was missing.**

Well, we weren't there collectively you see. I wasn't home, I was at Mildura. Mum was in Melbourne. My younger sister, she had married a bloke and he was in the Middle East. And he came home.

08:01 But, Mum must have been distressed, but I had no immediate knowledge of it, from anyone. My father was separated, had been for several years. And there was no-one else there. It was like a lonely sound.

**Well, I'm wondering, when you received**

08:30 **your posting to go overseas, did you know that the war was coming to an end?**

Yes, because the way they'd gone....following the movements of the war, as Germany instituted it, the way they started in Western Europe they gobbled up each place. And I was in the air force when they got into France. And they demolished

09:00 France. And I thought, 'Well, they wiped out all that. They occupy all that part of Europe.' And there was only little England sitting there. But, my God, didn't England come to the game. I've often thought of it since, and during, they're magnificent. How they retaliated and got back. To think that that little

09:30 isle, picked up and became the person that she is now. I remember I was at the showgrounds, doing my training, when the Germans invaded France. And I thought, 'God almighty, we're gone.' Because with our association with England we'd

10:00 be going, too. But, as it turned out, thankfully.

**And how did you react to the news that you were going overseas?**

Oh, great, great. I'd had six years in the air force and I'd seen no activity. I thought I was no better than a boy scout doing the same job that I was doing, more or less. Except that they could call upon me to do the work

10:30 I did. But I thought, having been in for six years and never accomplished anything, I was looking after all the aircraft, which trainees, students, were going training to do their part, in defence

11:00 of the country, but I felt no better than a boy scout, really. Although I was there if they wanted me. I was a victim of their desires.

**And what did you expect?**

I expected to be going over to....well, I didn't think. I thought Europe more so, and then Japan came in after Pearl

11:30 Harbor. And I thought, 'Now it's a different picture.' And the fact that I had been in Darwin waiting for them, and I got out about five weeks I think, before the first raid on Darwin. I've forgotten the exact date, but I've got it in my diary. And

12:00 then I was in Nihill, when Japan came in. So I paraded before the CO and I said, "I would like to get a posting back to Darwin." He said, "Look, we run this show. You go where we want you." And I said, "Well, there's a number of chaps down in the hangars of the same thought."

12:30 He said, "Well, I designate you to tell them the same as I've told you. You go where we want." And I thought, well, I was transferred to Mildura, more advanced aircraft. Later model Spitfires and Kitty Hawks. And that was quite enjoyable. But then, instead of being attached the actual planes,

13:00 flying daily with students, I was posted over to the inspections. Which came up as I said before, forty hours, eighty hours, one hundred and twenties. So that I was more or less in the factory, the hangar, doing all the major inspections. You would all get them all at the same time you see. You had a crew, there might be two or three

13:30 aircraft having those inspections, and then when they were done we were free until the next forty hourly inspection. So one aircraft comes in, there's a multitude of people to go onto it, to do the repairs, or your adjustments. So there was a lot of time we were sitting, talking. That felt wasted.

14:00 **And what did you expect when you received the news that you were going to England?**

Well, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I became associated with a place that had suffered war, and very, very badly. From, you might say, it was from a tourist aspect. But the greater realisation came.

- 14:30 To see the actual damage done. And to think that this little isle had come out of the mire, and reached and sustained the power that they did. I'm afraid I had a better impression of the Pommies after seeing that. But I don't want them beating us in cricket.
- 15:01 Which was always something that came up. I was in a little pub one night in London, and a bloke came in, a civilian, and I think he might have been a little bit....He said "Good day, Aussie. How's that bloody Bradman?" [Don Bradman, famous Australian cricketer] I said "As a matter of fact, I saw a newsletter the other day that he's now
- 15:30 an instructor in the army." And he said, "Well, get rid of him." So we had our Bradman. A good force. And there was the formation of a bond between us. We've got our differences but we're in unity when it comes to cricket. But not individually, it's different. But
- 16:01 we were well received. I went into a toilet in London. I think it was a service's club, and written on the wall, in beautiful handwriting, among all the other rubbish that was on there, someone had written, "Where ignorance predominates,
- 16:30 vulgarity usually asserts itself." And someone else had written underneath that, and in immaculate handwriting, too. "Obviously an educated alcoholic." That was in London. And I wasn't in London very much, only for the week
- 17:00 that I spent with my brother. I was glad of that, too.

**Well, you've mentioned that, I understand it was when you were posted to 466 Squadron, you rose in the ranks and got the office job.**

Was that before? No, it was after I left 466 that I was posted down to

- 17:32 Cambridgeshire. A place called Bassingbourn. And Liberators, that was. But that was when I had an office job. I designated the work. And it was there, that I was in the office and
- 18:00 there was a pilot officer, and a WAAF only, in there with me, we're doing the records of all the aircraft. And he said to me, "You're going on leave tonight, aren't you, Aussie?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "There's a Liberator over there at the control tower, headed for Belfast." He said, "Do you want to be on it?" I said, "Oh, what do you reckon?" So pack up, I got a free ride over to Belfast in a
- 18:30 Liberator. I was thankful for that because I would have had the tedious train journey and then the boat over, the ferry, from Southampton I think, over to Dublin. But anyway as I said, I went to Belfast, landed at Belfast. And then I caught the train down to
- 19:00 Dublin. And when I came out of the train there was myriads of young kids came round. "Got any gum? Have you got any gum?" And, "Have you got any kangaroo pennies?" Kangaroo pennies? Those pennies we had with the kangaroo on them. And the policeman came and shooed them all away.
- 19:30 And I went to find a place I could get accommodation. I only spent a couple of days there, and then I went down to Cork. There I kissed the Blarney Stone.

**And when you were posted to 453 Squadron, what was your job?**

- 20:00 Oh, just servicing of the aircraft, in between flights. It was pretty brief. Of course the Spitfire hadn't changed radically in that time. The engine had changed. They had Griffin engines then, where before they had the
- 20:32 Super Marine. And anyway they changed after that, too. They had the Griffin Engine in the 453 in Germany. And then they had them started up by a cartridge. Instead of a battery. It would give you an explosive bang,
- 21:00 a cloud of smoke would go out and the engine would fire up. But that was in Germany. But then because I was a corporal I wasn't closely associated with working on them. I should have been really, in order to keep control of the work that was done. But it was so briefly I was there, it didn't amount to much.
- 21:33 **And I'm wondering how you and perhaps your squadron reacted to the post-war occupation in Germany?**
- The older folk, and some of the younger folk, going past you, and they'd have a state
- 22:00 of 'I hate you.' You'd see underneath. Young kids were good, but then again... If they were in a bartering position, they were very matey. And I met some people, I went into some houses. We had a big club called the Winston Club, in Berlin.
- 22:31 You'd go there, Allied servicemen and you'd get tea and buns or something like that, but always, if you went there you would be accosted by someone who would ask you if you wanted a watch, or a clock, or

ring, or something. Something of value. And

- 23:00 they would ask you for cigarettes. Or marks. A German mark was worth sixpence sterling. And, a young kid came along to me, quite young, but he spoke pretty good English. And he said, "You like watches?" And I said "Yes." So he said,
- 23:30 "You come with me." So I went with him. They all took your hands, and walk along with your hand. And he took me to a flat, or a unit, and there's a woman, a husband, elderly, and a young woman, who turned out to be a ballerina. And I got two or three watches and a couple of rings
- 24:00 for an amount of money. The ballerina said to me, "Do you know Ernie..." Oh God, I can't think of his surname now. And I said, "No." And she said, "What station are you on?" And I said, "Down near Hanover." She said, "He's a cook in the
- 24:30 sergeants' mess." So she said, "Will you take a letter to him for me?" He'd met her previously and been up there some time. So...Jolly. Ernie Jolly. And I said, "No, I don't know him." And she said, anyway, "Will you take this letter?" I said, "Yes." So I took the letter and I got back to my station. And I
- 25:00 went around to the sergeants' mess, and I said, "Ernie Jolly about?" And he said, "Over there." I've forgotten the girl's name now, but I said, "I've just been up in Berlin, I've got a letter for you." He said, "Oh, thanks. Good." So I never saw him again. Until I got back to work,
- 25:32 civilian living and life, and from that job, I had another one where I was for thirty years later, as a boilermaker. And this was before I acquired a car, after the war. I forget now which year it would be. But anyway,
- 26:01 I had this job as a boilermaker, and the foreman said to me, "There's a job going down at the factory near you, Harry. He said, "It can be done on the Saturday morning. It can only be done Saturday morning." Because they didn't want to pull the work during the rest of the week. So he said the job was they had a tank, it would be about that diameter,
- 26:31 and they mixed cement in it. And the cement being abrasive, it wears the steel lining. And that had reached the stage where that had to be replaced. And my job was to replace the steel lining inside. So on the Saturday morning I went down and it was only about
- 27:00 one and a half kilometres from where I lived. And I was on the push bike. I had my air force haversack on my back. It had my name, number and rank. And I had a couple of tools in it and a bit of lunch. So I got to this factory, Jolly Products, and a fairly young, he was about my age, he was then. This is going back
- 27:30 about fifty years, maybe more. And he said, "I've got to go out. I may be called away during the afternoon." He said, "There's all the gear there, the welder, go ahead." So he said, "My wife is in hospital expecting our first child. So I may be called away." So eventually, he
- 28:00 was called away. And his wife had delivered him a baby boy. So when he came back and told me I said, "We better wet his head, hadn't we?" [meaning to have a drink to celebrate the birth] He said, "Yeah, righto." He said, "I'll take your gear, you ride your bike, and I'll follow you to your home." So when I finished the job,
- 28:32 he picked up my bag, which was my former air force bag. And we're in the pub and he said, "In the air force, were you?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "Where did you get to?" And I told him, around Voonsdorf in Germany. He said "Voonsdorf?" He said, "I was there." And
- 29:00 I had seen the sign above the factory, Jolly Products. I said, "Are you Ernie Jolly?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Do you remember someone bringing you a letter from a girl in Berlin?" He said, "Yes." I said, "That was me." Isn't it incredible. To go together like that. But he's now deceased. I said,
- 29:30 "How did you get on with her? Did anything eventuate between you?" He said, "No. But it was nearly a disaster." He said, "When I came back out of the air force I married, not her, I married an Aussie girl." He said, "I was still getting correspondence from her, in Berlin." And she said that she was at the shipping place, ready to come over and marry him. He said,
- 30:00 "I had to move quickly there. And tell her all about it." Oh, gee, it's incredible. The workings of the world.

**And when you were in Germany, what was your job? What were you doing?**

Oh, it remained just the same. I was a corporal, of course, and I'd designate the work of the airframes of the aircraft,

- 30:30 they were doing the flights around. So, in actual fact, I didn't see much of the hangars at all. And it was so bitterly cold. There were sufficient, as I said before, the ground was frozen. And we couldn't play that game of hockey that we were prepared to. And it was just after Christmas that
- 31:00 they sent us back home. We went back to England. And spent a week there and then we caught the ship

home to civilian life. I had a week's leave when I got home, then I became a civilian. Then I went and told the company I was back among their forces. And they agreed to that of course. As I said before, I think.

- 31:30 And then I progressed on doing a welding course, that's when I became a boilermaker and not just a fitter. And it opened up another field for me. And then, on marriage. My wife had advanced ideas. We had furniture,
- 32:01 this wasn't part. We had a dining suite which we put on lay-by for twelve months until the house was built. So it was a pretty common sort of a bed, double bed, and lounge chairs, a dining table I have there, and
- 32:31 I got a call from a girl who was the bridesmaid. The girl through whom I married my wife. She was one of our bridesmaids. And she lived on the other side of town, near Hurstbridge. And I got a phone call from her because I had a trailer. I was doing odd jobs,
- 33:01 in between times. And she said, "Could you go to Camberwell, and pick up a wardrobe for us?" She said, "Vic saw the advert [isement] in the paper." A house in Camberwell that was being disposed of and their furniture was all going. So I said, "Yes, okay." So Faye and I went out there, in the car. And this was a beautiful
- 33:30 two story old home. One of those palatial old places. And we got the wardrobe and we saw other furniture there. These chairs, lounge and what else was there? A table, a dressing table. So we went back and we purchased
- 34:00 these chairs which we had re-upholstered. But they're beautiful. So then I heard one of our neighbours talking about doing a night course of cabinet making. And he worked in the customs office. And I said, "What have you done?" And he said, "Come around and have a look at some
- 34:30 of the stuff." So I saw some of the furniture he produced. It was quite good. So I said, "I think I'll get onto that." But he was going to the Brighton Technical School. And that was a bit far, and I still hadn't got a car. So the local technical school, which I could ride the bike to,
- 35:00 I went and signed up there. And the instructor said, "Have you done anything of it before?" And I said, "Only at junior tech, and that was just fiddling stuff." "And how long ago was that?" And I said, "I've forgotten how long, ancient." So first off...

**I might just stop you there, just because maybe we can come back to that later.**

- 35:30 **I just feel like I wouldn't mind asking you more about your war time experiences?**

Oh, I see.

**If that's okay. I'm just wondering what you think was the best thing about being overseas in England and then in Germany? For you?**

The best thing....Well, the size of the place for instance, and a much greater population.

- 36:00 And relations between people. As I said, my first impression was, being in uniform, they looked upon us as invaders, I suppose. Just as they had been in the first instance. And the fact that they lost, must have been humiliating to them. But,
- 36:32 the countrysides, the different scenes. I meant to speak of this before. I went into....where the young lad took me.....No, it was another one, a different one, from the one I've spoke of, Ernie Jolly. He took me to a place, a man and a woman, and
- 37:00 I got something from them; I can't remember now what it was. Whether it was a clock, an ornamental clock. And they told me, these German people, they didn't speak very good English. But they hated the Russians. He said that when they came here, he had an electrical business,
- 37:31 and he said, "They came in and they stole the amp meters, and meters connected with electricity. And smashed them thinking they were clocks. They were amp meters. Another place,
- 38:00 I went to; I don't think it was the same one. A man was reading the paper, and doesn't speak very good English, his son was there, not much at all. And he was reading the paper and he laughed. And it was his daughter that I spoke to, she would have been about sixteen, I think. I said to her, "What's your dad laughing at?"
- 38:30 And she said, "There's an item in the newspaper," the Berlin newspaper, that the Russians have taken a soap factory from Germany to Russia. He laughed, he said, "The Russians come to Germany, and they learned how to wash." Because they looked rough. And they were stand over, they
- 39:00 beat up people. One of our blokes was beaten up with a pistol, in a shop, by the Russians, and they dominated everything. It would take a long, long time before they would become amicable to each other. Germany and Russia.

### **And were you scared of the Russians?**

I was careful. I did one trip

- 39:30 and I knew....a trip from Voonsdorf, and I borrowed a .38 pistol, revolver, and I had it tucked in a shoulder holder. And I was walking up a street in Berlin, the Kerferstandam, a big wide street, great, wide. And a flat I'd been
- 40:00 further back up there, and I noticed a road running off on an angle to a big city. Going south of there. I forget now the name of the place. But when I got to doing a little bit of battering, or romancing, I forget now. And I was walking back and there's no one around and a car came down the other
- 40:30 side, on the wide road, and he stopped. And the driver ran over and I saw he was Russian. And he got to me, me being a corporal, he saluted me, and he asked in stilted tones, if I knew where the turn off was for this town that I had noticed was going off on a slant,
- 41:00 and I just said one kilometre, and he ran over to the car, they turned around and went back. So I got out of that. But I was bit concerned when I saw him running across the road. But we didn't come into contact. There was a Russian zone and an Allied Zone. And if you were wise you didn't go, but if you were getting around the Brandenburg Gates, well,
- 41:31 there, they were on either side of the fence, and you just had to be careful.

## **Tape 7**

- 00:32 **Talking about your time in Germany, I was just wondering if you could tell me the damage you saw in Cologne, I just wonder the damage you would have seen when you were actually there and on the ground?**

Well, there was a lot around Hanover. Great buildings demolished. And when you see the architecture,

- 01:00 and you think that that has all been ruined. The architecture over there was just fantastic, not like the housing that you see these days. Even up to preceding these days here. So much more interesting and the main roads being so wide of course they had their small ones, too,
- 01:30 but more generally in the big cities, well, Berlin and Hanover were the only two I saw immediately on hand. Saw them from the air, but the height, you couldn't get a good estimation of their appearance, pre-war or pre-devastation you might say. There was so much devastation,
- 02:00 there that, you wonder how on Earth they could rebuild it to its former grandeur. It was sorrowful, not only from the humanity point of view, but for the beautiful work that had gone on. And the incredible situations you wonder how with their restricted access to those heights,
- 02:30 I suppose if you go right back to the Pyramids, the work there, what they did, with what machinery? What tools? I'm just bewildered as to how they would have got, say those Pyramids; of course there were none around Berlin. The general building....there was some huge structures. But you marvel at what they've
- 03:00 done. And when you come back to a small place like Australia. The limited building that there is. Although, we are picking up, I know.

**I was just wondering if you could tell me a little bit about, I guess, your attitude and the rest of your squadron to the Germans. I mean, they had previously been the enemy.**

They were the enemy,

- 03:30 but we were reaching them in peaceful situations. We had what they wanted. In regards to gifts or we wanted what they had. Watches, mainly. And there were other things that I wasn't aware of. People, even machinery, were shipped home to England.
- 04:01 And unofficial of course. And some got caught up. It was only recently I saw an article where something had been traced as having been brought back from Germany by the troops. But pistols of course. Everyone wanted a Luger. And on our ship coming home the rumour went throughout the ship that there was going to be
- 04:31 an examination for any pistols. And I know there were several thrown overboard. Because they wanted to bring them back to England, that was. But I never went for that.

**You mentioned that the Russians often mistreated the Germans during the Occupation. I wonder what you saw of the Allies, or the British, or the squadron you were with,**

- 05:00 **maybe a bit of mistreatment of the German people. Or anger or hatred towards them?**



No, I didn't see anything. You could see it as a sullen attitude towards us. And some, not general. Because they weren't in the position to adopt that. They wanted kindness and things like

- 05:30 that shown to them, for convenience. But no it wasn't on display anyway, greatly as to what their feelings were. When I became associated with them say in the black market, or a general meeting, they knew that we had the whip hand and they had to give us a bit of better consideration.
- 06:02 The women, of course they had an asset that our blokes desired, and so there was a joining together. Even a bit of animosity between those two wanting to bargain for the convenience, or the kindnesses, from the other person.
- 06:31 From us. It was a feeling that we knew we were on top. We had the bargaining power. And that's why, even, a situation came. There were two girls together and I found that they couldn't speak
- 07:01 any English at all. They'd be in their twenties, twenty-four, something like that. About the same age as myself. And I only wanted the company of one of them. And they discussed and I finished up with one of them. We occupied a place. I took her to this place,
- 07:30 where we got tea and a bun. It wasn't butter of course, it would be margarine I guess. And I got a pocketful of those and she was deeply gratified. Simple things like that. You would think that they would give their all for it. That was the depths to which they had descended.
- 08:00 And if you were going into that club there would be people standing outside wanting your company. For the purpose of getting something of benefit. It's quite understandable when you see that going on. And you know of what would eventuate. There was no employment. Say Cologne, for instance
- 08:31 you can't imagine it being resurrected. It was flattened. And, of course, divine intervention had the cathedral survive. If we knew the answer to it I would sign it up. But so many things were revealed
- 09:00 by that conflict. Not only in mankind, but in reconstructions, animosities, friendships. Which is probably a result of the migration. Even I, in some certain little microscopic, might have played a part
- 09:30 in a person saying, "Well he was all right. I'll migrate to Australia." I'd like to think that that happened. But I was interested.....my chief object was gaining articles really, possibly for gain. The Leica camera I got I sold for seventy
- 10:00 pounds. And I brought a motorcycle with it. The Voightlander I can't remember. I used it for quite a while. Because I wanted to give, I had a Hitler youth knife. Which had blood and honour in German on the blade.
- 10:33 But I gave it to Roger [his son] and he said, "No, I don't want it." He said, "I have a friend, a German friend." He said, "I think it would offend him, if he saw that." It was a black knife it was, a Hitler youth knife, with the
- 11:00 Nazi emblem, embossed in the handle, and on the sheath. Very nice. I don't know what happened to that. And there was a naval officer's ceremonial sword I gave to someone. One of the family, I guess. But apart from that, no, I would have liked a pair of field glasses,
- 11:31 but they weren't available, when I was there, but I got another pair anyway, here. (UNCLEAR) I'm using them, because everything is close up. There's no long distance.

**I wonder Harry, you've mentioned some pretty depressing scenes of people begging for food, and trading for food. I just wonder**

- 12:00 **maybe that changed your view of the war, seeing the aftermath of the enemy. I just wonder if it changed how you felt about the war?**

Well, we had heard, and we'd seen, on film, the atrocities that happened. They're on film, they can't be denied. I could never bring myself to deal with that.

- 12:31 An atrocity. Unless, perhaps, an atrocity was performed on me. But, I don't know how....I was in Freemasonry for thirty-eight years. And the principles of Freemasonry are brotherly love, belief and truth.
- 13:00 If that was unanimous right throughout the whole globe, there would be no such thing as war. It would be all love. You'd love a person to death; it would be much more gentle. No bloodshed. But I didn't know, I wasn't a Freemason when I was in the air force, and the members of the forces are in Freemasonry.
- 13:35 But how that conforms with attacking, if they were called upon. In the present situation with the forces, I don't know how they resign that. But I've known religious people in the services. Sefton
- 14:00 Edmunston Fern. He was a Salvationist. And he played coronet. And he was in Darwin with me and he was also in my squadron, one of the squadrons in England. He didn't come to Germany. He was a very peaceful person. He had a long moustache. He

- 14:30 would lay on his cot, alongside me, in Darwin, twirling his moustache. And the fellows came back from grogging on in the wet canteen one night, and they cut one half of his moustache off. Sefton...he was a gentle person. A very nice bloke.
- 15:04 **I wonder Harry, were you much of a drinker? You've mentioned other people coming home a bit intoxicated, but I wonder if you were a drinker at all?**
- I was. Never to the extreme, though. It was always contained. I am doing a little more now than
- 15:30 I should. And Roger wouldn't like it if he knew. He drinks very minimal. But I'm sitting here, there's nothing there very much. Perhaps when pay TV comes in, he's persuading me to get on that, and broaden my interests. He's a good bloke.
- I wonder Harry, something that you've mentioned**
- 16:00 **a little bit throughout the day, to romances. I was just wondering if you could tell me, especially when you went overseas, you hear a lot about air force men and Australian servicemen being very popular in England. And I was just wondering if you could tell me how you were received by the English ladies.**
- I was going with a girl for about twelve months, here,
- 16:30 when I joined the air force. And was quite charming, a redhead. Office type. For twelve months. I was posted to Darwin, I was up there for nine months, and I came down on leave and we walked around
- 17:00 the city of Melbourne, past several jewellers, and we were looking at rings. Nothing said. But I said to her, "Would you like one of those?" Meaning we could become engaged. And she said, "No." And I was a bit surprised. I offered no other remark. So anyway, I went back to Darwin,
- 17:32 and finished my time up there. Posted back. And went down to see her, and it was rather cool. Then I went down another night and she said, "Oh, you can't come in. USA are in here." So,
- 18:01 I said, "Okay. Ta ta." And strangely, I thought she would have aspirations to someone on an elevated plane. Even an American. But she married the brother of a, two brothers worked in the same firm, and she married one of those.
- 18:30 And he died about four years ago. I had the invitation to go their dinner dance, their annual dinner dance, and I saw them, at the table, and I guess I was...I had Faye and I was courting her, and I put her on display, and then we married.
- Harry you were just talking a**
- 19:00 **little bit about romances. And I think you mentioned maybe this morning, maybe something about a girl at Nihill?**
- A girl?
- Was it Nihill? The camp you were at there.**
- Oh yes, but it never amounted to anything. I had greater association with the families before
- 19:30 I left here, not greatly. I was stationed at Nihill, when the lass lived...She was the manager of the firm, F & G Stores, and she had three girls working in the stores. It was quite a fair sized place. And we became associated, so I moved into that
- 20:00 hotel. And I met a fellow, a fellow airman, a sergeant. Who lived in the hotel with his wife, and....I went to a dance at the exhibition building in Melbourne, oh, years and years after the war, and I had known him on the drome. And I had spoken to
- 20:30 him and his wife. Oh, I used to have dinner on a Sunday at the hotel, with all the company, and got to know him there. And I took a girl home from this dance at the exhibition, before I married of course. And I was speaking to the girl, I said, "Where do we go to?" The driver said, "Is that Harry Mason?" I said, "Yes."
- 21:00 I said, "Who is it?" He said, "Will Hart." I said, "God almighty." I hadn't seen him in I don't know how long. Fifteen, twenty years. And it was the fellow who lived in the hotel, but he said to me, "Do you know, all the time I lived in the hotel." He said, "I knew you were
- 21:30 there, I never saw you." I was very discreet. I got up early, six in the morning, went over the road to the garage, where they ran a bus to the drome and got in that. Vera was a lovely woman. She was the one I told you, I didn't want to come back a rag mop, for her husband. And
- 22:01 I could certainly have married her, in better circumstances. But then again, I might have given thought to my ability to earn a living, which I didn't establish until several years....In 1951, I felt qualified to accommodate a wife, which I proceeded with. I seem to have done all right.

**I wonder, you mentioned also that when you first got to England you were approached by a woman during the celebrations, I think, or...**

Celebrations?

**When you first got to England. I think the**

23:00 **celebrations in Trafalgar Square?**

Oh yes. Well, the first week I met my brother who was on leave prior to coming home from there, and I had a week leave enjoying there. We went to Trafalgar Square and I've never seen, and been part, of such

23:30 a mass of humanity. They stretched for.....it was incredible. But I had no great associations there.

**What was the mood of the time when you were there? What were people saying and doing and....**

Oh, they were all delighted, when it happened. It finished and now they were getting back to reality.

24:00 There'd been so much shortages and it was to go on for another couple of years after that, too. Everything was strange. Powdered egg, and all that sort of thing. And no steaks, that sort of thing. I suppose you could get them if you went to the Mayfair [Hotel] or something like that.

24:31 Incidentally we had the Joe Loss band come to the drome and play there one time. And they had some good bands, working in the dromes there. Good bands performed, good musicians, quite entertaining lunch hours. Very good. But another band, I went to Edinburgh and I saw

25:00 Joe Loss. Oh, he was good. Edinburgh was good, a very nice city. And we had a member of the....I said before, but there was an English squadron came over here, with Spitfires up to Darwin. And the staff, when things folded up and they decided to go back home, the squadron split

25:30 up and the men were dispersed around. And I met a Scotsman named Wares. Ian Wares. And when he knew I was supposed to, this was at Mildura, when he knew I was posted, he didn't know then I was going to England, but he said, "If you get to England, and get to Scotland." He said, "I would like you to meet my parents in Edinburgh." So I got his address. And

26:00 on my first week of leave I thought I'll buzz up to Edinburgh and look up Ian's parents. So I got the address, and it was a pub. And I got there and it was closed. They had restricted hours on the pubs in those days. So I knocked on the door, and a woman came out, and I explained the situation. I was an airman from Australia, and I met Ian. She said,

26:31 "Mrs Wares wouldn't have you go away without a bit of Scotch." So in we went, and out came Johnny Walker black label. And whilst I was there, disposing of that, a salesman came in, so he joined us in that, too. On the boat going over I had won a watch, a new watch, in a raffle. So I had two, and I

27:00 was telling him about that and the bloke said, "I want a watch," so I sold him my old watch. Excellent deal. But anyway, she said, after we'd had a Scotch, she explained where Mrs Wares lived, and I went over there. It was near the Edinburgh Bridge. Beautiful, mansion type of thing, like Buckingham Palace

27:30 in miniature. Oh, they were good. So I stayed there for a couple of days and I enjoyed their hospitality. And he being a licensed vitler, he took me into town, in Princes Street. Princes Street, Edinburgh. He took several establishments. "And here is my friend,

28:00 Corporal Mason from the RAAF. And he knows my son Ian." and of course they knew Ian, all the hotel owners. Oh gee, I think I was getting a little unsteady when I got out of that street. But oh, it was great, the hospitality shown. I ventured twice. I took the Tasmanian chappie with me one time, too.

28:32 On my return trip from Ireland, I went up to Edinburgh and saw them again before I went to Germany. And, of course, didn't have the opportunity after that to see them again before coming home. But life, and getting around meeting people, and the conviviality, was great.

29:02 **I wonder if you could tell me, Harry. You've mentioned all the different places you were. And all of the different aircraft you were working on, which aircraft did you enjoy working on the most?**

I liked every aeroplane. I liked the area, that atmosphere. The thing was on the ground, and I'm working

29:30 on the controls that will put it up there, thirty thousand feet. I felt a great deal of pride. And the necessity of keeping things in good order. There was so many destructions. I did feel proud. Maligned at

30:00 times, that we were. Poofter air force blokes. Pansies. What did they call....Golden Wattle, or something. Yellow....and something else derogatory. You develop a thick skin in those instances.

30:30 **Who was calling you pansies?**

Anyone around the street that rather despised you. They despised us, because they thought we were Blue Orchids, they called us during the war, in our blue uniform. Beautiful, but yellow. Some of the services, mainly the army,

31:00 nothing from the army, nothing from the navy. I didn't actually come into....One bloke in a pub in Melbourne, he said something derogatory to me, and I said, "I think I will punch your nose." And I put my glass

31:30 on the bar turned, and he had gone. I was lucky. That was in the Hotel Australia in Collins Street. But I didn't run into any strife like that, or generally. We were closer to them in Darwin, to the

32:00 army, and while I was up there, the army revolted. I don't know what their reason was, but they went through the town and broken windows, and what not. Whether it was the same thing that disturbed us. They were stuck up there in a little country town, as it was then....The differences, when I was up there early last year, it was

32:30 astounding. Astounding. Oh, in Darwin, pilot officer or flying officer Smith who crashed and killed, they raffled his belongings for his wife. And he had a Chrysler Roadster, and there was a big restaurant in Darwin. Big at that time.

33:01 The owner of that won Pete Smith's Chrysler Roadster. Now, if you go up to Darwin, I think the name was Bongiorno, something Italian. Every where is 'Bongiorno,' huge signs. About ninety percent of Darwin and even down the West Coast. Incredible.

**I was wondering,**

33:30 **you mentioned, I guess, deaths in the squadron. How did that affect the morale of the ground crew? Especially if it was an aircraft you worked on that went down?**

I felt devastated. Not only from the fact that it was my aircraft, but Pete Smith. Aircraft are replaced, men are not.

34:01 Then the replacement aircraft came up. The old was A20 132. The new aircraft replacement was A30 232. Which I got. And I was still maintaining that when I left Darwin. And, then the next time I saw a Wirraway, was Mildura.

34:31 **I wonder in accidents where aircraft did go down, did you worry that maybe there had been a mechanical fault you didn't pick up, or that it had somehow...**

No, I didn't. Not through any fault of mine, but when I saw....this is how

35:00 things are identifiable by checking it, signing it and recording it for posterity. I was at.....Mildura, must have been Mildura.....no, Darwin it was.

35:30 My first job, on an aircraft, I was told, "Take off that panel there and make the adjustments," I can't remember now what it was. The speedo tube, the tube which protrudes from the front, main plane, and records the speed of the aircraft.

36:01 So this tube going through from the front to the situation its recording in the situation in the cockpit. And when it crashed, it was brought, all the bits and pieces were brought to the hangar. And they were doing a check over. And

36:30 I found that speedo tube, instead of being on the locking union, (UNCLEAR) on the tube itself, the copper tube and I'd twisted that a little bit. And the engineering officer came up to me, in the hangar, I hadn't met him before, he said, "Come down here with me." So he produced the sheet, the

37:00 recorded sheet of the work that had been done and which section I had worked on and signed, and then took me to the wreckage. And I saw how that tube had been twisted. Not sufficient to cause damage, but it was a fault. So it became very significant in my memory, to take a little more care perhaps. But

37:30 being brand new, out of school, and being given that job. And you can't even see the article. I couldn't even see it. And it should have been the fault of the flight sergeant, too, in charge of the hangar. But he had checked it as he should have, after I'd done the job. But too late to be sorry. But fortunately, to my mind, I'm very

38:00 glad that it wasn't the cause of the fatality. That was the plane that hit the tree, crashed it. So....I was always very, very careful after that. If you put your name to it, that's it.

38:30 **I wonder how the aircrew let you know that they appreciated the work you were doing?**

No, no word was ever said. You were expected to do the job, that's it. End of story. You didn't do it, and then a major thing comes up that can be proved, well, then you would be court-martialled.

39:01 **Were there many incidents of that? Where people were in serious trouble for...**

No. I never heard of one. It would be hushed, certainly, by the individual. The administration wouldn't

be broadcasting it. It reflects back on so many people. Who checked it? And who checked the checker?  
And

39:30 who checked the checker's checker? So...It could have happened. Even in other functions, say army, navy.

**I wonder if there was anyone you ever worked with, whose work you were a bit**

40:00 **suspect about or....**

Well, I know, for instance, that I was respected for my capabilities. They had what they call a drogue. A drogue is a long, circular piece of

40:31 material. It could be up to twenty, thirty feet long, coming down to a narrow end. And this is on a length of cable, tied to a winding arrangement on an aircraft. The one we had in Darwin was a Fairbairn aircraft. And jutting out from the side of it

41:00 was this arm, fixed, and the cable with the drogue on it. He would take off with it withdrawn, but when he got into certain areas, he released it, and let out the cable perhaps thirty, forty feet, more. And aircraft would make attacks on it, firing actual bullets, at this

41:30 canvas shroud. And they would, if different aircraft were firing at it, they would coat the nose of the bullet, in different colours. Red, yellow, green, blue. And when the aircraft is finished, it comes down and lands, and they go and examine it, to see how good the different pilots were. "Oh, you were flying green? Not a mention. You didn't hit."

## Tape 8

00:33 **Harry, you've spoken to us a lot today about the different kinds and types of planes that you worked on, and there were many, I'm wondering out of all those different planes, whether there was one that was your particular favourite?**

I would say the Spitfire. It had

01:00 capabilities, and in good hands...It was a beautifully built plane. And with its performance, too, it held that performance for so long. And I know the appreciation of the English people on the Spitfire would (UNCLEAR) I would think. But it was

01:32 a British design. It was taken from a (UNCLEAR), a well known bloke. I've forgotten his name now. But it was such a graceful thing. And they said it was impossible to strain the wings. But when I was at Darwin,

02:00 when one came in, they brought one in and it had rivets that were pulled in the mainframe. Because it pulled out of a dive, and put such a strain on the...when you're lifting out and getting it up again, that it pulled out these rivets. And there was a good deal of consternation amongst the management. I don't know, it never came back

02:30 to me, or any of the staff. Perhaps the higher elevated, but as to what was the cause or the fixing of it, I don't know who did the repair job, or whatever. But it was beautiful. But the others, of course, since they've advanced

03:00 to jets....I was in London, when the first squadron of fighters flew over the town of London. I'm not sure, Meteors or Vampires, I can't remember now. But, all the populace came out and saw them go over. This was in the city of London.

03:30 Gee, they were great. But it made the Spitfire superfluous, ancient. But they were magnificent, and the pilots who flew thought they were marvellous, too.

**Well, I wondering in that sense if you could compare working on an aircraft in the way that you did to working on a car?**

04:00 Well, you could say there was a relationship. They both need an engine, and unless you were getting into high speed designed cars, racing cars, where a bolt protruding from one part of the car's frame would restrict it

04:30 by a percentage of speed. Not noticeable down in the lower element, but when you get to the higher speeds, anything protruding from the sides that may cause resistance, must have a reduction in speed. But comfort, well....I've had some comfortable cars. I had a Rover.

**But I'm just wondering if**

05:00 **in some sense, the Spit, in the way you described it, was a bit like working on a sports car. I'm**

**wondering if it was the sports or Rolls Royce of planes? In your mind?**

Oh, there's no doubt about it. For that time, it was supremo. Of course, Germany came up,

05:30 with some very good aircraft, too. And it was only recently I saw a film, showing that. I've forgotten what it is now. My mind is not very retentive these days. But they said it was better than the Spitfire...

**And out of all of those planes that you worked on, I'm wondering**

06:00 **if there was some work, or craftsmanship, that you felt you were very proud of?**

No, not really. Part of my work, I was explaining the drogue before, and I

06:30 explained how it was fired at, well, one day, when we were on the civil drome, this was in Darwin, a bullet severed the cable from the aircraft to the drogue. And he landed on our field, and they got the drogue, and then that cable had to be spliced.

07:00 We had our own aircraft and there were a number of us sitting around, waiting for our aircraft to return. And they wanted someone to splice this cable, so the drogue could go up and do this job again. And no-one else was willing to do it. And they said, "Mason will do it. Fix the cable." So I got that cable and I had to splice it in again, to make it workable.

07:30 And it made me slightly elevated above the others. They either didn't feel confident or whatever. But I did it, they fitted it on and the plane went off. Did the job. That was one association that I felt, yes, that they confessed I was superior to them, in that very microscopic area. But nothing else came up in

08:00 that light. Oh, yes. I was stationed at Mildura, and every now and again, a private plane would come in and land, and perhaps stay overnight. Have some business to do in the city, and pick it up the next day. So they had what they called an 'Oil Dolly'. Which was a cylindrical cylinder,

08:30 on wheels, and it contained oil, and they could cart this dolly around to any aircraft, and pump oil from this barrel up into the aircraft. Well this monoplane it was civilian owned. And someone pulled an oil dolly along, underneath it. And it tore some of the fabric on the Allan.

09:00 And, of course, the owner was a bit disturbed about it, and they selected me to do the repair job. There had been a big three quarter tear in the thing, so I had to stitch it up, needle and thread, then cut out a piece of fabric and fray the edges all around. Then

09:30 paint it on with the aircraft fabric. And he gave me ten shillings, the private owner, so I was quite proud. And ten shillings was ten shillings in those days. And also, the fact that the general opinion was, "Mason will do it." Excuse me, I will lift my crown.

10:00 But generally, though, there was nothing outstanding about me, I've got no decorations.

**It does sound like you were a very good handyman.**

I think I proved that in my afterlife. With the construction of all these timber things. I'm quite proud of those, and so are the children. Adrian said even, or

10:30 Roger, "All that stuff is still as tight as a drum, and it was built fifty years ago." So I've earned their respect.

**Well, I'm also wondering, you've mentioned a bit about, and I imagine that some of your time with the air force was a bit repetitive, and you had time to kill on your hands. I'm wondering how you coped with your frustration**

11:00 **and boredom?**

Reading. I did lots of reading. Everywhere I went, I was a member of the library. There wasn't much else to do in any of the....Point Cook, I could get home from there, but I was only stationed there a week. The showgrounds, I was close to home again. Nihill? Nihill didn't have much at all.

11:30 Only the pub. And the pub closed at ten o' clock. That's the front door, but the back door opened. But there were no sporting facilities there. I was glad when I....I was very much appreciative of Darwin, where I got three seasons of hockey, there.

12:00 They started running. Cross country, that was at Nihill. They only had two runs and it petered out. Nothing then, until I had one game of hockey in England, of course. I mentioned that and the one that I was lined up to do in Germany, which faded out also, because of the frozen ground.

12:31 But, nothing was done, really. Entertainment. There were no women on the station at Mildura, at Nihill. Nihill, yes. There were not very many, but...Oh, we had

13:00 a concert, a concert party at Nihill. Nihill? Mildura. I was in a men's ballet. And I've got a photo of that somewhere. Yes, it was Mildura. And that was fun. And just surprising the talent that they dig up when you get

- 13:30 two three four hundred people there. And a couple of comedians were really excellent. And a contortionist. A ballet girl. It was quite surprising really. And when I was at Mildura, they thought it was so good that they would put it
- 14:00 on in the Mildura Town Hall. But unfortunately I was away before that happened. I don't know whether it eventuated. But generally speaking, you were left out on a limb. And that was the reason why so many of them go to the wet canteen, and seek their conciliation in grog. But,
- 14:31 I didn't see any excesses there.

**Well, you've mentioned you were very excited and saw it as a new challenge to be posted overseas. But you did spend a long time at Mildura. I'm wondering what you felt when you were leaving? Were you sad to be leaving?**

- 15:00 To a degree. But I was more thankful that at last I was going to achieve what I had thought I would get much earlier, in going overseas. Even were it to be Moresby. I'm glad it wasn't Moresby. When you read about the conditions they worked under, up there, in the wet....Oh,
- 15:31 malaria for a start. In Darwin, you would get dengue fever, but you would never get malaria. Unless it has in recent years come there. But, when it was known that my brothers had been over to Europe, I thought, 'They've been in the air force two years, and
- 16:00 they've achieved what I always had aspirations for.' But it cost one brother his life to see that. And the buildings I was interested in, to see...The Thames Embankment, Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square. Things that I had read about from childhood. And to see that. But then for me to see The Rhine and The Rhone.
- 16:34 The Panama Canal and Bermuda. This was like a boyhood dream come...And I lived through it, I am able to talk about it. Other people who've been there, and disappeared, killed, not able to relate their memoirs.
- 17:01 You would find that most of the kids now don't care about it. Family and other people. But I've got a very strong appreciation, after seeing all that. But when I first saw London Bridge and Buckingham Palace, and the changing of the guard. I saw that one time.
- 17:30 And the hundreds and hundreds of people who assembled there, every day, to see the changing of the guards. And the beautiful precision. In the crowd watching this changing of the guard was a soldier, and I said to him, "Who are the troops taking part?" He said, "The Irish taking over from the Welsh." He said,
- 18:00 "They're bloody awful." And yet to me it looked absolute precision. Jealousy amongst the forces. And when you consider that the hundred of the years that this changing of the guard has been going on, and it's still much admired. People delight, and they probably come some distance to see it.
- 18:30 Well, you think everyone in England would have seen it by now, but apparently not. Or, if they have, they see a repeat performance. But I will never forget the disgust on this soldier's face. "They're bloody awful." And here was I thinking it was precision to the utmost.

**And how do you think your time in the air force**

- 19:01 **changed you?**
- It made me. It gave me the knowledge that I had something to build on. And had it not been for that, it was the inspiration for me, finding that I had the ability laying there, but it had to be produced, developed, schooling,
- 19:30 and to put your mind to it. Forget the niceties, commit yourself. I was doing over time until six o' clock at night, and then riding my bike up to the technical school and do two hours of cabinet making. This went on and on. Next door neighbours would be coming over to watch....We had probably the first television set in that area, at that time. They would
- 20:00 come over to our place, before I would come, grab a meal, off to school. They would come over when I was eating my meal, and they would be still there when I came home from school at night. So I was putting to advantage, the male of that anyway, wasn't all....He was an accountant, but he turned out to be mongrel anyway.

**Well you were relatively**

- 20:30 **old by comparison to some other boys when you were in the air force. You were in your twenties and there for six years, so you were in your late twenties by the end of your service. I'm wondering if your age was any great disadvantage to you?**

No, I didn't feel that there was any great difference in ages, then. It wasn't noticeable.

- 21:00 Perhaps later on, very late, we got the younger people. About the times that the WAAAFs came into it when I was at Nihill. And that seemed to be associated with youth. Which it was too, when you compare

some of the older men. Some of the older men, when I first went

- 21:30 in, were members of the permanent air force. And they were a little bit shy on us. We were intruders. And it was displayed, quite often. But I thought, gosh, they had the stage when they were learning going back six or whatever years they had been in the service. Of course they almost all had
- 22:01 rank when we came in. Perhaps they got the rank when the war broke out and they brought in all the recruits, the volunteers and what not, until compulsory service came. When they were compelled to go into the services, whether it be army, navy or air force. But the group that I had were all of a similar age. And similar thoughts,
- 22:31 to a degree. We had the rowdy, we had the conscientious, we had the religious, and myriads of different characters. And that made it so much more interesting, too. You had different conversations. A couple of intellectuals, and two in particular,
- 23:00 they were always together. They always had volumes, and discussing volumes. I don't know what their subjects were. But they also went to England on the same trip that I was, but they were not stationed with me. But very nice blokes. I was in a pub at Kew, one time, where I lived, prior to the war,
- 23:30 and a fellow came in, and he stood alongside me, he said, "I know you." I said, "Where from?" And he said, "You were in the air force, weren't you?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "You were on the ship coming from England to Australia. I was the librarian." He said, "You were there every bloody day." So it's quite remarkable, isn't it? I
- 24:00 met him a pub after that, and I haven't since him since. So it's nice to be noticed, for whatever reason.

**You've just mentioned some of the permanent air force blokes showed their irritation towards the new boys, such as yourself. What would they say?**

They probably looked upon us

- 24:30 as incompetent, which, I must confess we were, too. When we first went in. They took us straight from a room, we didn't even have an aircraft, and we were placed in a situation at the top end of Australia, which is in the hot spot position. They always spoke of it as being the first place to be knocked off by, as it turned out, Japan. And anyone else up
- 25:00 around Indonesia, perhaps. And for us to be taken directly from a drawing board you might say, into a place where we are reliable, responsible, for the lives of Australians. And depending upon us to do a good job in whatever we did. And I felt very proud to be part of that. If you
- 25:30 want to analyse it like that. We were volunteers. We weren't shot-gunned, we were all volunteers in those days. Just maybe for various reasons, adventure, devotion to King and country. I was looking for adventure. And, as I spoke of before, to better myself, and make myself more
- 26:00 beneficial to me, or a family if I should have one, and the country in general.

**Well it does sound like the air force did really help you improve your lot in life. I'm wondering if you can, and it doesn't matter if you can't, but if you could refer how your pay rates changed throughout your time in the air force?**

Well, I think I demonstrated that

- 26:30 by three healthy children, and the work that I've done. Not only in the home, but the capabilities I developed.

**My question was what pay were getting, at the beginning? And then how did that change throughout your...**

Oh monetary? Well, more things come into consideration, like the

- 27:00 trade that you get into, what your earnings are, and I've got my pay cheques going from way back, so I can give you a contrast. I think I was getting something like ten pounds, ten pounds something, that's twenty dollars, a week
- 27:31 and before I started to get the idea that I could improve myself by getting back into what I'd learned in the air force, and combining that with another increase of learning. The welding for instance, that was a great boost to me....

**And how did the pay**

- 28:00 **rate of the ground crew compare to the air crew?**

To the air crew. Well, I don't know exactly, but they were officers, more generally. Except that we had sergeant pilots, non-commissioned officers. And observers, they had non-commissioned officers who were observers. Gunners,

- 28:30 and I don't know how their wages were. You see this was never discussed between the men. In Darwin,



for instance, because of the gambling influence up there, ins and outs, at the Chinese place, joss houses and whatnot. This bloke I've mentioned before, I lent him ten pounds.

29:00 Well, he was in on that gambling, two up and whatnot, and I never got it back. That was just an experience. That was a week's wages then, for me. But he had no compunction. No principles. So I didn't form a close company with him. He's in one of the photos I've got, too

**And when you were finally discharged from the air force in 1946.**

29:32 **Immediately afterwards, what did you miss do you think?**

What did I miss from the air force business? I was grateful for the opportunity of being able to improve myself and I was thankful for the air force for that. And to, I suppose, to open my eyes, to

30:00 a degree. And especially so when I married. I was very, very thankful that I've made such a success of my married life and family. And the work that I did in the house in Melbourne, it astounded some people.

30:31 And me, too, at times. But I would never have been capable of doing it, had it not been for the training that I received in the air force. Which opened up another field for me.

**I'm wondering if you missed wearing the uniform?**

Oh, I don't miss it.

31:01 It was sort of accepted that you would be in uniform in those days. I was proud to wear the air force uniform, that's why I selected them. No, I can say that, yes, I am very, very proud that I served in that time.

31:32 And more particularly so, as Roger pointed out to me, he said, "You're going down into the Archives." And he said, "And for what you've done, you deserve it."

**I'm wondering on that if a young person, perhaps a grandchild, came to you for some advice, what would you pass**

32:00 **onto them about your experience in the air force?**

Well, first off I think if there's any possible means of avoiding it...there's no point going to your death, pre-arranging your own death. And especially so if you've got complications of

32:30 a family. I would not recommend a family man go into it. To intrude that upon, well, you get the final identification of who creates these wars. [Prime Minister John] Howard, or Joe Blow or whatever. Peace should come first. But

33:00 if it is impossible to avoid, which it seems these days. Is religion...Muslims against the others. Is it religion that's doing it? Or is someone's inner feelings? Resentment against....Well, I know because of the manner in which America and England had developed themselves, there is a good amount of jealousy, and though,

33:30 in developing themselves to what they are, have they exploited other people? Put them in a bad position or something? There's so much to analyse...And if I was to recommend, as you said, would I recommend to anyone if they should do the service, only if they have to. I've

34:01 benefited from it. And I'm proud of what I've done. But if it could be avoided, well, have it avoided. I'm very lucky, through the benefits I've gained from Veterans' Affairs. I feel very gratified that

34:30 these things ended up in this manner. But I know very well that I have done a lot of contributing to it. You can't do it without that inner spirit. The desire to do it, and improve yourself. It was my initial inspiration, you might say, of joining the forces, for the defence of the country. Yes. I think if someone

35:00 intrudes we've got to get rid of them, eliminate them. And if war's the only thing that is going to do that, well, you have to be in it. You can't do it by yourself.

**And I'm wondering if you got an opportunity after your discharge to talk about your air force experience with your father?**

No, it wasn't

35:30 much discussed. My father was invited to leave us pretty early, because of his manner, behaviour, to my mother. And it wasn't until....my brother took him over to a vacant allotment opposite the house, to teach him a lesson. But he said when he got over there, "I

36:00 couldn't do it." Words were enough. And my father left. And he was associated with another family where the father was a builder, and he gave my father work. And then we didn't see him for years. Until I was in the service and I went to

36:30 a hairdresser in Kew, to have my hair done, and he was sitting there waiting for a haircut. It was sort of

a reunion, I was in uniform. And then later on, the rest of the family came, not Mum, and we played cards on a Saturday night. Myself, Ron,

37:00 Ron's wife, and my father. And it got that way. But we sort of accepted him, but never to live with the family. We were all broken up. Until he got very ill and went to hospital, and he didn't last very long in there.

37:31 He's right out of it now. That was quite a few years back now. But, he was a showman. He had a million dollar glow about him. There was not a penny in his pocket. Starched collars and things like that.

38:02 **Well, we're coming to the end of our session today, I'm wondering if there was anything you would like to add, or if you feel like there is something we might have missed out.**

On longer thinking, perhaps, I might have. But I can't think now. What interests me, would

38:30 that interest the general public? My solo thoughts may not be in conformity with others. But as I delve into it, and as you produced from me, a gratification that I was placed in a position to be able to lay down my life for my country, and the King and the Queen.

39:01 And I consider my justification for having arrived on this globe. I've done my piece, however nobly or ignobly it might have been. Maybe the fact that I've done it to my advantage is...But at the same time, I was there if they wanted me. If they wanted to put me in the front

39:30 line. Well, I was there. It was the backline? Okay. I had to accept it. I won by their decisions.

**And if you had your time over, is there anything you would have done differently?**

I would have been more aware of the need, the necessity for improvement of education and abilities.

40:01 What I've known and what I had achieved, I could have done earlier perhaps. But my parents were not in a position of financing anything like that. They didn't have that upbringing, and they could do nothing to assist....Though they come in agreement, and they're very, very proud of what we've achieved,

40:30 but they were not in a position to finance us. To go to a university now you pay thirty thousand dollars. That reduces so many people who may have the aptitude or capabilities; they're just simply not in the financial area to pay for it. So, to a degree.....Mother Claver....[?]

41:00 She said, because she despised...Have I told you? Mother Claver said, "You Masons will never be anything." Because we didn't have a penny to our names. But in my memoirs, which I've written up to two hundred and fifty two pages now, there have been several instances when I've said, "Mother Claver? I hope you are taking notice."

**Well I think you should be very proud of your air force experience. Thank you very much for speaking with us today.**

It's my pleasure. And I'm gratified to both you people for making it possible for me.

**Thank you. INTERVIEW ENDS**