



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

Accession number	S00539
Title	(401943) Gray, Kenneth Douglas (Flight Lieutenant)
Interviewer	Stokes, Edward
Place made	Not Stated
Date made	February 1989
Description	Kenneth Douglas Gray, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) and Royal Air Force (RAF) Bomber Command, interviewed by Edward Stokes for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45 Discussing enlistment; air force training; training in Rhodesia; Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), Royal Air Force (RAF), training at Lichfield, England; training on Wellington planes; Bomber Command briefing procedures; crew tension; casualty rates; flying techniques; post-war employment.

Disclaimer

The Australian War Memorial is not responsible either for the accuracy of matters discussed or opinions expressed by speakers, which are for the reader to judge.

Transcript methodology

Please note that the printed word can never fully convey all the meaning of speech, and may lead to misinterpretation. Readers concerned with the expressive elements of speech should refer to the audio record. It is strongly recommended that readers listen to the sound recording whilst reading the transcript, at least in part, or for critical sections.

Readers of this transcript of interview should bear in mind that it is a verbatim transcript of the spoken word and reflects the informal conversational style that is inherent in oral records. Unless indicated, the names of places and people are as spoken, regardless of whether this is formally correct or not – e.g. 'World War Two' (as spoken) would not be changed in transcription to 'Second World War' (the official conflict term).

A few changes or additions may be made by the transcriber or proof-reader. Such changes are usually indicated by square brackets, thus: [ ] to clearly indicate a difference between the sound record and the transcript. Three dots (…) or a double dash (– –) indicate an unfinished sentence.

Copyright

Copyright in this transcript, and the sound recording from which it was made, is usually owned by the Australian War Memorial, often jointly with the donors. Any request to use of the transcript, outside the purposes of research and study, should be addressed to:

Australian War Memorial
GPO Box 345
CANBERRA ACT 2601

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Edward Stokes so recording for the War Memorial archives with Ken Gray, Bomber Command. This is tape 1 and side 1.

(Checking volume control)

Ken, could I ask you first please, when and where you were born?

I was born in Melbourne on 25th August 1921.

And did you attend school in Melbourne?

Well, outside Melbourne. My parents died at a very early age and I was actually brought up by an aunt and uncle who lived at Dandenong which was then a little country town outside Melbourne – now very much part of greater Melbourne.

And did you complete your schooling there? Did you run right through to the end of high school there?

Yes I did. I completed high school leaving certificate at Dandenong High School in 1937.

And could you just tell us very briefly a little bit about the general background of what you did after you left school and before the war came along, and also perhaps something about your hopes – what you really wanted to do in life?

Well, that was very simple. I'd always wanted to do nothing but fly. That had been from a small boy. I was filled with the stories of Biggles and World War One exploits and so on. All the great aces of World War One – Sopwith Camels and all that sort of stuff, SE5s – and I sort of absolutely imbued with that, so I'd always wanted to fly and in those days there was a system whereby the Royal Air Force ... one could join the Royal Air Force from Australia at the aged, I think it was seventeen and a half from memory, and that had been my intention – was to join the Royal Air Force. Don't ask me why ... Yes do, yes. It probably was a good reason in that the Royal Air Force had lots of exciting aeroplanes coming along, Hurricanes and Wellesleys and all sorts of exciting things whereas the RAAF in those days seemed to be much more limited in its scope. I think secondly too it probably was a good deal easier to get into the Royal Air Force under this scheme for quote/unquote `colonial' people than it was to get into the Royal Australian Air Force as an officer in those days.

Could I just put this in a time context to get a date when you left school, how long before the war was this?

Well this was 1937, two and a .... beginning – sorry the end of 1937 – so it was two years before the war started. But that's where ... so at that time I had this period – I was sixteen so I had to wait at least a year and a half to do this – so I went instead in ... for that interim period, I went into a firm of chartered accountants where I think my distinction there was that I've followed my ... the junior the year before me had been a fellow who became a test cricketer – Ross Gregory – who was killed during World War Two in actual fact, also

in the air force – so I went into a firm of accountants in Melbourne as a trainee accountant and frankly I was just waiting until I was old enough to join the – at least tried to join this Royal Air Force scheme. In 1939 when I was eligible for it – early 1939 – was at the time when the Germans had walked into Czechoslavakia and so on and the war was imminent and my guardians at that time then refused to sign the papers for me to take up that scheme. Then of course the war came at the end of 1939 and like every war in history and everybody said `Well it's only going to last – it'll be over by Christmas' and so it seemed to be the phoney war it was called and, uh, I didn't lose my enthusiasm but the schemes for entering the air force were then chopped until the Empire Air Training Scheme came on stream.

> Could we perhaps just pause there for a moment before we go on to actually enlisting and so on. Just going back to that period when you had this obsession if you like or a real desire to fly, was there any idea in your mind in terms of reading news of political goings on in Europe and so on that war would be likely, or did you see that as the most likelier kind of service flying career but in a – but most likely in a peace time situation?

(5.00) No I think one certainly accepted by that stage certainly the, uh ... well, from the mid-thirties, even as a kid, one accepted the fact that war was inevitable. There was no question about that I think, among my generation, that we were ... for a start we were kids of the depression – children of the depression – and then coming out of the depression it was patently obvious that war would have to come. It was just like night follows day. There was no question, I don't think in most of our minds that war was inevitable from about 1935–6 on.

> In terms of what Hitler was doing in Europe?

Yes, well Hitler was on the march and we watched – even watched the activities ... I must have been a terribly war-like person or something, because even as kids we used to play these war games – trenches of World War One and that sort of thing – and then I became very ... brief period I became even interested in the Spanish Civil War and the prospects of getting into that. Uh, I think I probably wanted to go to war for some reason. Don't ask me why but it did strike me that that was it and it wasn't any question of just going to join a peace time air force. It was to join an air force to fight a war.

> Do you think that was because you were in a general sense as perhaps a lot of children, or certainly boys, are imbued with the inner sense – the kind of abstract glories of fighting – or was it a more direct connection with the exploits of Australians in the first war and in particular the connection between Australia and Britain – the Empire connection – and particularly the whole issue of how Australians were greatly respected for their contribution to the first war?

I think there was an element of that. I think perhaps as say born in 1921, growing up when still memories of World War One were strong, the old digger with his tales. I remember we had a near neighbour who used to regale us with tales of how he'd won World War

One and I think later on I found out he'd never seen a shot fired in anger but uh, nevertheless he'd believed he had and so there were all these stories, but I think in my particular case I was great reader and I read everything there was to be written about the uh, the air battles of World War One and there was such a high degree of chivalry. It was almost like going back countless generations to the old orders of knighthood and so on and orders of chivalry and this thing of battling in the skies over France and so on all had a tremendous glamour attached to them so far as I was concerned.

> Did you see yourself first of all do you think as – after you left school as a late adolescent – as an Australian or as a Britisher?

Oh, Australian, I think quite definitely. As far as I can work out I'm the fourth ... uh, fourth Australian born generation which I think makes me a fifth generation Australian if I'm correct in that – but I think I'd always consciously been aware as a kid, I've been – yes essentially Australian. Yes I can say that positively because I used to read the war histories of World War One and I used to get terribly excited when scanning a page for any mention of Australians in it and so often being tipped – uh, tricked up – tripped up by the word `Austrian' and think `Uh here it is again. Another great exploit by the Australians,' only to find it was something to do with the Austrians. So yes, essentially I was an Australian, yes, without question.

> And is this shared with other boyhood mates or is this a more solitary thing?

No – what, the whole glamourisation of this thing or the whole thing of being Australian?

> No I was meaning the glamourisation of war, Ken?

Yeah, the glamourisation ... no not shared by everyone. For example you know, I joined the Australian Air Training Corps and was one of the initial people in that. I must have had a phobia for uniforms or something, but none of my mates joined that specifically. I'd been in the scouts earlier and then I joined the Australian Air Training Corps which had an attractive uniform. The question of being Australians was very strong of course, because if only in relation to things like test cricket in those days. Well we very nearly left the empire as a result of the bodyline campaign and this sort of thing was terribly Australian and much the same as today, people talk about our attitudes – our racial attitudes towards Asians and so on. In those days it was the poor `Pom' if you like. Even kids who weren't themselves Poms but were born in Australia but whose families were British born, they were treated as being a different sort of ... they weren't us. They were sort of different kids in those days. So there was a very strong Australianism.

> That's most interesting. Just turning to, um – going on a little bit to the period before you enlisted Ken, do you think that the kind of schooling you had and the particular levels you reached when you left school, perhaps you could specify that, did that have a significant bearing on what you later did in the air force?

(10.00) I don't know that one can say that exactly. I did do leaving certificate which is the – what's it these days, matric isn't it ... higher school certificate – um, I did leaving as it was in Victoria in those days which virtually was a qualification but it wasn't necessary. For example I had one good friend in the air force who grew up in Queensland – on the cane fields in Queensland – he was virtually a bare foot boy in the Queensland cane fields until he went into the air force. I think his highest education was the equivalent of what was then called the merit certificate – about grade eight, something like that – and yet he was a first class pilot, so that sort of part of it was not necessarily a requirement to be a pilot. There were other attributes I suppose to be a pilot. One always wondered – getting on a bit – when we were selected as – having been selected for air crew then after the initial training, one was selected for pilot, air gunner, or whatever and one's concern always that was going to be made a wireless air gunner and not a pilot. We all wanted to be pilots of course, and you got some awful shocks when some of the people who became perhaps pilots, but ... or some of them ... no, more particularly, some of the people who became wireless air gunners, who seemed to have all the attributes to be pilots but missed out.

> Perhaps we could talk about that a little bit later. What were the other men who joined the air force roughly at the time you did. Were many of them men who'd been umemployed or had they mostly had jobs or come directly from some kind of education, Ken.

I think most of my lot – certainly all of my lot – with one exception which ... quite an interesting little story perhaps, might tell you that if you're interested but, most of my lot were certainly all employed – all those I know with one exception and this was a fellow ... I'd better not mention names here in case he's still alive and, I don't know ... he was a Brit actually who'd come out to Australia and married a very social, wealthy Australian girl in Melbourne. He had been a member of the – this identifies him a little bit – but he'd been a member of the British Ryder Cup team, the amateur golf team which used to play the United States – he came out to Australia, married this very wealthy girl in Australia and when he came actually to be enlisted into the air force – he was just ahead of me in the queue. I knew him quite well at this stage – he was just ahead of me in the queue and the sergeant who was taking down particulars as they used to say, said to this fellow `Now what do you do?' and this fellow said `A gentleman', and this rather stunned the air force sergeant writer or clerk, who said `Gentleman, gentleman', he said `what do you mean gentleman'. He said `What do you do?' and so this fellow said `I'm a gentleman', and he said `But what do you do, what job do you do?' He said `I don't do any job, I haven't got any job, I'm a gentleman.' `Oh' he said the RAF sergeant `Umemployed'. So that gentleman duly entered the air force as unemployed which I think perhaps answers the story about statistics, you know, damn lies and what have you.

> That's a most interesting point Ken. Well if we can just move on a little bit to, um, the period immediately ... you've left school and you were working for some time with an accountancy firm, but that was very much a second best to flying I understand ...

Yes.

> ... that was the real desire. Could you recall generally, or perhaps even specifically how you felt and how perhaps it affected your view about what you yourself might do when Menzies made the declaration of war – that Australia was at war.

Yes, I was – I'm always a bit confused about this because as best to my understanding that announcement was made in the morning of what would have been September 4th in Australia. But I have a distinct memory of ... I was then living in Melbourne actually, or just outside Melbourne, but ....

> ... I think it was actually the 3rd of September but anyway ...

Third, yeah, 3rd of September was the date, yeah but time ... yes, when was the actual .... No this would fit perhaps when I'm stopping to think. I'm mucking about here but I remember I was on a train. I'd been staying the day with a friend out at the same place, Dandenong where I'd grown up, but I was now living in Melbourne, and I'd been out for a day's golf and I was catching a train back in the evening of that Sunday when somebody said to me `Had you heard that war had been declared'. I don't think at that stage that I got terribly excited. War was declared, I think perhaps it was a bit of a let down, I think going back to the point you were making before about Australia and the Empire and so on – I think one automatically took it as read that if one was needed that one would certainly serve in the forces – there was no question about that. In my book the choice was eminently clear that it would be in the air force and to serve as a pilot. I would have been devastated to have thought about anything else and yet the immediate question then that arises is why didn't I dash in the next day and do something about it. Well the short answer was that I was eighteen, just – I'd turned eighteen, what, the week before war was declared – but one still had to be twenty-one.
(15.00) I think I rather assumed that I ... my guardians would still not give approval at that time, I think we were a bit more sophisticated by then in world war ... in one in that I don't think one could've got in at the age of fifteen saying one was eighteen and so on – so I think it was one then of sitting back and saying well better wait and see what happens as a result of this announcement of this Empire Air Training Scheme, which I think had been devised on paper some years before, but had not yet been developed.

> And there was certainly no idea in your mind of enlisting to fight in any other capacity. It was to be – was it to be a pilot or nothing?

Well I think in my case, yes. I think – I didn't even contemplate anything else. It wasn't a question of had I thought about anything else, I'd always wanted to be a pilot – a pilot was a way of fighting a war ... was now a war on – *ipso facto*, that's what one would do, go and fight as a pilot.

> This is a very difficult issue to – or a couple of issues to distinguish between – but could you distinguish between your motivation to want to fly and your sum motivation to act in Australia's interest to defend

> Australia? Which came first, or were they perhaps just two sides of the same thing?

I think probably the urge and the wanting to fly was probably uppermost in my mind. But as I just mentioned a moment or two ago, allied to that was the thing that it was unthinkable that one would have not served one's country in those days.

> Yes that's really answered that point. One other thing you said just then, just to clarify it. You implied that there was a slight let down when war was declared, was the implication there – or was it not – that one would have felt better if Australia had less ... or the Empire, Britain if you like ... had less declared war as a reaction to the certain actions on the part of the Germans and that it would have been better if it had been a more positive declaration of war long before that final moment came.

I think probably it was this sort of built-in inevitability from – in my case anyway – the mid-thirties when I was fifteen–sixteen, starting to be conscious of such things, hardly fully aware I suppose, but conscious of such things and this awareness that – or seeming awareness that war was inevitable and then suddenly to find yourself that you were in this war and I think probably that was ... it was this slow build up and suddenly saying well it's here. Perhaps it was also an unconscious reaction saying `Oh my God', you know, `now I've got to be in it'. It's not just for fun any longer and it's not just a question of flying aeroplanes and flying high performance military aeroplanes, it's a question of going fighting and, let's face it, putting your life on the line.

> That's most interesting Ken. And at that time was there any comprehension of how long the war might last?

No, once again it ... well it seemed to me and the people I was associating with as a kid in those days – we were all eighteen – but it seemed to us at that stage that it was once again going to be this story, the war would be over by Christmas and this time we were talking learnedly about how it would be very much different now because in World War One the Russians had always been very `iffy' and `butty' about their participation, particularly when their revolution was boiling up and so on and so the Germans didn't have a two frontal war, whereas at this stage it looked as though it would be quite a decisive activity in the fact that it wouldn't ... It just ... it was stupid in hindsight because who on earth could imagine that it was going to be over by Christmas. I suppose we had this idea of this much vaunted French ground forces and the army and the strong British air force – which it was strong in those days, small, but strong.

> And what about the issue of what Japan had been doing in Manchuria and so on and by this stage in China, was that part of the calculation or not?

No, not consciously. I think I was hardly even aware that Japan ... I suppose I was vaguely aware that Japan had been in Manchuria and China and so on, but not positively aware, no. Certainly not conscious of it and certainly no thought that within a couple of years that they would be fighting on Australia's doorstep.

That's uh ... Right. Let's perhaps if we can just move on a little bit Ken, going on to actually enlisting. Could you tell us when and where you enlisted and perhaps the situations around it? How for example the ... your foster parents I think they were ...

Yes, guardian, yes.

... your guardians, how they felt about it. Whether it was supported or not.

Well by this stage of course, well ... sorry not by this stage. I actually enlisted in ... just as the fall of France in May of 1940, when it became obvious we were no longer talking about a `phoney' war, that here we had a full scale war on our hands and obviously going to be a war of attrition.

20.00) There'd been by this stage the announcement and the development of the Empire Air Training Scheme and so this seemed to be the way to go and so my guardians at that stage had no barrier to it now. They were all in favour, in fact, what was the term given to, uh, to the ... those ... not conscientious objectors ... but those who just refused to fight a war – they were `cold footers' of what ... oh I've forgotten the word...

Pacifists?

Not quite ... no not pacifists ... those that just didn't join up, you know, those ... pacifists were a different category. They had a ... an objective view or a positive view of not fighting, but just those who had fifty good reasons why they shouldn't go and the old B Company, he'd be here when you go and be here when you get back – but, so no at that stage they would've expected me to do my duty and so there was no problem there. So, uh, yes I enlisted at the time of the fall of France when it became obvious that the war was going to go on.

Now at that time, having been accepted for air crew – not necessarily a pilot at that stage – having been accepted for air crew in the air force one went onto the air force reserve until one was called up. In my case that took some – just on eleven months in actual fact, I was on that air force reserve. We were engaged in some minor `keep you interested' type activity ... which were very useful actually. Things like air navigation, theory of flight, theory of electrics and so on, all taught at ... you went along to night classes – you'd carried on with your normal civilian activities – but you went along to night classes for those and for, very importantly, learning Morse Code at your local post office. I can still dash out, I don't know, twenty words a minute I suppose on Morse Code from what I learnt in those days.

That's an interesting side light. You said at your local post office?

Yes.

Could you just clarify that?

Well of course in those days, the post office was also the post and telegraph office. It was the old telegraph office and in those days, long before – not long before – but before everybody had telephones, means of rapid communication with most people was a telegram. It was a normal thing. People sent telegrams all over the place for all sorts of

reasons and so these were transmitted by telegraph by the local postmaster or the postal staff at the post office. You lodge your telegram at the post office and it was belted off in Morse Code.

> And so, um, people such as you would spend time at a post office working with the staff there?

Yes. You know, certainly in my case it was the, um, the postmaster was the actual person concerned and, oh, we attained quite a high standard of expertise in Morse Code.

> That's most interesting. Well if we can move on beyond that, Ken. You spent the period, I think, until about April of 1941 in that situation and then you were officially called up. Could you tell us a little bit about your – perhaps your reactions on when you were finally called up when this thing you'd been wanting for so long finally happened, and also where you went and what you did?

Yeah, well, of course, that was – it was marvellous. I couldn't wait until this, sort of, letter did arrive and when the letter arrived telling me to report to the Initial Training School it was called, that's right – Initial Training School at Somers in Victoria, on Western Port Bay, next door to ... strangely enough, next door to where I started another career a few years later ... next door to HMAS *Cerberus* at Somers which was the Initial Training School and that's where we all went in as trainee air crew with our white flashes in our caps and hopes in our hearts and this business of hoping to God that we were going to be selected as pilots. I think the first shock came when we were presented with our bedding equipment, which consisted of being given a hessian `outer', it was called I think – or `inner' – that was a hessian `inner'. A hessian `inner', which was like a big hessian bag, which you then took down to a compound where you filled it with straw, which was a straw palliasse, and all the old hands ... your initial desire was to fill it so full it was almost like a rock, but you were convinced rapidly by the old hands just not to put too much in it. So you took your palliasse back and put it inside an `outer' which was a calico type, sort of, outer mattress arrangement or mattress cover and started this life of learning to fly aeroplanes by doing rifle drill, which always seemed a little strange.

(25.00) Yes. Perhaps I could just ask you about that ... that initial period of induction when one assumes a lot of fundamental service discipline was being instilled. Given that later you had to fly in very difficult conditions where people simply had to do what they'd been told to do, could that have been done without that very basic kind of parade ground discipline, or not?

I think not, looking back on it, and again I had experience of it again in another career later on – but once again the question of ... I often wondered at the time – we all wondered at the time – why on earth we had to go through this rifle drill and parade drill, but it was this instinctive reaction to commands and I think this is important. You're told to halt, you halt, unthinkingly, and particularly in flying, or in seamanship as I learned later, if something has to be done it has to be done on the moment. Lives depend on it, so you don't have the business of sitting back and sort of having a debate about whether it's a good idea to slope arms or to shoulder arms or whatever it is, you do it automatically and

instinctively, and this became this instinctive part of the ritual. I think the other feature of it, it taught a degree of coordination, it taught ... it improved our physical fitness, and you started this damn thing at some incredible, ghastly hour in the morning when it was dark and cold as charity on the parade ground at Somers in – coming on into the autumn/winter of Melbourne, and ... but it improved one's fitness. By the end of those days down there, I can remember we all used to sort of collapse into bed at ten o'clock at night and absolutely exhausted – physically and mentally.

> Mmm, I can certainly understand that. I'm just thinking back to some of the things that I've told you about Jervis Bay. Were there any men who, um, baulked significantly at that, or, you know, who really found it hard to accept that or was that uncommon?

No I don't recall any of our group ever sort of baulking at it as such. A lot used to ... I can remember one poor wretched fellow who used to sit on the end of his bed quivering with the cold because he couldn't face up to the fact of getting out of bed at six o'clock in the morning. If he'd got on and done something about it but, um ... no, you got very little sympathy with this. I think the lights came on at six o'clock in the morning when the drill sergeant came in and turned the lights on and they – they were huts with about thirty odd people sleeping in them and you had whatever it was – twenty minutes, thirty minutes to shave, shower, make your bed, and be down at breakfast ... no, we didn't go to breakfast, we used to go for a drill period at six thirty – and have a drill period at six thirty till seven fifteen or something, and then go to breakfast at seven fifteen, and then start the day at eight.

> Quite a – quite a harsh regime. Going onto the actual flying, and this must have been most important, and one would imagine exciting for a lot of people – certainly for you from what you've said about your whole desire to fly. Could you tell about, um, perhaps about your very first flight, the first time you went up with an instructor, I think in a Tiger Moth?

That was later on. I'd actually had had a flight – my ... I'd had a flight way back in the early thirties with Kingsford Smith, in the old Southern Cross, when it came to Dandenong and the Dandenong Show Grounds and for five bob I was able to prevail on my guardians to give me five bob to go up in flight with this, and I'd been up with him.

> Tell us about that first flight, Ken.

That was I think, you know, any – any doubts I may have had prior to that or any confirmation I needed of what marvel this thing was of flying was certainly – was confirmed on that flight with Kingsford Smith. It was only take-off from the Dandenong Show Grounds and fly around the area for ten minutes or something. But it was just this marvellous feeling, particularly in the older aeroplane where you were flying. I mean to get into a 747 today or something of this nature, you're in a cocoon and it's – you're off the ground – or before you're off the ground you're handed the glass of champagne and so on – I always feel a little guilty about that because always in those days, no smoking, no drinking, obviously in aeroplanes and so on, and it always still amuses me today that I

still have that sort of feeling of guilt when you get into a commercial aircraft – but it was just that magic of floating into the air, and you did seem to float into the air, you didn't sort of – it wasn't brute force dragging you up there, you just floated gently into the air and ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B.

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Ken Gray of Bomber Command. This is tape 1, the second side. End of identification.
>
> Ken, perhaps if we could just go on now to your training. Could you tell us about your first flight as a member of the air force in a Tiger Moth?

Well, by this time I was in Rhodesia. I did my flying – I'm one of the 300 who did their flying training in Southern Rhodesia – Zimbabwe as it now is of course – and having arrived in ... finally after Initial Training School, we then went through through the Middle East, in the *Queen Elizabeth* to the Middle East and then after some weeks there, down to South Africa and up to Rhodesia. Having arrived in Rhodesia ... first flight, golly, I don't know that I can even consciously remember it. I think that there'd all been this absolute thrill of – of, uh, wanting to fly and now this – after all these years and indeed by now almost a year after I joined the air force of actually having that first flight. Um, we used to in Rhodesia, because of the heat, we used to start flying at five o'clock in the morning – in the early hours of the morning. I think I can remember meandering down to the – uh, not meandering down, probably scampering down, to the flight huts where the aircraft were – and you were allocated your flying instructor and you hopped into this Tiger Moth for the first time at a place called Heany, which was outside Salisbury, and we took off and I can just ... I can't consciously remember too much apart from certainly, this wonderful feeling of being just once again, floating around – Tiger Moth doing sixty-five/seventy knots, whatever it did, floating around, an open cockpit – all those dreams seemed to be coming true as though you were back to the Sopwith Camel again, because the Tiger Moth wasn't much advanced to the Sopwith Camel, and this wonderful feeling of freedom, of being in air, and just cruising around.

> Perhaps if we could just come back to the Tiger Moths in a moment, Ken. I had in fact thought your first flight had been in Australia. Could you just tell us a little about the conclusion of your – that initital training in Australia and perhaps also any ... do you remember anything particularly clearly or were there any vivid memories of the journey from Australia? How did you feel when you left Australia and set off for the Middle East?

Right. Well okay, going back to Initital Training School which was purely ground school, sort of navigation, and theory of flight, and meteorology, and all these things, and, uh, I think our abiding concern throughout the whole of that course was whether we were going to be made pilots or not, and I think on the day that we were fallen, and the whole lot of us – I've forgotten how many were in the intake, some, oh, well over 100 I think anyway – we were all fallen in and the names were read out. I don't it ... was it

alphabetical order, it could have been alphabetical order, I've forgotten – but there was a fellow who was on the course who had been in everything. Having started in April – we'd started at the end of the cricket season, he was captain of the cricket team, then we moved into the football season – Australian Rules of course in Melbourne – he was captain of the football team, we'd just had an athletics meeting in which he'd won practically everything, he was about the third cab off the rank to be named for what his selection was and I think we all just about dropped dead when it was read out, wireless air gunner, and we thought my God, well if he's – I can't think of the fellow's name now – but I think he'd also been captain of Scots College school – and we heard this read out and thought oh my God, well if he's made wireless air gunner, what hope have we got. We'd been before an interview committee quite shortly before that and I remember the fellow standing next to me, who became ultimately, um, distinguished judge of the Arbitration Court, he said `My God' out of the corner of his mouth, and I said `What's the matter?' He said `Remember I told you how the interview committee, they asked me why I wanted to join the air force' and he said `the only thing I could think of to say was because of the colour of the uniform'. He said `What hope have I got?' But he duly came up and was made a pilot and then to my delight, when my name was read out, pilot, I was cock-a-hoop, and I think probably our whole being had been directed towards that for so long that that was certainly the most important thing that came out and you couldn't care less after that.

(5.00) Could I just ask you, do you have any knowledge now – did you gain any knowledge later of the criteria that were used in that decision and also, how did it affect the men such as the sportsman you mentioned, who were not made pilots?

I honestly cannot – we obviously as pilots said we were the best, and I think the navigators used to say they were the most intelligent, that they required special skills in mathematics. I have some reservations – very strong reservations about that, but that's beside the point. No, I honestly do not because it seemed to be – at that stage it seemed to be ... I don't know whether it was a feature of enthusiasm or what on earth it was, but I never did know and never did learn whether there were any ... we did do aptitude tests in those days – whether it was a result of the aptitude tests, whether it was a result of our background, enthusiasm for flying, or whatever it was – I really have no idea what it was.

And how did it affect men such as the sportsman?

Quite a few of them – it shocked them at the time. I don't know of any of them who didn't carry on with it. Indeed quite a number did train as air gunners and then after a tour of operations were allowed to retrain as pilots. But I don't know of any who went and hung themselves or did anything disastrous but I – it certainly shattered them, no question about it because ... this is all one wanted to do, we all wanted to be pilots.

There's obviously an issue here of, um, not in a judgemental sense, but of a kind of elitism, the pick of a particular service, was there also an elitism between services that the RAF – that the RAAF was somehow better or more special than either the army or the navy?

Uh, oh dear, now that's put me on the spot, via my later career, hasn't it?

Well can we stick to your early war career, at that time?

To me, no. To me to have gone and fought in the trenches would have been (a) frightening, (b) terribly uncomfortable, although a lot of my war wasn't all that comfortable, and (c) it just wasn't anything I'd ever sort of contemplated really. The navy was somewhat different. I can get in a plug here for my future service by saying that navy always seemed to be a highly and truly professional service and a service which – to which one did not aspire if one was not aspiring to be a professional military person, and I suppose in a way I was, but I'd never given navy a thought strangely enough. So I'd never applied to go into the navy at the golden age of thirteen as so many people did in those days. But there was a professionalism, once again, if I may, from a little later on – we had a poor blighted fellow who was an administrative officer – RAF I hasten to add – in Rhodesia when I was training there, who was trying to teach us to be gentlemen and although he was an RAF war-time flight lieutenant at this stage, he had been in the Royal Navy in an earlier time and I never quite knew why his services hadn't been taken up by the Royal Navy in World War OneI. However, his statement was – let me think about it – `In the Navy, of course, we're all gentlemen. In the army there are some gentlemen, and in the air force there are no gentlemen'. You could imagine this went down like a lead balloon. No I don't think – I think in Australia there was a degree of elitism in World War OneI, the elitism was to be in aircrew, particularly in those early stages. You know, the terms that were applied to us, `blue orchids' and all this sort of thing, but there certainly was an elitism. I think it was the ambition of most people – or a very great number of people – to join the air force. Later in the war it became equally attractive to join the navy as ordinary seamen, and indeed the navy later on, had a number of officers who had joined the navy towards the end of the war as ordinary seamen and it became quite a thing later in the war.

(10.00) That's most interesting, Ken. If we could just perhaps move on then to the – just briefly to when you actually leave Australia and this is quite a step, your leaving home, your guardians and so on, the journey to the Middle East. How did you feel about that and were you conscious of events in Europe or were they still quite distant from you?

Yes, we were conscious ... we were very conscious of events in Europe. We still know – I certainly didn't and I don't think any of my colleagues did – see even by then, now it's 19 – where are we, about August 1940 – any sense of any threat to Australia in the near future, which by this stage only sixteen months away, but we didn't see that. I think again I said just before we left we were subject to medical inspection and on the day we were subject to our medical inspection, and this we knew then that we were going, we weren't told very much but we were told we were then going overseas – we knew we were going overseas because of this inspection. Damned if I didn't come back to camp that day and in those days we were camped in the Melbourne Showground – Melbourne ... yeah Melbourne Showground as a holding depot – I happened to be under the shower that morning as I came back, after I'd come back into camp. We were meant to be back on board at twelve o'clock but we used to take the white flashes out of our hats and sneak in about seven o'clock in morning – as I got under the shower I found a red rash all over my stomach and it was obviously measles and I thought well that finishes me because you

weren't allowed to go overseas with that and I've always been thankful to that doctor when we did our medical examination, taking one look and pulling my shirt down hurriedly, so that he didn't see the measles any more, and I was allowed to proceed. So we went by train up to Sydney – troop train overnight to Sydney – where in my case we boarded the *Queen Elizabeth* to go to the Middle East with a large contingent of the AIF and that I think, was one of the most moving experiences. We were in company with *Queen Mary*, the two Queens leaving Sydney Harbour and as we sailed down Sydney Harbour, uh, with the troops – all of us singing with that tremendous choke in our voice, singing *Now is the Hour*, or the good old *Road to Gundagai*, and all the good old Australian songs, *Waltzing Matilda*, and so on, and the tugs in the harbour – all these sailings were meant to be secret but with the tugs in the harbour hooting and so on, it was a wonderfully, wonderfully, moving experience. I don't know what there were – oh, about 12,000 troops on those two ships, I think.

> So a lot of men, and on the journey to (a plane overhead) – on the journey to the Middle East, was there any tension that you were going – travelling through areas that might have been ... that were hostile?

Yes, we were in company – we were escorted by I think it was the old *Adelaide*, but in effect it was ... oh and one of the British – *Ramillies* I think it was, one of the British battle ships – but in fact the Queens could outstrip these ships in speed and they were heavily zigzagging, both to make the task of submarines more difficult, but even more particularly so that they kept their mean speed back to those which the accompanying war ships could maintain. Yes, we kept – we all had to keep watches for submarines and so one and I remember I was on a Lewis gun on one of the wings of the bridge somewhere or other, was my station – I think every night, was it every night?, yeah I think it was every night ... for some reason all the air force seemed to get those jobs.
Strangely enough there was a lot of tension going over on that ship between, um, airmen and the soldiers. They didn't – the soldiers didn't take too kindly to ... to the airmen ...

> Was that because they felt the airmen did have the – some kind of elitist attitude towards them, or not?

I think it was on that score, not ours. I don't think – we felt we were a cut above everybody of course, I suppose, – we were eighteen years old, a lot of us, I was – or nineteen I suppose by this stage – and we were a cut above all the rest of the men and we'd been selected for this great thing of being pilots, and I suppose we did have that sort of sense. I remember there was a very, very nasty incident in Fremantle – we berthed in Fremantle – and some people were out on shore and one poor fellow came back – he was just about black and blue all over, where a group of soldiers had got him outside – he'd been in a pub, and got him and kicked and kicked and kicked him, he was black and blue – his eyes – he couldn't see for ten days or a fortnight, his eyes were puffed up, face all bruised and battered and so on, for seemingly no reason at all.

> Could I just ask you a question here which you might just like to answer in view of that incident and given the perspective of your time in the air force and perhaps even the navy later, but thinking of the second war – that, I

> mean, it ... I suppose has been said that uniforms are sometimes an excuse for people to, um, well in a sense, to officially sanction violence that's within the individual. If you look at that incident would you see it in that way, or how would you interpret that?

(15.00) I don't think so really. I think this was just a feature of drunkenness. I think this fellow had gone ashore – I can't even recall if we all went ashore or not – but this fellow did, he was one of the older group – not an earlier ... a fellow in his twenties ... if we went ashore – I don't think we even ... I had about two drinks in my life at that stage I think – but, uh, we hadn't gone drinking but a lot of them had gone drinking and a lot of them – a lot of the army fellows in particular, came back very, very, very drunk and I think it was just a feature of this. He'd had the audacity to stray into one of the pubs where they were drinking and they'd said something, he'd given a response which they didn't like and I think that was it. I don't think there was. It's a bit later on from the point of view ... I mean some of the early – very early – people in the army – and I'm on dangerous ground here, I know – but some of the very early people in the army were people who'd come out of ... were unemployed, had come out of prisons and this sort of thing and, uh, and they were in some ways, were some of the dregs, and they turned out to be very, very good soldiers, but in those stages. I think this was just a feature of drink.

> Well moving on to the Middle East. Is there any particularly clear memory of the Middle East as it affected you as somebody going to the war? Do you have any particular clear memory of that? Perhaps just briefly.

Uh, yeah, a couple of things I'm not going to mention – no intention of mentioning – but one or two things which I think were interesting. We used to always say that we were outside Cairo, we were put onto – we were put onto an RAF airfield just outside Cairo, where our job was to – as trainee airmen – was to push the aeroplanes out in the morning from their hangars and push them back in the evening, and, uh, occasionally we'd be allowed off and have a pass to go into Cairo. There were a number of German air raids on Cairo at that time, and we used to always say that `You could always tell if there was an air raid on in Cairo because as you were going into Cairo all the Egyptian army, ack-ack units were making their way rapidly out of Cairo', but – that might be censurable in this day and age, we're not allowed to have those thoughts are we? No, it was – I think it was tremendously exciting of course, to get to a place like a .... I'd read a lot as I mentioned before, as a kid, and to get into a place like Cairo, and to see something like – uh, not Raffles, um, oh, I've gone a complete blank on the name of the number one hotel in Cairo, I was going to say Raffles – to see something like the big hotel which one had read about a thousand times in various books and so on, to see things like that, to see the wonders of the Great Mosque, to go and see the pyramids and the sphinx, all that tremendously exciting. At that stage things looked pretty grim in the Middle East. This was, uh, I think we're in one of our stages of pull-back at that stage and we'd pulled back, uh, perhaps we'd gone into a trance. No I think from memory the Germans were still only sixty or eighty miles to the west of Cairo at that stage, although when we subsequently went down to the Middle East, it was ... sorry from the Middle East to South Africa, which was in the troop ship, this time, *Mauretania*, there were only – we were virtually the only troops on

board plus some hundreds, or many hundreds or even thousands, of Italian prisoners of war, who'd been captured and were being sent to UK for various things, and so we had this wonderful thing of all these – as being still at this stage, leading aircraftsmen, and having all these, uh – being in cabins with three or four Italian prisoners of war looking after us, where we lived in the lap of luxury going down there.

That just sounds like a rather an interesting sidelight, Ken. Was there – what were the ... I mean I can understand that the Italians were, in a sense, serving you, looking after you, what was the personal feeling towards them? Did you – did people feel hostile to them as individuals or not?

Far from it. Our impression, and once again I suppose I should be careful but I'm not. Uh, the impression one gained there was that they were very, very pleased to be out of the war. They were delighted to be out of the war and as such they were delighted to be of service to us and we had a camaraderie – they were wanting to learn English and we weren't wanting to learn Italian I don't think, but it was great to have – as I say as leading aircraftsman – to have people to look after you and so this was great. They'd make up our bunks in the ship and look after us at meals and so on and we had a wonderful time. Uh, no, there was certainly no looking down on them, but you certainly got the feeling that they were not interest ... they were delighted to be out of the war.

(20.00) Just on to something that we'll talk about perhaps in a different context later, but it seems to be an apt moment to ask it now, given what you've said about these Italians. Did you later have a consciousness that – that ... for example when you were flying over Germany, that you were setting out to kill men who perhaps were as likeable as you, as these Italians were, or was there a different feeling there?

No, there was a different feeling there. You were out to – in our case – you were out to destroy the German ... when you were bombing, talking about Bomber Command operations – you were out to destroy the German war making machine. It was a tremendous machine and it was the view of many, including particularly our masters of strategic bombing, that the greatest way of destroying the German war fighting capability and the war fighting machine was to destroy its industry. And to destroy its industry it was thought that the most effective means was to bomb its cities and its centres of industry, and so one wasn't normally conscious that one was out to kill people as such but you were out to destroy their capacity and that inevitably meant killing people. So one had no ... well I certainly had no compunction. I don't remember any of my colleagues ever having any compuction about this – or any feeling about that.

Well if we can perhaps just move on to the period in Rhodesia to – and this is really if we can look, perhaps not too much detail at your initial actual flying. Could you tell us, perhaps not the first flight in a Tiger Moth, that's perhaps too specific a recollection, but what's your general recollection of flying Tiger Moths? How did you feel in it and also what were they like to fly as aeroplanes?

Well they were beautiful as aeroplanes because they were aeroplanes, you know, they flew ... you ease back on the control column and the nose came up, you ease forward and it went down, you ease to ... you put it to right or left and it banked accordingly. It had that wonderfully light feel about it and it had that feeling of not of being forced through the air of – I think in the air force too, and these days of drilling holes in the sky – you weren't drilling holes in the sky, you were just part of it floating around in it and you could float up gently onto a cloud and float around literally on the top of a cloud like an angel. It was all, you know, a wonderful feeling. There was this tremendous feeling that this was a dreadful thing to fly, how difficult it was to fly, which it was in some ways, but I think one of the big impressions I got was you had, uh, no runways in those days, you just landed on a grass airfield – airfield not a strip – but of course, we were also terrified of the need to land into wind that we'd be lined up ten deep to try to get over the wind sock to be sure that you were coming right over the top of the wind sock and there'd be ten aeroplanes in line astern, all coming in over the wind sock determined to be right into wind, over the wind sock, instead of judging it from either side. If you're coming either side, you had no problems, but we were always lining up like that. That's always been an abiding impression. I know in my case, I took to it like a duck to water for a start, and after I think it was five hours when we came up to go solo, one was sent along to the flight commander. One's own instructor said `This fellow's ready for solo' and he was given a solo air test, it was called, with this flight commander, and I was sent along to the flight commander at some incredible – I think it might have been under five hours – and, uh ...

... what was the norm there, Ken?

It was about seven – and so I was sent along to the flight commander to have this air test. So away we went and of course the first time that I'd been flying the damn thing that I fluffed the landing and came in with wheels landing instead of a three-pointer. So he came in and he said `Well, you know, you need a few more.' Well from that point on do you think I could get a three-pointer. I kept on doing these wheeled landing which they would not accept and so the minutes and the hours started to dribble by to five and a half, to six, and six and a half, instead of being first on the course I was now settling down towards the average, and I still couldn't get the damn thing. I got everything else right, but I couldn't get the landings right.

It sounds as if you'd become – you were creating a problem through your expectations, were you?

I think I probably was. So at that stage, they then said well look you know, they put you into a special section at that stage, and I was put into a special section – again I'd better not mention names – with some RAF character, whose family owned a brewery, and whose sister the instructor was very keen on – he knew Kay – so this fellow ... there was no way in the world that this fellow was ever going to learn to be a pilot, he was hopeless. His idea of landing a Tiger Moth was to land it about fifty feet in the air and come crashing down in these control crashes of three-point landing fifty feet up, and the instructor was dead keen not to fail him, because that was going to ruin his chances with the fellow's sister – so he kept saying `Well you'll be all right, old boy', he said `I'll just

put you down for twenty minutes, which I'll give to this other fellow'.
(25.00) So he'd give the instruction to the other fellow and charge it to my time, so that my time then started to build up more and more and more, until, in the end, I had a theoretical time, I think of about twelve hours, which was right on what they called the `scrub' standard, that you were fail. In actual fact I'd had about nine and a half hours flying instruction but it'd all been debited to me, the other two and a half hours, which this wretched fellow who'd never learn to lie in an aeroplane – never learn to fly an aeroplane, was getting them with no charge against his hours.

> Can I just ask, were you – was there any way you could've affected that – what this fellow was doing, or was that just a – the kind of thing that went on and you accepted it or whatever?

Yeah, well, I think one accepted it because, again, as I say, one was nineteen and not terribly anxious to buck authority. One wanted to fly and one felt that if you bucked authority, he had the say so, he'd be the fellow who'd say `Well this fellow Gray will never learn to fly, he's no good, he's useless', so one accepted it. However, just when things were starting to get – look really serious I had another air test and was passed to go solo and then of course that was the magic moment. You were absolutely scared stiff when you were sort of popped into this aeroplane and invited to take it up all on your own. The, uh – in actual fact what they used to do was you'd ... after the air test, the, um ... you'd pull over the other side of the airport just as you were due to take off the down wind end of the airport, and the instructor would suddenly sort of undo his straps – he's seated in front of you – undid his straps, hopped out of the aeroplane and said `Okay off you go', and you just went round, did one circuit and landing on that occasion and you came back and the birds were singing and you were up there and you got up there and you sang to yourself as you went around the circuit – still terrified – back over the wind sock, so that you were sure you were right down the right path and in you came and had your landing – just the one circuit and landing – and then you went back, you'd gone solo, you did a bit more instruction and then you started to do solo virtually all the time.

> In the issue of the solo flight, perhaps it's just interesting to do with flying generally, now obviously by this stage you – one has really learnt what you need to know to take off and land and so on, was it a more pyschological barrier that one felt a kind of fear that if anything did go wrong up there, there was certainly nobody to help you and therefore you might crash and kill yourself, or was it something else?

I think it was psychological – psychological. Well it was just – it was the same old thing of group psychology – of a whole group of you all doing it together, all desperately keen to prove yourselves and yet fearsome that you were going to fail it somewhere along the track. That was the one barrier of out going solo. Having got there, now you're about to overcome that and you've sort of had that feeling, if you did that first solo, after that everything was easy. There was no problems to it at all and from there on it was no – it was all plain sailing. Which up to a point it was but ... so there was that psychological thing. I don't think at that stage fear came into it terribly. It came up quite soon after, I

think it was quite soon after we'd all gone solo for the first time that we had our first casualty among our group.

I was going to ask you about accidents?

Well until then we hadn't had any and it was into our – oh, I suppose, I can't quite recall how many hours – but we'd all gone solo and we were into the stage now of being a little practised at it or even starting on night flying – or had started on night flying come to think about it – when we had our – within our group – we had our first accident, which is one poor fellow, one of our original group, night flying, and just ... we never ever did know what happened to him, just the aeroplane finished up flying into the ground, but, uh, whether he got disoriented or not ... and I think that – that was for the first time you suddenly thought Oh my God, and I think that was literally the first service funeral I attended was this fellow. It became all too common an event after that unfortunately but that was the first one, and that was the one that really sort of hit home at you I think.

Mmm. And this was obviouly fear of flying, not so much of the enemy as came later. Could you tell us your first memory, or your clearest recollection of your early night flights in Rhodesia?
How did night flying – I mean, obviously you had problems of not seeing horizons and so on, what's your clearest memory of night flying?

I'd have to refer to my log books to see how much we did on Tiger Moths. We certainly did some but, uh, not a great deal. I think from memory in Tiger Moths, we only – having done our day flying – we did most of it day flying – then we just did a few circuits and landings by night and I think that's about all we did in night flying. I don't think in – did we do ... yes, we did a small night cross country. Yes, that's right, we did a small night cross country and of course, you flew on instruments and you had the simple instruments which were in a Tiger Moth. They were the basic things that are there for everything and ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Ken Gray, Bomber Command, tape 2, first side, or third side of the whole lot. End of Identification.

Ken, perhaps we can just move on from Tiger Moths to, um, I understand when you were in – later flew in – or trained in Oxfords. Could you tell us what they were, what they were like to fly and also perhaps, particularly, what it was like to move from the Tiger Moth, which really was just First World War vintage aeroplane into something quite different?

Yes, well first of all came the next shock of course, before that, because once again having got over the hurdle of being declared a pilot, of course, then one wanted to become a fighter pilot and sort of go back and become one of the aces in World War OneI and with all those glorious stories. I got no idea again if – what statistics would say to this – but strangely enough in our case we were all the young blood, and we ranged from

about – by this stage – about nineteen up to about thirty-one or two. All the young blood thought we would be the fighter pilots and all these older element would be the bomber pilots. In the event most of us, the young fellows, all finished up – and certainly of that group – all finished up as bomber pilots – twin-engine pilots and so on – whereas most of these older fellows finished up on fighters. I've never known the logic of that either, but it seemed to us that the gung-ho ones would have been among the young ones. Maybe they regarded the young ones were better cannon fodder or something for Bomber Command – anyway so the thing was the conversion then was that we went on to Oxfords, Avro Oxfords.

> And were men in Rhodesia at the same time who were training to fly fighters?

Yes, they were on the Harvards.

> Mm. So what was an Oxford like and how did you react also to the knowledge of being destined to be a bomber pilot?

Well, I think, having got over that, sort of one said `Oh well, that's the way it's to be'. There's going to be twin-engined aircraft – multi-engine aircraft – so the Oxford was ... I said an Avro Oxford, it's not an Avro Oxford, it was an Avro Anson – what on earth was the Oxford? I've gone a blank ... but anyway it was a twin-engined aircraft. Uh, for those days, it had just come into service about the outbreak of World War OneI, so with a rave reconnaissance role, light bomber, this sort of thing – but in fact by that stage was certainly too light to be even regarded as a bomber, so it was strictly in those days a training aircraft. It was a pleasant aircraft to fly, it had all the characteristics of a twin-engine aircraft – multi-engine aircraft – and so one converted onto that and that's where the consolidation went on. I've forgotten, we had thirty-forty hours I suppose – fifty hours maybe – in Tiger Moths and something like 100 hours then in Oxfords, which was ... having got over the conversion aspect of it, was largely cross country flight, bombing, all this sort of thing, as opposed to the pure skills of flying, having learnt to fly the aeroplane, then it was onto more the applied skills of flying.

> And what proportion of your training, Ken, was ground work – book learning – if you like and what proportion was flying – actually flying the aircraft?

About half and half. We flew as I think I mentioned earlier, we flew in Rhodesia, we flew – we started flying at five o'clock in the morning because of the heat later in the day and the thermal currents and so on, so we in fact we only worked the mornings. We started at, I think, literally started breakfast at four o'clock in the morning, something like that, and we were down to the flights at four thirty or five and first light, and you either went flying at five o'clock till perhaps eight thirty and then the classroom from nine thirty till one, or vice versa, and I tell you it was hell if you were in the classroom from five o'clock in morning – equally it was hell if you were flying till around about one o'clock. It was really quite uncomfortable flying because, although it was a so-called twin-engine aircraft, and larger aircraft, it was still very susceptible to being tossed around by the thermal currents

and so on. So we did about half and half, things like meteorology and so on. Again a lot of theory of electrics, engines, mechanics of aeroplanes, theory of flight, navigation, meteorology – I've mentioned all those before – were the major subjects.

(5.00) Did you do much training then, or did it come later in your operational training, or more specifically to do with formation flying and the active side of flying into a hostile area?

No, no, nothing ... formation flying we did. Of course we didn't formation fly in Bomber Command but formation flying we did as part of the discipline of flying but ... and we did bombing runs on a thing called `a camera obscurer' which I've never quite understood anyway, but which were always ... we did a lot of `camera obscurer' runs which were a dummy bombing run which showed the results – the theoretical results – of what would have happened – photography, things of that nature, and then you got onto actual bombing with a eleven and a quarter pound bombs that you used to drop. You know, little things about fifteen inches long.

Just looking perhaps more generally at your training, say going up to the time when you left Rhodesia to go to Europe, do you think you'd been very well trained or adequately trained? How would you describe your training?

I think our training was excellent. We were well trained, well disciplined, we had ... by the time we left Rhodesia we had, I think, something like 150 hours up, whereas if you remember in World War One people were being sent to the front with twelve–fifteen hours up, if that. So we had a good basic training before we left there. We were good – we were good pilots by then, even at 150 hours, but there's been well applied training and we'd learned a lot of flying skills. You learn all the skills not only of ... just of handling an aircraft under ideal conditions, one did precautionary landings, single-engine landings, single-engine flying, instrument flying, where you had a hood and you couldn't see anything but the instruments, flying by night – by day – so that then when you flew by night you were adapted to it. No, no, it was excellent training.

And what about your other recollections of the period when you were training in Rhodesia, could you tell us a little bit perhaps about what men did when there was spare time, if there was any. Did you have any contacts with local people?

Yes of course. One's got to realise again that Rhodesia in those days was a very small population. I think the maximum figures – it was mostly RAF were training there – but with their ground staff and everything else, I think there was something like 19,000 or 20,000 RAF in Rhodesia at any one time in those days, whereas the white population of Rhodesia was only about the same – about 20,000 in those days – and so there was a small number of ... of people to whom one could associate. In fact I was lucky in that I did meet up with a charming family in Bulawayo of Scottish family, and I used to go and see them a lot when I was on afternoons off, because as I say, we had ... we used to fly until midday or one o'clock – or work until midday – and then the afternoons were free. So we played a lot of sport, being Australian, inevitably we were always required to be playing cricket all the time. In fact we had some very good cricketers with us, including

one fellow who came in with me – I mentioned before – who became a distinguished judge of the Arbitration Court – was a very, very good cricketer – we used to play a lot of cricket. A few of us were able to get out on big game shoots. I was never a shot, but I went on one of these, had a shot at but missed a lion, but one of our group did get a lion. We used to go to places like Victoria Falls and we used to get up to, from time to time – I can remember it vividly – at the prime hotel – principal hotel in Salisbury at the time was the National – where, if we got a day or two off, a weekend off – we could stay at the National for fifteen and six a day, which was all meals, and obviously bed – but three meals and bed and the meals used to consist of about eight choices for ... about eight courses and about eight choices of each course – fabulous, really quite fabulous with a little Indian beater sleeping outside your doorstep.

(10.00) Sounds lovely. Was food on your base, or general living on the base, was that good or not?

Yes it was. Through some oversight in the system, when we went to Rhodesia it had been not understood by the British – the Royal Air Force and ourselves – did one's flying training – elementary flying school and advanced flying school as leading aircraftsmen and not been realised that – and they had provided accommodation treating it all as though we would be sergeants or officers and so when we arrived there, there was no accomm ... or very little accommodation for other ranks other than for ground crew and so on. So we were made – given the glorious title of acting sergeants unpaid during our flying training, so we lived in the sergeants' mess. Then half way through out Initial Training Course we were selected or not as officer candidates and those of us who were selected for officer candidates moved into the officers' mess – still as acting sergeant unpaid – acting sergeants unpaid. Now it's a remarkable thing that the whole of the administrative staff of that setup was RAF, to a person, and yet the whole of my particular course were all selected as officer cadets and my ... Australian course I'm talking about ... so I think they were very fair with us there, that they rated us as being better than their own people generally, whereas only about – I think the average was twenty-five percent were officers and three quarters were in the sergeants' mess – to a man all the Australians were in the officers' mess and, uh, about nine-tenths this made then of the rest of the course being RAF were in the sergeants' mess.

Mmm, that's most – that's most interesting, Ken. Would you attribute that to some kind of, um, – well using a modern phrase – reverse discrimination – or to the characteristics of the Australian men themselves?

I think perhaps it was the characteristics because we were – like all Australians when you get into a certain environment you rise above yourself. As an example of that, when we first arrived there, we were taken over under the charge of – two groups of us – under the charge of a drill sergeant – an RAAF drill sergeant – and we had two remarkable fellows – Luskim and Wilkinson were their names – and they were two remarkable fellows, and when we got there they used good psychology. They got into arguments with their RAF counterparts and they said to their RAF counterparts that their fellows were much better than the RAF fellows at drill, and so they came to us and instead of saying `You will do

this or you will do that', they told us the story and said `What about it fellows?' So we had a drill competition with these two groups against two pick RAF groups and we walked in hands down, you know, way ahead of them, by an independent marker. So I think that sort of – some of that sort of character came out and whether it was still a residue from World War One days of the attitude, or the approach ... I don't think it had anything to do with reverse discrimination. I don't think they were bending over backwards to be nice to these colonials. I think they just said `Well, you know, this was the – on the basis of which we're judging this, these fellows are better'.

Would you say underneath it there was an element of the colonials – the Australians – feeling they had something to prove?

Quite right – oh yeah, sure, yeah, I think so, yeah. No question of that, I think.

Okay, well just going on to – just before we leave Africa, Ken, do you have any other ... mmm not thinking of flying and training perhaps – but any other particularly significant memories or not?

Mmm, yes, I have some memories. I'm going to be political again. Am I allowed to?

You're allowed to say what you would like to say.

Well I just, uh ... I have ... if I may sort of bring myself up into the latter part of the twentieth century – I have the enormous – most enormous sympathy for the tremendous and horrific problems which South Africa faces today – but at the same time I don't have very much time for the hard line Boer of South Africa and part of that relates to the fact that at that time the [OB – Osawa?] – was being active in southern Africa in support of the Nazis. So much so, that in fact, even in Rhodesia, our training camps were, um ... were guarded by – of what was the name of the, um – the Askari Corps – the Askari Corps – who were armed with these very sharp, very short, assagais, and we were warned ... I mentioned before we used to used to go to the flights at four o'clock in the morning and four thirty in morning, while it was still dark – and you would ... and we were warned that these guards only knew two – several words of English – the challenge and the response – and if you gave any silly response to it look out, and so the challenge of course `Halt who goes there?' You halted. You felt this blade of the assagai and it's pitch black where you couldn't see a thing – the blade of this assagai touching you – the skin on your neck and so very hastily said `Friend' which they never tried to identify, I must confess, and you were sent on your way. But if you'd said `Me you silly bastard' or something like this then you'd be in trouble. Not that I ever heard of anybody who was, but – and I must say it's part of my dislike of this hard line Boer was because of this sort of reaction, of this and of the way in which he was, as I say, actively supporting the Nazis.

(15.00) Was that perceived generally by many of you? ...

... yes ...

... were men very conscious of that and of politics in Africa?

Yes, you find that one of – not our group – but one of the group who ... other groups who trained in South Africa – in Rhodesia sorry – subsequently took up Rhodesian citizenship and was chief of the Rhodesian Air Force in the end. Most of our fellows – I've not been active in what's called the Rhodesian Association – Rhodesian Aircrew Association – I've not been active for no reason other than the fact that it's in Melbourne and I'm in Canberra, but it meets regularly. It is, and always has been very pro white Rhodesia, and white Rhodesians and very pro Smith in his day, for reasons that they enjoyed it. They had that happy Association and while not excusing the regime – the white regime in South Africa and Rhodesia – were conscious of the many grave difficulties there are there and they are grave ...

... that's right ...

... I think even today.

That's most interesting. Perhaps if we can go on to – I think we ought to move onto here, Ken, because of time. Could you just tell us perhaps very briefly, because time is moving on, you leave Rhodesia, you travel to – via Cape Town to Britain and, um, there's a refresher training course, and perhaps we might skim over that, you then go directly to Operational Training, I think flying Wellingtons, where was that and what did you do?

This was at a station called Lichfield which is in Staffordshire and which later became an Australian OTU – it was called Operational Training Unit, at that time it was just a general Bomber Command OTU – we were out for the first ... that is where one then selected a crew – a crew for Wellingtons and we were all virtually thrown into a large hut and said well `There you all are' – into a hangar – `There you all are, uh'.... Even in those days most of us were Australian at Lichfield. Certainly most of the pilots were Australian – and I ... we mutually selected ourselves, I think, by – we'd had a little dealing ... I can't remember how long before – not long certainly – before we actually selected a crew and we sort of got together with one another and sort of, said `Well what about you, would you like to join up with me?' `No thank you very much, indeed' or `Yes please' or whatever and so you selected your crew, and in my case I finished with an Australian ... a crew of seven we had in a Wellington – I had myself, of course, as pilot and captain, I had an Australian navigator, an Australian bomb aimer, an Australian, um, rear gunner, and I said seven didn't I – five actually we had in a Wellington – and then an RAF wireless airgunner. Uh ...

The process of selection Ken, it seems most interesting. Were you, as a captain, selecting men and it was, I understand, your prerogative – were you conscious of, for example, men's record in training, what they'd done, or was it based more on a personal – purely personal likings or dislikings of individuals?

It was more on the feel you had for people – the feel you had. You got that feel that these were a good bunch of fellows, okay, let's grab these fellows and away you go and so it was more on that basis rather than on a basis of, uh, records and so on. You had very little

time in which to do it, but you do do it well because you then became a unit. Sorry. The only way in which one could operate as a bomber crew was to become a complete unit. The bomber crews which were wholly unsuccessful were those who were just a number of individuals, notwithstanding where we were or what we were doing, all crews – certainly every crew to my knowlege that got through a tour of ops was an integrated whole. They did everything together. They lived in the same accommodation together, they shared that accommodation, they shared their off-duty activities. It wasn't – mostly it was not pilot go with a pilot from another crew – it was that whole crew do something or perhaps two crews do something together. But you go to the pubs, the local village pubs, you go to the dances in Grimsby or in York or wherever you were stationed at the time as a crew and you get around as a crew.

(20.00) I've certainly heard that said before, Ken, and it would certainly make sense. How would you answer the question that – although obviously a crew would be more coherent and effective operating as a unit, that there still was a – obviously a hugely random aspect to casualties that the person on the ground could be a good or a bad gun aimer and you might or might not be in his sights. How does that relate to this issue of good crews getting through and bad ones not when, with that random element? ...

Yes, yes. I don't think I could – I couldn't put it positively why I think perhaps I may have then ... I don't know of a crew getting through which was not a good integrated crew. They did ... an unintegrated, poor crew never got through. End of message. A lot of good crews didn't get through either, but certainly the bad crew – or the badly integrated crew did not get through.

Perhaps if we could just go on talking about crews for a moment, there must have been – oh I imagine, or perhaps there weren't – instances where, perhaps because of sickness or, um, or other stresses or strains, or perhaps injury where a plane had been damaged but not brought down, individuals were forced to drop out of a crew. Did you ever lose members of a crew and if you did how did one accommodate the new individual to integrate him quickly?

It was always the sort of thing you hated doing. You hated ... if one of your crew was sick, you all tried to be sick, or you'd carry him to ensure that he came through. Now in my particular case my rear gunner did get sick towards the end of my tour and he had to be relieved briefly, which meant that he had to catch up those ops with another crew. Having joined another crew he was lost and was killed as a result of that. Uh, or not necessarily as a result of that, but he was lost in that way – uh, so generally one fought desperately not to fly with other crew. It was always regarded as a bad luck to fly with other members and generally this could be accommodated. We had more crews than we had aircraft, (coughs), excuse me – there was always a spare crew or two about and so generally it could be possible to switch a crew. While you had your own aircraft normally, it was always possible to switch a crew onto an aeroplane and keep the whole of that crew off an operation if one member was sick, particularly if it was a key member, and so generally that was done as far as possible. You tried not to, and if you did go the other route and if

you lost a member permanently, then of course you picked up another crew member for that purpose – he was drafted into you and he became integrated.

> Could I just ask you how you felt in that specific instance where a man who, if for some relatively trivial reason had been able to continue flying with you would have survived, but in fact he flew in another aircraft and was killed, how did you and your crew feel?

Well, we, yeah, we – this happened actually after we'd broken up as a crew, but we were very, very distressed about it, you know, because we were very distressed at the fact that he couldn't be with us when we did fly, and we hated it because he'd become part of us as a whole. You ... in many cases you didn't like a lot of the personal traits of members of your crew perhaps. They – you rubbed – they rubbed you up the wrong way but you made yourselves overcome that sort of thing, because this was this essential feature that if you weren't together the whole time that things were likely to happen to you and it, as I say, it seemed to happen to those that weren't an integrated crew.

> Just going back to your training, Ken. Was this issue of crew integration and crew loyalty something that was very clearly and explicitly spelt out or was it something that was just so obvious that it was not in fact formerly trained in ... trained into you?

No it was trained into us and it was – it was patently obvious but at the same time it was trained into us and drummed into us time and time again. This is an essential thing, you must be an integrated whole, you must be.

> Right. If we can perhaps just go onto your – just briefly staying with operational training before actually operational flying. You trained I understand in Wellingtons and then about the same time moved over to Lancasters. How did those two aircraft compare, which did you prefer? What are your recollections of them?

The older Wellington that we trained on was a bit of a dog compared certainly to a Lancaster and once again you went a heavy route. You did – we did Wellingtons and trained on those, but these were the older Wellingtons which were a bit underpowered, and so they were a bit – for that reason alone, a bit of a dog.
(25.00) Then we trained briefly on Manchesters which was the pre-cursor to the Lancaster, and it was a real dog because it was heavily underpowered. It was almost the same size as the Lancaster but had only two engines and so that was heavily underpowered. Then we did a bit on ... oh I've forgotten the name of the damn things – not Ham... – on Halifaxes – very briefly on Halifaxes. They were dreadful. They could only fly with a bomb load at about 15,000 feet maximum and then of course we went to the – from there onto the Lancaster, and that was magnificent. You're almost back to a Tiger Moth sort of feel about it. It flew as an aeroplane. It was again ... it wasn't something that was drilling holes in the sky, it just – it flew, it took off kindly, it landed kindly even with a load on board – even with a heavy load on board – and the things that that used to do under flying operational conditions – the stresses and strains you used to

put on it with a heavy bomb load, when you got caught in search lights or fighters or something of this nature (cough) were unbelievable, just to the extent to which it took that punishment of just flying.

> Let's talk just for a moment longer about a Lancaster, because obviously that's the important plane in your operational flying. Could you describe for us – could you visualise – perhaps you could imagine yourself in the pilot's seat up there at the front – could you describe your surroundings and also describe what were the ... why they were so good or perhaps any defects too, perhaps even describe the feeling of taking off in a Lancaster and then the different manoeuvres?

Golly, I don't know how you'd tackle that one.

> Well that's an excessively loaded question. Let's begin with the cockpit? Could you recall the cockpit?

Well perhaps first of all, should say that, by the time you moved up to a Lancaster you'd inherited a number – another two members of crew. Uh, you inherited a – a flight engineer and now a mid upper gunner as well to bring you up to a crew of seven and both of those in my case were RAF sergeants who came to me. So, okay, you got up into the cockpit, having had as you always did, going into operations, your nervous pee on the tail wheel which became – all these things became pure ritual because if you didn't become ritual – if you'd done it last night and you came back and then if you didn't do it tonight, my God you mightn't come back – so you did all these things. So you had your ritual pee on the tail wheel, having checked the externals of the aircraft, hopped in and hopped up to the cockpit into the left hand seat. Flight engineer served as your co–pilot in fact, and he was in the right hand seat. The other crew members took up their sundry positions around the aircraft. Now in essence, basically the cockpit of the ... or the instruments anyway in the cockpit of a Lancaster weren't all that much different to those of the Tiger Moth and – or of the Anson. You had four throttle levers, instead of one or two, you had a control column with a wheel on it as opposed to the – just the joy stick as it was in the Tiger Moth, and you got up – you sat on your actual seat. The parachute was the cushion, if you like, of your seat. You sat on your parachute, then under that – you always had in those days, you always had a tin hat – so you put your tin hat under the parachute for fairly obvious reasons. If anything was going to get hit you wanted to make sure that didn't, so you put your tin hat under the seat, or under the parachute on the seat, you settled in with that. These aircraft were not heated of course, so they got hellish cold, so you were done up in all your flying gear – the gloves and the lot. I even, to day, I still wear my watch on the inside of my wrist and the reason for that is that from the flying you had your flying gloves which had a zip down the inside of the wrist, so when you wanted to see your watch you had to ... you had to have it there and so it just became automatic to me to wear a watch on the inside of my wrist. So you got yourself in. By this stage, the worst feature of any – we're talking now about a bombing raid or just the aeroplane itself? But the worst feature of going on a bombing raid was not necessarily the flight of the – it was the briefing. It was when you walked into that briefing room, where you were told where the target was and thought My God not there, thinking there's no hope of coming back from

there. I mention that because when you got it – by the time you got – had your nervous pee and got in the aeroplane, you're no longer scared. You had been. You'd been through this period of concern, you'd been through this period of doing everything the same as you'd done it last night, singing the same song as you got changed into your gear. Another RAF captain and I ....

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B.

> Identification: Right, this is Edward Stokes with Ken Gray, Bomber Command, Tape 2 side 2, or side four of the whole lot. End of Identification.
>
> Ah, right Ken, um ... the briefing and so on ...

Yes so we would – we used to get involved each evening, singing across the locker room, *You're All Dressed Up To Go Dreaming*, became our ritual song and we both got through a tour of ops and we used to do this each time. So you had all these sort of little rituals that you went on with. So having got out to the aero ... oh, the other thing, I used to sit down always in the period between briefing and going out to the aircraft – used to sat down ... sit down and read a chapter of *Boswell's Life of Johnson* – uh, it calmed the nerves. So you got through all that by the time you got out to the aeroplane ready to go. All that was behind you and you were going and so away you went. So you settled into the aircraft and ... sorry ...

> Since we did get onto the subject of briefing, perhaps might have – I was going to ask you about later. Could I just clarify the – I mean the really ... During the day one's sitting around with the crew waiting, I'd assume to know if there was going to be an operation – you would only find out that day – when was really the greatest moment of tension? Was it when you found out a destination or in the general build up to briefing, simply knowing there would be an operation?

I think probably when you went into the briefing room, because no matter where it was, you knew it was hideous but the one you were doing tonight was always more hideous than any other you'd done – or so it seemed – and so I think it was that sort of moment of tension when you went into the briefing room and you saw where it was going to be. When you saw the little lines where you were going to and so on, and I think that was as – as big a tension. In fact, in the main the briefings were more traumatic than the ops. Now that sounds silly, but to do a tour of thirty ops you – I think I was briefed something over 100 times. The others were cancelled either because of weather – largely because of weather – but on occasion because it became known that the enemy had got knowledge of where the target was and so it was decided to cancel. (cough) Sometimes the state of the moon or the state of cloud and so on. So it was a general thing, it was that sort of thing, was the scary time if you like, the really scary time, because once you got onto an operation you were busy professionally, you were doing things and you were doing them to the best of your ability and sure the first time you saw that flak, your stomach turned

over, but at the same time it wasn't that sort of mental turmoil. So you went through this mental turmoil and knew it was like little tired kids released from school when an operation was cancelled – when a briefing was ... you'd been briefed and you were, as it was termed, stood down, and you'd be onto your bicycle and down to the local pub as hard as you could go to make up for it and almost invariably when you got to the local pub you'd be told, even if you were the first one in there, `Oh just as well you didn't go tonight boys, you wouldn't have wanted to go to Cologne, would you?' or wherever the actual target was.

Now the ....

They all knew – all the pubs knew, yes, all the little local pubs knew. So this is where of course, you know ultimately, how very often the Germans knew. How it got out I don't know but it was certainly known. I mean there was a lot of people involved in the process of preparing the operations room, although they were meant to be sworn to secrecy, it got out obviously and it sort of got around the place. Um, so that what I'd – to me anyway – was the most traumatic thing. That hour or two from the time you learnt the target, it was probably three hours from then until you went to man your aircraft. Then you got into your flight vehicle as a crew and you went out to the aircraft, onto the aircraft, settled yourself in, and from there on in you settled down, calmly and quietly. Uh, you first of all, as I say, checked your aeroplane out for a – externals, checked the bomb load was correct, and then ... see very often even ... you never knew right until you were taxiing out. Sometimes there was the recall signal would be sent from the tower when you'd already bombed up, started up, and were starting to taxi out. Right as late as that sometimes. So these were the days of course of the thousand bomber raids, primarily. Most of those I did were thousand bomber raids. There were a few specialised small raids but most of them were thousand bomber raids. Now that went – if you were an experienced ... well, sorry start the other way round. As an inexperienced crew you came in virtually as `tail-end Charlie' of the raid and you were at the back. As you became more experienced you advanced through the timing of the raid and the raid was usually broken into about four phases.

(5.00) Now contrary to general thoughts, particularly by the Germans strangely enough, the Germans, with their organised mind believed that one aircraft had a bomb on a certain point and then they all bombed back from that particular aircraft, and out from it as a pattern. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Everybody was keen to get rid of their bombs and if anybody dropped their bombs just – just a bit early – so that it spread ... it was very effective really ... by doing that you bombed pattern instead of all falling in the one hole, it fell on a large patterned area, it was the whole thing that did it. So you did not fly in formation. You took off. So you then all taxied out as a squadron – I suppose what?, twenty – usually twenty aircraft from the squadron, twenty plus – you taxied out from fifty different airfields in Eastern Britain – uh, Midlands and Eastern Britain – you taxied out, you took off and you were given a rendezvous position over the east coast of Britain. It might have been Hull or somewhere on the Humber or at various positions, depending on where you were going – and so you all had to pass over that point at approximately a given time and you were making for that point at that time. So you'd go off and you'd circle around the airfield. I'd said before the `Lanc' was lovely to fly but

with a full bomb load she was still a pretty heavy beast, you know, when you're carrying a full bomb load and full fuel load, so you'd stagger off and lumber off into the darkness there and away you'd go. Sorry.

> Well I was just going to ask you to clarify but perhaps you're about to anyway, Ken. It fascinates me the whole issue of how squadrons from all over Britain are converging on one general area and forming into, I understand, a loose formation, not a tight formation, but a nonetheless formation. How did that process of the gathering up of different squadrons into one larger group, how was that coordinated?

Well it was only coordinated insofar that different groups – there were five groups in Bomber Command – different groups had different assembly points and then from that assembly point they had one crossing point. So it happened through a process of random arrangement. It wasn't strictly arranged. I mean it wasn't an organisation that I got there at minute zero zero or second zero zero, somebody at zero ten or ten, twenty, thirty, etc, you just all made for that point at the one time, well inevitably ... oh sorry if you were in different groups then you were at different times, but other than that it was just this random arrangement. Now it worked very effectively, because in the end when you weren't flying a formation you were flying a loose stream. It was a bomber stream which, because everybody thought they were in the right place, but again inevitably, human error crept in and it was spread probably a mile wide – maybe wider – but about a mile wide and it was staggered in height. Not by me being told to fly at 20,000 feet 700 – 20,700 feet – and the next fellow at 20,500, but we'd all go up and we'd all try to get as high as we could get with a bomb load and in the time frame and so this staggered us out this way as well. So it was remarkable that there were – you had all these aircraft after they reach the assembly point with navigation lights and all other lights off, it was remarkable that you didn't hit. We actually did hit an aircraft on one occasion but it was over the target and not – or getting towards the target – not over Britain and over the target it was like Kings Cross with all the illumination of flak and uh, search lights and so on.

> Well I was just going to ask you just to go on to pursue this tack for the moment. There are no navigational or other lights, the cockpits are blacked out, how on earth were there so ... why was it that collisions over these staging areas weren't extremely common?

I know of no collision over the staging area – there probably were some – but I know of none. Uh, there were certainly collisions over the target area because people were doing things over the target area like jinking, like weaving, like corkscrewing to evade fighters or coning by search lights and so, uh, that was when you were so busy doing that you didn't see the other aeroplane or whatever, but over the – these areas I know of no occasion where there was an accident – a collision.

> Mmm.

There were close – close misses. But you know, you hear the stories today of the physical separation and so on coming into places like Mascot, uh, it always amazes me the number

– how difficult it would be to hit somebody when under our conditions we were all random.

(10.00) And within your own squadron, which was a much tighter group and you've gone from your specific aerodrome to the staging area, did you have any consciousness at all, in any way, of the position of the other aeroplanes relative to the leader?

No. You just ...

... how did they maintain that ...

... we just went our way out to that assembly point. As they say, you were told to be at the assembly point at say a minimum of 20,000 feet at a certain time and that's all we did. We just made for there. Now when we then got on the stream for Europe, if you like, to cross the North Sea – as we were crossing the North Sea I might have had an aircraft ahead of and below me which was from 456 Squadron, one to starboard and astern of me which was from 128 Squadron, anything at all. We weren't together as a squadron. We were all individuals and this is the other thing is that you are ... you didn't really have a squadron spirit. You had an individual crew spirit and the name of that spirit was to do your job of work and yet to survive. To do your bombing run efficiently, effectively, but to survive and in relation to that you deliberately did certain things, after you learnt. I think the figures showed that the first seven raids and the last five or three or four or something, were the most dangerous. If you've survived the first seven you were likely to survive right through until the last three or four and where again you came into a high danger period.

There are a couple of reasons for that, I think. First of all, as I say, this was 1943 – I'm right I think in saying it was our Bomber Command's worst year of losses, where the average loss rate was seven percent per raid. Now seven percent maybe doesn't sound all that bad, but it meant in a thousand bomber raid you lost seventy aircraft. It meant that your life expectancy was fourteen operations. After fourteen operations your luck had run out. But in the first seven, you were inexperienced, you were at the tail end of the bombing raid which meant that by the time you got over a target you were relatively safe from ack-ack because the guns were running so hot, the barrells were drooping, literally, after twenty/twenty-five minutes of intensive firing the gun barrells were drooping – so they were out of action. But you were vulnerable to fighters because you were at the end of the stream, the fighters had time to find out exactly where the target was, get to you and get into the end of the stream and so you were vulnerable to fighters. You were inexperienced, you didn't know what to do about it. So your first seven–eight raids were vulnerable. But if you survived those, and I think most who survived those first seven, was lucky. After that then you did get this degree of cunning. Now I always flew with, if possible, an aircraft above and behind me on each quarter – starboard quarter, port quarter. If I could get an aircraft up there, because if a fighter came for him – for me – he'd come to them first so he wouldn't be coming for me, he'd be going for one of them. So you'd try and get one of them stationed up a couple of hundred yards astern of you.

But just going back to what we were talking about before in terms of staging, Ken, this is the thing I can't understand.

What?

How did you see them? How did you know where they were?

Well, you didn't, as often as not. I mean you're flying at 20,000 feet, you're usually above the weather and over the target certainly you could see it because it was lit up as bright as day. But even on the stream you had – your night vision became adjusted and you could see those sort of distances. So I used to actually go looking for them. A couple of people that I could station myself in that position and then loosely formate ahead of them and they were probably doing it to somebody behind. But I mean that became the sort of thing – is that you were out for your survival and at the same time doing your job.

That's really most interesting, that there was this – that it was utterly a crew and their aeroplane – and there wasn't a wider loyalty to the whole mission?

No, there was that ... the loyalty to the mission insofar as achieving the purpose of bombing that target but I don't think too many of us were terribly concerned at the – I mean we were concerned if whether fellows from our squadron were lost or not because they were personal friends but at the same time, even that, was a little wrong. I said personal friends. Outside one's own crew you didn't have too many friends. You deliberately did not because you quickly learned that if you became personal friends with that crew you get back tonight and you find he didn't come back and so you'd have that sort of loss of a strong friend. So they were aquaintances rather than friends and you see your whole being of social activity – social intercourse, everything else was with your crew and only to a small extent you'd say sometimes to a fellow crew `How about coming out', and they would come out and – but seldom did you act as buddy to buddy from pilot to pilot or whatever.

(15.00) That's most interesting Ken. Perhaps we could then – could we just go on a little bit or, um, progress a little if you like in the, as you call it, in the flight stream. Could you describe with, um – well you've described very clearly the general tension of briefing and so on and that build up until one gets in the plane and starts doing something practical to occupy one's mind and then the staging flying towards Germany. Could you recall your first actual experience of flying over hostile air space and what happened, how it was defended and how it affected you? How you felt, how you coped?

Yeah. Well the first flight one did as a pilot was with another crew. You went as second pilot to another crew and flew with them and I must say that I had ... I had the impression when we took off, that from the moment we hit the enemy coast that it would be wall-to-wall flak until we came out again, that every inch of country – and to my astonishment and delight we took off, passed over the North Sea, crossed the English Channel – I think we were on a raid of Dortmund in North Germany – crossed the North Sea, crossed the Dutch coast I think it was we actually crossed ... crossed the Dutch coast – nothing. Oh I

thought, this is lovely. So I was starting to sort of think, well, you know, what's all so difficult about that then suddenly bang, you know, up there a little ahead, off on one side, up say came some search lights. And that was your fear, that if you got what was known as `coned' – when a group of search lights locked onto you – and when you're `coned' you're pretty much a dead duck. But you saw the first of the search lights coning onto somebody up there, then you saw the flak coming up. Then, from there on it was – as I say – it was like this daylight of – if you – generally if you weren't at the target area – if this was short of the target area – unless somebody had made a bad mistake in routing you, you were off your route, because you're normally routed in, clear of any other defended areas until you got to the target area ... so insofar as it was possible you were routed clear of any known defended areas. So it wasn't till you got to the target area, but you inevitably saw off to one side or the other, somebody had got off track and got himself into bother, and those people – it was always stragglers, whether for that reason or stragglers behind the stream who were the ones who were knocked off, because they were lone targets and easy targets. So then you got this intensity of, as you got closer to the target and got into defended area, and going into Dortmund you had quite a corridor which to go through – perhaps twenty minutes of this – which when you first looked at it you thought well, there is no way that anything could go through there without being hit because the stuff was coming up. You could see the black bursts around you, you could see the puffs occasionally get shaken by (cough) excuse me – a near miss, under you in particular you felt the effects of it. You saw the search lights going up, you saw some poor fellow being `coned' by search lights, see then the anti-aircraft concentrating on him. You'd see him perhaps explode in mid air, you'd see him going down and what have you.

How did you feel when you saw your first plane explode?

Well I think like everything else, it was a case of saying `There but for the grace of God go I, and thank God it was not I on this occasion', and always this feeling of relief – always – that it was not yourself who was being hit. But if you're really seeing a lot of it, poor bugger sort of thing. One became very callous to this thing, inevitably because if one didn't you wouldn't have lasted, you know, any time at all. So it was just this – this look of amazement. But once again, you were busy, you were doing what you had to do and I'd been given – we were all given in fact – you were given, um ... oh what's those, um, those wakey-wakey pills – I've forgot what they call them now – but you had those if you wanted them.

These are to combat fatigue?

To combat fatigue, but I quickly realised that the excitement of what was happening – uh, the fright of what was happening, the busyness of what was happening – you didn't need any of those to take, so you just happily sort of, uh ... well not happily, you just got on with it and did the things that you were meant to do. And then that feeling of relief when you came out of the target and away from the defended area. Uh, but then your concern was to keep a close watch for any fighters coming in, because then they became your worry then, because if they were vectored in on you – so you became very conscious of that. All the way in, all the way out you weaved. If you got – well perhaps that comes later – but, so you weaved as you ... you weaved across, sort of doing a random pattern of

not keeping on course because quite often, if you were coming to a defended area they would have their radar on and they might keep the radar on you.
(20.00) The only warning you got was when the search light was switched on – the master search light – and you saw that switched on from the ground and thought, oh my God, long before the beam reached you in fact, you saw it switch on, and before the beam reaches you, you knew you were going to be `coned'. But if you were very, very quick you could beat that, but we didn't get that on our first raid. It was – in fact mine was quite innocuous. We bombed the target, we had all the flak, etc etc etc, we got no fighters on the way back and just after we passed the French coast on the way out, I remember the captain saying to me `Well you can take her now,' and by this stage I was about to settle down and have a little sleep at this stage. It was about three o'clock in the morning. I then had to grab the wake up pills, and have a couple of those to keep myself awake and flew the aircraft back to the base and then I couldn't sleep for about the next eight hours, both as a result of reaction and the damned pills. So I never took them again.

During the flight, or rather over the target areas, Ken, where they were defended, did men often show physical signs of fear, or again was it that you simply had too much to do to really experience it? I mean ...

I think you had generally too much to do to, uh, show any actually over the target. I've one story which I wouldn't be prepared to say because the fellow concerned is still alive, but I had one concern ... I had one occasion where a fellow had absolute fear, but it wasn't over the target.

A member of your crew?

Uh, a member of a crew I knew, yes.

Are you willing to talk about that in a totally anonymous fashion or not?

I don't think it could be anonymous because it would be known, yes.

Right, okay ...

... but, but normally no people did not – I knew of no case of people having fear over the ... well fear, yes, but not – sorry – having fear but not displaying fear, not to the point of not being able to do their job.

Just while we're on the issue of fear, and this is, um, certainly not meant, um, in a personal sense towards you, and if it's directed towards other people, it's certainly not, I'm sure you'd realise in a judgemental sense – when hearing these stories, one wonders how anybody could cope at all. Least of all oneself, but was it common at all, or not, for bomber crews to abort before reaching target areas to drop bombs elsewhere on the grounds of, for example, mechanical defects, that kind of thing that could be validated in some sense, but in fact with which a plane could have continued a mission?

Uh, no. For a start it didn't pay you to get out of the bomber stream. You were better to stay ... we had a very nasty incident which we may or may not have time to relate, but – over Stetten – but, uh, in the main one did not want to get out of the bomber stream. So there may have been people who dropped their bombs and stayed in the bomber stream – without bombs which made it much easier – the aircraft was more manoeuvrable, faster, etc., could get higher – I don't know of any. I'm sure there would have been cases, but I don't know of any – (coughs) excuse me – but if you lost an engine in the early stages of a mission, long before you reached the ...

This was just a break for a telephone.

If you lost an engine before you – well before you got to the target, say over the coast or something of that nature, normally you would ditch your bombs and return to base on three engines as being very unwise to go the whole distance on three engines. But I know of no cases – no, sorry, that's not quite true. People in dire circumstances where they had been coned well short of the target, there have been cases certainly of those who just dived down and did what was known as a `corkscrew' to try and evade the action, and on occasion they had it ... were forced to drop their bomb load as the only way to get away and so there were those sort of occasions.

Uh, just a domestic necessity there.

So there were certainly those occasions. There were occasions when, uh, you were sometimes given a secondary target which you could bomb if you had ... if you for some reason or other, could not make the primary target. But in the main you were best to stay in that bomber stream and stay with that bomber stream. If you left the stream you left the protection of everybody around you and you were easily picked off.

(25.00) That's certainly interesting. Ken, the idea is certainly to open things out, um, you said then, there was a nasty incident over, I think, ...

Stetten ...

... Stetten that was a significant memory. What was that?

Well this, uh, oh, ah, on this night ... sorry go back a bit. Bomber Command had got to the stage where we were getting very heavy losses on moonlight nights – very heavy losses on moonlight nights. So it came a period where – during periods of full moon there were no raids at all and then they started to say this is crazy because we're losing two weeks of every month – or ten days anyway of every month when we were not having any operations, which means that the Hun knows it as well and he was quickly awake up to this and say `Well okay I can do all sorts of things during those ten days, because we're not going to be subject to a raid'. So some bright spark had the idea that during the periods of bright moonlight we could go in at low level – which of course we weren't trained for – we were high level, night bombers. So it was thought well let's go in at low level and then only rise to bomb the target, but go across, uh .... So on this particular night it was a raid where it was decided to do just this. We went in across the North Sea at low level ...

... and this is a cloudless night ...

... a cloudless night, yes, cloudless night, full moon. Went in over the Danish coast and Stetten on the Baltic Sea – of course, now the great sight of Lech Walesa, isn't it, whatever it's called these days – so we went in over the Danish coast, then into the Baltic, climbed to altitude to go in and bomb Stetten – a big shipbuilding port and so on – and so this was great fun. We fumbled across ... we always loved flying at low if we could and particularly at night – moonlight night, no cloud, lovely right down on the water, across there, started across Denmark and going across Denmark my bomb aimer called ... said over the intercom `Skipper there's a ...' I've forgotten if he said to port or to staboard `there's a town to port or a town to starboard'. So I went to alter course slightly away from it and what we didn't realise for the moment, it was – how would you show it – top of a heart I suppose – it was a town where the centre ran away from us. Where there was no centre until you got right into the centre and there were lobes on each side if you like, and so instead of going away from it, we went straight into it, in fact. And as we went right over the top of it we got a hell of a pasting and put the port engine – one of the port outer engine on fire ... port outer, have to think about that in moment – I think it was the port outer engine – on fire and we got knocked around pretty badly. Um, so in getting the fire under control I had to get up a little bit of altitude to get the engine fire out. Got the engine fire out ...

... how was that done, Ken?

With the use of, first of all, stop the engine and then use the extinguishers – it had automatic extinguishers built in – so we got the fire out but of course the engine was ruined so I couldn't use the engine again. No hope in the world with the bomb load I had on of being able to climb up to bombing height with that bomb load. We still swear – we've never been able to prove this – we still swear that as we came up we then started to get pasted – we were out over the Baltic Sea at this stage – we started to get pasted again by a naval force and we still to this day we firmly believe that this was a force which was escorting the *Graf Zeppelin* – the only aircraft carrier the Germans ever built – out of Stetten and it had been Stetten to Rostock or something – it had been in that area. Anyway we tried to scramble up to a height where the bombs would go off ...

Ken could I just interrupt you we're about to ....

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A.

Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Ken Gray, Bomber Command, Tape 3 Side 1, or tape five of the whole lot. End of Identification.

Right. This is continuing the story over the sea.

So we scrambled up to a height where the bombs could go off and made for this force and tried to drop a bomb on it – or drop our bomb load on it. We dropped – all we can say is that we did drop it in the area, but of course, at the same time as you do this, when you stop an engine you feather it – if you know what feathering is – so that the engine is

facing into the slip stream and is not causing any drag. (coughs) Excuse me. Uh, so we did just that – or tried to do that – but the damn thing wouldn't feather. I thought no matter, well, at this stage there was no point in us with three engines trying to get back into the stream again so we set out for home, and we went across the ... this time going out we made the shortest way home – we set out across Holland and going across Holland we came to the Isles of Sylt, off the Danish ... off the Dutch coast. As we came over these islands, still fairly low, suddenly we saw right below us – just below us – the lights of an airfield switch on and two minutes later, as we were looking back we could see two aircraft taking off after us – obviously taking off after us. Constantly all the way across there we'd been trying to feather that engine without any effect and suddenly when these things came out I thought oh my God, because all your ancillaries were driven by different engines and if it was the port outer – I think it was the port outer from memory – the port outer drove the mid upper gun turret and so if that had feathered we'd have – even with ... with it not feathered but windmilling as it's called, just going around – it still had some power on it to give power to the ... um to the mid upper turret. So it was producing that power for the mid upper turret all right at that stage. So sure enough about three minutes later out over the water we had an Me110 got on our tail. He made a pass at us and I went right down on the water to get so that he couldn't get under me – he had to keep coming down from above me all the time and on about his third pass we got him and shot him down and he went into the water. The extraordinary thing was, as we got back over the English coast, again I said to the engineer `Try to feather the port outer', and this time when he went to feather it, it feathered immediately. Now if it had done that before – it was the mid upper who actually shot him down and if we'd have got him before that would have been it but I think that was our closest ... uh, we had other occasions where we were ...

Just coming .... And that rather highlights your point, Ken, of the vulnerability of a lone aircraft.

Exactly. I mean we probably had no alternative but to do it that way, but perhaps we did in retrospect, probably would have been better, having dropped that bomb load, to have tried to scramble up without a bomb load with three engines, I probably could have scrambled up to join the main force and go with the main force the whole way. But the moment you're on your own you're a sitting duck and particularly these two fighters ... I never did know what happened to the other one. We never saw the second. The first one picked us up and he was the one who – or one of them picked us up – we never saw the second. But, uh, whether he for some reason did something else, I've got no idea.

Mmm, that's most interesting. [Break in recording]

(5.00) Right well this is just continuing with Ken after a break for tea. Ken, um, one thing I just wanted to ask you because it relates back to your – to what you said at the beginning about your desire to fly and so on, that, um ... that you were very imbued with the stories of the First World War, with the chivalry of the, you know, the lone fighters in the sky and so on – in the Second World War in these mass bombing missions for instance, you've described how one crew was very much a lone unit and to a certain extent

> you were protecting yourself ... not perhaps at the expense of other people, but not – with not consciously acting to protect others – was there a feeling of let down that the whole thing was less chivalrous, more – far more barbarous than you'd been led to expect?

Oh, sorry. It's, uh – inevitably, yes. I think the chivalry idea was a throwback to World War One and I think probably it was in those days. I gather that that was the attitude that one has read about and it was pretty correct. It wasn't so much of a let down I suppose in World War Two. By this stage one had become inured to it, one became adjusted to it and it was just fact of life, that this is the way in which things had gone. It'd gone a long, long way. I don't think – to the best of my knowledge – I don't think fighter pilots had ... it was anything the same sort of attitude in fighter pilots. A dog fight was conducted at much higher speeds and there wasn't the same sort of feeling about a dog fight as there had been in World War One. Which all seemed like a great school boy exercise in many ways I suppose.

> Just going back to operations, where you described in general terms that – a couple of operations, the first one and the one we spoke about a moment ago. Could you recall and describe what you would regard as perhaps the two most significant operations you few on? Whether because of your objectives or because of the particularly difficult nature, the extremely harsh defences. Are there any that come specifically to mind?

Yes, yes. I think probably my last operations were against Hamburg, which were the great, um, the windstorm of Hamburg – the wind fires and so on – in August of `43, they were the last ones I did and they were – oh I think did we do three or four? But we virtually totally wiped out Hamburg in those raids and from that point of view they were tremendously successful. The degree of opposition on a couple of – one of those I think we virtually walked in. There was very little – very few losses experienced. Another was a complete washout because of the cloud. We – unexpected cloud over the target and I think it was just almost a fiasco because people were just bombing through the cloud on the glow of previous bombs that had gone down and I think that was completely unsuccessful. I think it was the last one which was particularly successful. Another extremely successful one was on – oh golly, the place where the buzz bombs were being made, oh I've forgotten – Peenemunde – Peenemunde. That was another, we thought, very successful raid and I suppose in many ways a much more ... it was a smaller one. I don't think we had a thousand on that, I think it was a smaller raid where we were attacking the site where the buzz bombs had been made. They were known to be there and it was one of those triumphs of British Intelligence which had shown these `beasties' to be there and we mounted a very successful raid on the facility at Peenemunde. A lot of others were – we did a couple of very long distance raids down to La Spezia in Italy, which, uh – one of which was, uh, I think I just about created a record on that occasion when we had a, um, Lancaster airborne with a full bomb load for eleven hours forty-five minutes. We got lost on the way back, missed a change of wind and crossed over the French coast with virtually – as we thought no bombs on board, no – and had to throw our guns overboard because we were getting so short on fuel. Once again it was an occasion where it was just on dawn when we flew over what we thought initially – screaming `mayday' – thought

was the British coast and only to find that we were actually still flying out over the French coast down by the Cherbourg Peninsula and once again we saw an airfield light up on this occasion in the early dawn, but nothing ever happened, nobody ever came, so we .... That was the time we landed finally at Exeter, because it was the only place we could get to. Having been diverted to Exeter on a mayday call – we managed to get into Exeter on, literally, two engines after we touched down – two engines stopped because of shortage of petrol.

(10.00) Once the attitude of the aeroplane had changed to being on the ground, we were so short of petrol for eleven hours twenty-five. But the amusing thing was that we were there for thirty-six hours – it was a beautiful June morning. We were sitting out – on the second day that we'd been there, we were sitting by the airfield, they'd sent down a couple – we'd also strained the engines, if you like, and they sent down a couple of fitters from the squadron to repair the engines and they were up on the large trestles fixing the engines and we were just lying out in the sun just by a squadron of Spitfires who were dispersed on the other side of us, and suddenly without anything happening the bomb doors just parted and out dropped a great thousand pound bomb which had been apparently discharged off the racks but had settled onto the bomb bay doors and for some reason took thirty six hours for them to force the doors open and this thing fell out .... You've never seen people go so fast in all your life. The only people that didn't run – not because of our bravery – but because we knew what was happening was the bomb aimer and myself because we knew that a bomb couldn't arm itself in that time. It has to have `x' feet in which to drop before it arms itself and so we knew that it dropping ten feet down onto the ground, it couldn't arm itself. There was spitfire pilots and God knows what going in all directions, the two fitters working on an engine jumped off the ladder from whatever it is – twelve–fifteen feet up – onto the ground and went like ... you see Tom and Jerry cartoons dashing off – we dashed over knowing, as I say, that it couldn't have armed in that space and took it over from there. But, um, those I think are probably the outstanding memories of operations. Always when you went to the Ruhr Valley, any of those heavy industrialised targets, they were always thick with flak. I think on two occasions we got coned, but this is where I always ... as I say when the search lights lock onto you – and that's when you really expect to get hammered but on each occasion we just had that seconds notice when we saw the master search light, light up just as the coning hit us and we were already control column over for a turn and stick pushed on the dashboard and you went straight down in a screaming dive into what was called a `corkscrew', where you screamed down and then screamed the other way and heaved the aircraft around in all directions. How the poor thing – the wings used to stay on under those conditions, God only knows, and we twice got that, but both times because of these manoeuvres – certainly on one of them I had to drop down from something like 21,000 feet to about 5,000 – we got away with it on each occasion.

> Mmm. Just talking perhaps for a moment about the greatest dangers one faced flying over a target area. You've described coning, flak, fighters, how would you rate the ... those – or any other dangers to a bomber? What did you fear most?

Fighters I think. Because once a fighter really got on your tail you were generally – he was using .5 ammunition which had a long range and a heavier penetration value, he was using the heavier ammunition, 20mm, something like that – we were using .303. Now .303 was like – generally like shooting a, what do you call it, a pea shooter. Although as I say on the one operation we had on Stetten we did bring an aircraft down because he came in too close and we had the advantage, if you like, because we were right down in the water and he couldn't vary his tactics. But generally he could stand off you, outside your .303 range and pump into you 20mm stuff, so the fighter was generally more conclusive. If you got a fighter you were pretty much done for. As I said just a moment ago, if you got flak as a result of being coned, you had about a fifty-fifty chance of getting away with it, if you reacted quickly and really corkscrewed early, then you had a strong chance. You could also corkscrew against a fighter which gave his target – made you a very difficult target for him. But as I say, my tactic generally was to try and get somebody else behind and above me which – which counted me out generally as a target for a fighter except in exceptional circumstances where you got out of the stream. But generally, uh, in itself coning and anti-aircraft fire, just general anti-aircraft fire was more frightening. Where there was also another factor which could be very frightening in England, on a couple of occasions you got back to England and found heavy fog over your air field, you were diverted to another airfield if there was one possible. Sometimes it was some distance away and you might be getting well short of fuel by the time you got there, other times you just got such heavy icing during the winter months.

(15.00) You said before that the Lancaster wasn't heated and of course one had protective clothing and so on, how cold did it still get in those aircraft on long flights?

You were – talking like the bomb aimer and – not bomb aimer, the mid upper gunner and the rear gunner were much colder than the rest of us. You were comfortable, you weren't really cold. I mean you were comfortable enough on those flights yes. You were never – you weren't frozen.

And what about mid-air collision, Ken, was that – over a bombing area, a target area ...

There were quite a number of those. We had one very, very near miss, where it was so close, we swore that we touched and indeed when we got back and reported it, no other aircraft reported such an event. Now we – the look we had at this aircraft on that occasion – he was aware that he'd nearly hit us. So our – we had a feeling that, that he as a result of that went down or certainly he didn't get back because no other aircraft in the stream that night – on the raid that night – reported such a near miss.

Could you describe how that – I mean obviously would have happened very quickly – how ... where he appeared from and also where he touched on your plane and the damage?

He – there was no visual damage. This is the curious thing. There was no visible damage. He came down from high above us – well reasonably high above us – came down into a diving turn from above us and on our port side from memory. He came down from our

port side, down – obviously I think he thought he'd been coned and he was sliding into a corkscrew manoeuvre and he came down right in front of us and went right over the top of our wings and we – we felt that we'd clipped his engines or his propellors, but there were no visible marks on any part of our aeroplane.

Mmm. And that was the only – the sole incident in which you came ...

Very close, yeah. I mean other times you saw aircraft a hundred feet away or something of that nature quite reasonably frequently – over the target in particular and – but this time he was literally three feet away if you like.

We've talked quite a lot about the tension before a raid and obviously this great fear, but it's controlled through activity during the raid. Were there moments at all flying of chit chat, of light heartedness or was it a different atmosphere?

Oh, yes and no. Uh, sometimes as part of this tension buildup you could get crew members who are chatty on the intercom and decide to make remarks and certainly if you were over enemy territory, you shut those fellows up quickly because when you had an important message over the intercom you wanted it not to be interrupted by somebody making some facetious remark about something or other and so (coughs) excuse me – you quickly learned a discipline – an intercom discipline – where people only came up with statements. So that when you got a statement you were immediately alerted. You know `Mid upper to skipper, fighter on the port quarter' or something above or another aircraft on the starboard quarter below or something of this nature and you were immediately alerted to it, whereas if people are doing something .... Now you occasionally got an excitable member of crew who was perhaps a bit tensed up, who'd start to chatter away unnecessarily, but generally you shut them up as quickly as you could.

Just going onto a more – a fairly general question, Ken, could you recall any one particular incident on operations that you would regard as the most – for whatever reason – as the most spectacular thing you ever saw? Spectacular in whatever sense you want to take it.

Yes, yes.

Something that stands out above all other ...

... Probably, yeah, probably, one of the Hamburg raids – the very successful Hamburg raid. Oh and also another one on, oh Bochum, or was it Wuppertal – uh, on one occasion we went to, I think it was Wuppertal we went and then several – not it might have been the other way round – and several nights ... no Krefeld, Krefeld, that was the place – we did a very successful raid on Krefeld and then about three nights later we went to an adjoining city close to Krefeld, and went past Krefeld on this occasion, and three nights later you could see the whole of that city of Krefeld as we'd seen it in the briefing maps before we'd done the raid three or four nights previously – you could see it all glowing as the whole of the city was alight – uh, the whole place and it just ... you could see that map again all over in the glowing of the embers of all this .... I think that was a most

impressive arrangement. Another one I think, probably you touched on it yourself way, way back, but the size of an aircraft burning going down and then the impact when it hit the ground, still with bomb load and petrol on board – to see the sight of that blow up when it hit the ground. I think probably the most spectacular thing I ever saw – unfortunately spectacular – was after my tour of operations when a – when I was back instructing again – operational flying instructing – seeing a ... a Wellington coming in to land just cartwheel as it came into land and this huge flash of flame as the whole thing went up. It was one of the most horrifying sights. It was just one of those that went up with a huge explosion.

(20.00) Mmm. That ... yes, well ... must have been quite an appalling thing to see. Um, just going back to the actual ... or two things based on what you said then, Ken, about ... I mean this image of a city alight from bombing. Was there ever in your mind, or perhaps the minds of other men you're aware of – was there any questioning of the bombing ... of the effect of bombing on civilian populations and on the whole general strategic value of the later bombing command operations? Did the – did the benefits from what you did outweigh the costs, both in terms of losses on the allied side and what was happening to civilians down below?

Well to take the first point in relation to that what effect it did have – what were the effect on civilians. I think the general attitude there was that most of the people we were working with – were a minority of Australians and Canadians and what have you – mostly were RAF people. Most of them had been subject to – as indeed we were to a slight amount – but most of them had been subjected to the German raids of earlier in the war, particularly many of them had suffered casualties in their own families and so on, their own homes had been lost and destroyed and what have you. So you had that sort of attitude that – a feeling that this was just retribution and so the hell with it. That was bad luck that you were killing women and children. The other point was that we felt that we were destroying the German war fighting capability by destroying their industry and in turn destroying their cities. Now we had a different view to that taken of the Americans. The Americans engaged in their daylight bombing – precision bombing of selected strategic targets and they went to bomb up an aircraft factory, a motor works, or something of this nature, railway marshalling yards, and they specifically set out to bomb that target and any killing of civilians was coincidental. There were inevitably casualties, but they were coincidental casualties. The strategy of British Bomber Command was, just as I've explained it, by – to destroy their war machinery, you had to destroy their cities and this killed people and so you went in for this mass bombing raids. Uh, at the time we thought they were extremely successful. I believe that what has been shown since the war, showed that probably the – it was not commensurate with the damage done. Sorry the other way round. The damage done was not commensurate with the cost, certainly to the allied forces and perhaps to civilian casualties on Germany's behalf. It was not as effective as we believed it was.

But at the time the belief was definitely the ...

At the time the belief was definitely there, because each target we did bomb was not a target of a city of beauty or something of this nature. There was the Leipzig raid – I wasn't on that – but all our targets were industrial targets – the industrial Ruhr in particular. I only went to Berlin once but Berlin was a strategic target as was certainly was Hamburg.

> A related question to this which is perhaps fairly important, is on these night raids when you had great difficulty with visibility and dodging around and weaving simply to survive and therefore problems with keeping your navigational plot going and so on. How generally accurate could one be in even – in getting to a reasonably general target area or was it really quite random – in terms of the accuracy of the bombing?

No, to get to the actual – to get to the target area was virtually no problem, uh, either by visual navigation, dead reckoning navigation, and then later on with the Pathfinders you knew you were on your target. You knew – well forget the Pathfinders for the moment – you knew that you were onto your target and certainly some aircraft strayed and did get lost on their way to target and they missed out on the bomber stream and probably didn't make the target.
(25.00) But having made the target area then the position was made much easier by the Pathfinders putting down their master bomb aimer and putting down his flares and so on and you bombed then on his flares and that was .... The basis of your bombing was extremely accurate. Uh the accuracy of your bombing depended very much on your own nerve and it generally meant that you had a – oh I've forgotten the time, I think it was twenty-nine or thirty-one seconds or something – you needed a straight run to the target – that was the time you were really tensed up because that was the time when you were highly vulnerable and, you know, towards the end of that twenty-nine seconds you'd be counting a little more quickly than one – two – three – it would be 25–26–27–28–29, bang, right bombs away. So inevitably you tended to – you were bombing on a particular heading which you had been given and you bombed from north to south or south to north as the case may be, so you were all bombing in the one direction. So I think the bomb aimers – the master bomb aimer – put down his marker ahead of the target if you like so that the bombs then straddled back across the target centre.

> Mmm.

And in fact it did mean – this did mean a broad area of bombing. Some of them were well out with tons and tons of bombs dropped out killing cows in the fields. Uh, but others were extraordinarily accurate, such as I said Krefeld before and Bochum, Wuppertal, Hamburg, were extremely successful raids.

> But the general picture there then is that the – certainly when the Pathfinders come into the picture, that it was the steely nerve of a pilot simply to continue on a dead level course that would – was the measure of accuracy. Is that correct?

Yes, entirely, yes. I mean if you – if a fellow got the jitters in that ... that period of that straight run to the target, while the bomb sight settled down and so on and you had to

have that run in – that very steady run in. Unless you had that steady run in then God knows where the bombs went.

> Perhaps just going on to something else that's important to talk about, related to that in a sense. We've talked about the whole thing of the loyalty within a crew and of the importance of that unity and so on, and as you've also said it was statistically improbable to reach the end of a tour. Or I think in fact to go beyond even a half way point, how did ... what was the emotional reaction amongst crews as the general – as one by one other crews were picked off? As beds were empty in the morning and that whole picture – and as the tour went on it happened to more and more people who one had known, if only superficially?

Well I did make the point earlier that there was almost a definite `don't get to know `em too well, fellows'. Now I think this may have been different in the Australian squadrons like 460. We were a neighbour of 460 in 101 – they were just at the master airfield up the road at Binbrook, we were at a place called Ludford Magna. Now, there was – in those squadrons there was probably a greater affinity because they were all Australians together. Our attitude tended to be with us .... Oh sure we had squadron parties and so on, but generally the attitude was don't get too close to another one because he may not be there in the morning and you don't want to – you deliberately sort of distanced yourself to a degree from those other fellows. You didn't know them anyway. You didn't have a background of knowing them, you hadn't trained together as say somebody in 460 Squadron – the Australian squadron – there were probably at any one time were half a dozen crews who trained together, or there's pilots that trained together and various elements that trained together, so there was a degree there that didn't apply to those of us who were in RAF squadrons so you kept that distance. Uh, general attitude I think was one of God, you know, poor old so and so. Oh well, you know, – end of message and you calloused yourself to this sort of thing.

> And within one's own crew, Ken, was there – was there much talk about the odds of survival or was that ... was that also discouraged because of the – I mean, I mean the discouraging element of morbid thoughts, or was that quite open? Did people talk about that?

Not particularly, no, no. You tended to think it was like all these things. It was always the thing that was going to happen to the other fellow – like winning the lottery, that I'm never going to win the lottery but somebody does win it every day, but it was the same sort of thing in this. In fact that was the expression that was always used – that he'd bought it. But, um, – so you didn't – you had ....

END TAPE 3, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE B.

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes. Ken Gray, Bomber Command, Tape 3, side 2 or side 6.

[Ken Gray continues from Tape 3, side A])

So you sort of always felt that it was for everybody else, that this was going to happen, and if you're honest with yourself – if you're really honest with yourself – you had to say well `God I wonder if ever I'll make this thing', but you just felt that somehow deep down that it was you who were going to be all right. Now I suppose that was the same with all the fellows who did buy it. They probably thought exactly the same thing. That it was going to happen to somebody else.

Mmm. Until the last – the last awful moment.

Yes.

Um, well perhaps if we can go on just a little bit Ken, you in fact completed a tour with – it was with 101 Squadron and you went – you went then to operational instructing, could you tell us just briefly, because time is going on, about that and what it was also like to be doing flying in that kind of obviously much safer environment after the strains of operational flying?

I'm not so sure I'd agree with you it was much safer when they came from Ansons onto Wellingtons, which we were instructing on. Sometimes it was more dangerous. I know the Wellington had a – just as an aside – the Wellington had the flap and the undercarriage levers side by side and they were very similar levers and of course, you pulled your undercarriage up as soon as you were off the deck and then you pulled your flaps up when you were about 300–400 feet up. If you pulled your flaps up on the ground you were liable to go straight in. I always used to carry a great five cell torch battery – rubber torch ... torch, five cell torch – and the first time a pupil went to pull up the flaps instead of the undercarriage he'd get a smack on the back of the hand with this five cell torch and I guarantee he'd never do it again but that was highly fright-making. But, no, by this stage, Lichfield 27 Operational Training Unit had become an Autralian OTU and all the crews during my time there were Australian crews coming through to be trained onto Wellingtons with their crews before they still went on, later on, to Lancasters. So we had this period of intensive training where a fellow would come to you – or several crews – would come to you and on a good day – a good flying day, you'd strap an aeroplane on your backside at seven o'clock in the morning and you'd be in and out of it ... well your crews would be in and out of the aircraft four or five times during the day while you taught them – to convert them onto Wellingtons, which was a much heavier aircraft than the Anson or Oxford they'd been used to and you taught them purely to convert onto that heavier aircraft. Then from there you took them on a couple of exercises of – bombing exercises and cross country exercise and then you hand them over to another team of instructors who trained them up in bombing skills. If you like we were meant to be the master pilots with this specialised training aspect. It was an interesting feature, both of by day and by night and you did this very intensive training with them.

Just going back to one thing – I'm sorry this is out of context, Ken, but I had meant to ask you. I've just seen a note here. You were saying I think,

after six weeks with 101 Squadron you had become the senior crew on that squadron, how did that affect the morale of your crew? Is that an important thing?

Uh, oh yes. It was a sense of pride and we were the senior crew in period of operations, or number of operations carried out, and in fact I think, another crew and I, who finished together, were the first crewies on that squadron to finish a tour of operations in two and a half years. There'd been very heavy loss rates on that squadron. But it was more I think, a sense of pride to be the senior crew on the squadron rather than a feeling of Oh God, you know, when does our number come up?

(5.00) And you were saying then that on that squadron you had particularly heavy loss rates, was that because of the targets you'd been directed towards or because of morale or skill within the squadron?

Everybody had the same targets, it wasn't that. But we did have – what in fact actually led to this was that I suppose I was about number six or seven in the heirarchy when one night we had a particularly bad night when what were known as `German intruders' – German nightfighters – from time to time used to come across as the bomber stream was landing and then of course the lights were on the airfield, the lights were on on the aircraft and these intruders used to get into the landing pattern and then as an aircraft with it's wheels down and its flaps down was making it's final approach would come up and straight behind it and shoot it down. And on one night – I've forgotten the number now – it was eight or ten I think, no, it was ten or twelve – we lost ten or twelve aircraft actually in the circuit, just coming in to land from these intruders and these included the four or five crews who were ahead of me at that stage and so it was after that night that I shot up into senior crew.

And you could see all that happening ahead of you? Well how did you survive?

Got the hell out of the circuit and came back a bit later after it was all over. It happened all very quickly mark you, but once again people were tired and I suppose lacking in judgement and you know, they saw these things happen and just sort of plodded on the circuit, but the moment I saw one of these happen, I mean, we knew the intruders were always about, I turned off my navigation lights and made off for the English coast again for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes and came back again.

Mmm, that's most interesting. Again that relates to the importance of the individual crew operating. (phone rings) Perhaps just going on Ken. By this stage your I think, your rank was a – at the end of that tour you're a Flying Officer, I think?

That's right, yes.

... and you were awarded the DFC at the end of that tour.

Yes.

Was that – what was the citation? What was that for?

Oh I think the usual thing. For gallantry in operations against the enemy in the air and in particular the episode of the Stetten raid was recalled in the citation.

And were any other men of – on your crew decorated?

No, no, not at that time, no.

And how did you react? Was this a kind of ... Could I just ask was it – given the horrors you'd lived through – was it received with, I mean obviously with pride, but did one feel good about it or had the whole experience been so awful that it was almost the awfulness overshadowed the award?

Uh, really I think it's a bit like beating your head against a brick wall. If – certainly looking back on it now after forty-five years or whatever it is, some dreadful period – one doesn't feel that it was a horrifying experience at the time. It was harrowing but it wasn't – it wasn't a dreadful experience really at any time. It was harrowing and it was frightening at times but it had periods of great exhiliration. I think, yes, it was a feeling of not only a personal honour but an honour to the crew as well, because we were a crew and like all these things I think a lot of sense to be made in the way the Americans do things, sort of give everybody something. Our system was not and our system was that generally for a job well done sort of thing, it was given to the pilot and the rest of the crew got nothing, or a unit citation sort of thing, or a crew citation, probably would have been a better way of doing those sorts of things. But I suppose like all these things awards and decorations are always a hit and miss thing and a lot of people who should get them don't, and a lot of people who do don't – who should not, do.

Yes. Perhaps if we can just go on a little. We've covered it very, very thoroughly, the whole period of your operational flying. I think in late 1944 you were sent back to Australia via the States to collect Liberators but you – you in fact came back by sea. Could you just tell us very briefly that last episode in your air force career during the war, with the Liberators, Ken?

(10.00) Yes, as you say, we were to have picked up the Liberators in the States but this entered into some argument so we were then – American pilots, civilian pilots flew the aircraft out to Australia and so we came back by sea and then converted to Liberators in Tocumwal and I think at that stage, I don't know, I must have had about 1,200 hours up – flying hours up – and to my surprise ... having first of all been a captain of a Lancaster, when I think I had 185 hours up – and to my ... oh yeah, horror, I suppose in some ways I found that I had a second pilot who had over 1,000 hours up and a third pilot who'd had about 700 or 800 hours up and the frustration to those fellows must have been very great really to find themselves with those number of hours, which they'd built up in training command and training activities – not operational – then to find themselves on a squadron which in the event never really got operational during the war – find themselves in a squadron and having sit a second dickie to – second and third dickie to somebody else must have been terribly frustrating, I'm sure. But so we actually formed up a squadron of

... we were the fourth or fifth squadron to join – form up. The other squadrons got into operations, we got as far as Darwin when the war finished. In fact, I think literally on VE day, we were in – we were still, if my memory serves me correctly, we were still at Amberley outside Brisbane, where we had a shocking accident with one of the crews on that day too. We'd flown a formation flight over Brisbane on – because of VE day and there were a whole number of WAAFs in one of the aircraft and coming in to land the aircraft kissed, it crashed and killed the lot which was a shocking thing to happen on VE day – or the day after it might have been.

> Mmm, that's a very, very sad memory, because in fact I was going to ask you, perhaps if you could put aside that particular incident, and it must have been partic ... extremely harrowing. Being in Australia – this is VE Day 1945, looking back on what you'd survived and what a lot of men, of course, had not survived in Europe, what were your thoughts?

Well obviously one of great relief at this stage because it was over, we'd heard nothing. I certainly had heard nothing. I was singularly ignorant about atom bombs and so on and until the atom bombs came we thought we were going to have to grind away through the islands up to Japan and I think we were sort of looking at the prospect of another fifteen to eighteen months of war before – at least a horrible war of attrition which it would have been. I mean irrespective of the morality of the atom bomb as such, the usage of that bomb, the number of lives – both allied and Japanese that it saved were absolutely horrendous because there would have been hundreds, and hundreds, and hundreds of thousands of casualties in that period of conquest of Japan. And we saw what happened in Okinawa and so on and that was an outpost of the Japanese Empire. Once it got to the Japanese homeland I have little doubt they would have fought every inch of the way.

> Mm, yes, well that's certainly quite likely. So if we can just go onto the actual end of the war, the VJ Day – and I'd like to talk in a moment, just briefly about what you later did in the navy of course. Looking back on the whole period in which you flew in the war and obviously flew in very dangerous conditions, is there any one thing that stands out, any one or number of things that now, to you, are the most significant memories of that period? ... of the meaning of it or how it affected you?

Yes, yes. Um, I don't think – I'm sure it didn't affect me in any adverse way. I've got no hangups to the best of my knowledge. I've got no scars morally, mentally, or whatever as a result of the war in any way, I don't think. There was nothing that happened of which I was ashamed, a number of things of which I was quite proud. Significant events – oh I don't know – perhaps going to Buckingham Palace to receive my ... to be invested with my DFC may have been – was a wonderful occasion. Other occasions I think perhaps one that, if anything stamped itself on my phsycie as much as anything – more than anything else – was probably the raid we described in some detail on Stetten, where as they say, particularly the fact that made me wonder at the time as to why that aircraft feathered when we were back in safety when it would never feather and would have been disastrous if it had earlier in the operation, makes one wonder about some divine being, if you like, or some – something or other – so those sorts of things.

(15.00) The whole experience was a very worth while experience. I mean by the end of the war I was still only twenty – I'd just turned twenty-four a week before the war finished – and so a sort of feeling that you had probably during that period, more – in many ways – more power over important things than probably ever had since, strangely enough. It's a strange sort of feeling, but at a very tender age. I don't – I think it probably made me more a thoughtful person, I don't think I would – in my personal development I don't think would have been anything like as great if it had not been for that experience. I think I would have been a much narrower person had it not been for that experience. But I think probably one of the nicest things about it was I used to always think when you went on leave during the war, when you saw those barrage balloons coming into London it meant when you were coming down on leave, you know, you're away from it all, until the brutes started to drop bombs on London again, with the buzz-bombs and the V2s and equally as you left London going back to your squadron the sights of the barrage balloons a little behind you and thinking God, you know, be back to this lot again. But no it's – I don't know, I don't know that I had anything which was of tremendous impact on me in one way or the other. No flash of lightning, no Paul on the road to Damascus stuff, anyway.

> But that's interesting about the broadening of your life and the perception of life and so on. Of course after the war Ken, you took, in many senses, a radical turn in direction in terms of your career. Could you outline just briefly what happened when you left the air force and your later connection with the navy?

Yeah, well I left in – I left the air force early in `46 on demobilisation and I went back to the firm I'd been with. I'd – they were a firm with English principals, whom I'd seen during the time I'd – the three years or so I'd been in England. During the war I'd had a lot of contact with them and they sort of indicated to me that they'd like me to take over the Australian firm in due course when the then managing director, who was an Englishman, left which would be in six or seven or eight years. I would serve an apprenticeship, they seemed to get to know and like me and so on, but I got back and I started to think oh I don't know, this is not for me, this life. I didn't seem to like the idea of going to – I wasn't married at the time of course still, going to work in the morning, and coming home in the evenings and this sort of thing seemed a pretty dull existence after the war time experiences, and so oh late in 1947, about eighteen months after I'd been out of the air force, a friend of mine drew my attention one morning to the fact – knowing that I was dissatisfied with civilian life – and said `Had I seen the advertisements which navy had in the newspaper looking for pilots' and I said `Oh they wouldn't be interested in me. They'd be interested in fighter pilots'. He said `Oh well it doesn't say', and so I said `Oh I don't think so. I don't think that's my scene anyway', so I happened to be out doing some business that afternoon in Melbourne – Port Melbourne area – and I suddenly drove past Rowe Street – Rowe Street – `Oh' I said `that's the place that they said HMAS *Lonsdale* to enquire about this thing'. So I thought I may as well bob in and so I bobbed in and it was almost like the press gang. By the time I got in there before I knew they had me filling in forms to apply. I thought well that'll be the end of it, please send in your log book with the application etc., which I duly did and to my surprise a few weeks later – a

couple of weeks later – I got back a letter, please would I present myself for an interview. So I presented myself for an interview duly and with several of the most horrifying – to younger people, gentlemen of the navy at that time. I remember one of them was later Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Harrington, another one was Admiral Harries, and these two most frightening gentlemen were the interview board. I thought that fixes that anyway and to my even greater surprise a week or two later I got a little letter to say, pleased to advise I was in, would I report to HMAS – to the train to go to HMAS *Cerberus* on such and such a date in January 1948, go to the Commonwealth Government Clothing Factory to get fitted – to get measured for uniforms etc. etc. etc. Please tell us if you're not interested. So I duly was interested and so I joined the navy with twenty-three others, I think there were of us, who joined at that time as pilots – as acting lieutenants and so we joined and we spent then six months at Flinders Naval Depot learning to be naval officers and gentlemen and to become seamen. Then we did six months at sea getting watch keeping certificates in various ships and then at the end of that year we then went to UK for a year – for two years rather – for refresher flying and then exchange service with the Royal Navy before we came back in HMAS *Sydney* in my case on the second trip of *Sydney* which was in late 1950.

(20.00) Mm, that's very interesting Ken. Could we perhaps just end with two final questions? One is, when you went back to England, having been in England through a period of great danger and difficulty,

[Break in recording]

... Just two final questions Ken. Going back to England, post war England, what was that like and how did your memories of the war come back?

Init... oh yes, I was going to say there was initially no change. Yes. The first change was we went for our initial refresher flying, we went to an RAF unit and I think the first shock came on night one, because previously during the war every night in the mess – in the squadron mess – was a party going on or people that were having probably too much to drink on most occasions – and I remember this first evening going down to the mess and wondering where the action was and finding myself about the – one of about three people in the mess, having two quiet sherries and going having dinner and then going to bed and thought my God, you know, what's this all about. It was still a period of considerable – in fact rationing at that time was almost as savage as it had been during the war and in fact six months after arriving over there on that occasion I married. My wife was also an Australian but we married in England at that time. But it was obviously a period of change, the first changes were setting in. I've been back now four or five times subsequently for short and long visits but the first period of change was just starting to show itself then, I think, the whole change in British society if you like, that the old ways of the class system and so on had broken down quite rapidly during the war and this was manifesting itself in England when we were there in 1949–50.

Mmm, that's most interesting. The other question which I thought I might just end with because it relates directly back to your initial enthusiasm to fly is to ask you what was it like to land on an aircraft carrier in a little

fighter aircraft after you'd been flying this totally different, far larger aircraft landing onto a flat piece of ground?

Quite frankly I'd just as soon done an operation over Germany than land on an aircraft carrier. It's – it is – it requires a lot of skill at which ... which I didn't acquire too greatly. Unfortunately just as I was starting to land on the carrier they changed the deck landing system so I had to learn two systems virtually one after the other, but it is a very difficult – in those days – much more difficult than it is today, because with the angle deck today it is made much easier. There was this horrifying thought that you landed on a deck and if you didn't pick up a wire up came the crash barrier and you pounded – thumbed into that, which usually didn't do you, the individual, any harm at all. But didn't do your aeroplane a power of good. In fact almost invariably after a barrier arrest, it meant that the aircraft – the crew hopped out and the aircraft was usually thrown over the side because there was no room for a heavily damaged aircraft in a carrier. I think that was the most horrifying thing the first time you saw one of those things – one of those happen because this had never virtually happened in your experience before, but suddenly sort of land on, somebody else land and thump into the barrier behind you, having missed a wire and see as the barrier was dropped a whole lot of vehicles get around the aeroplane and heave it over the side. End of message, end of aeroplane. So it is a very – certainly in those earlier days with the straight deck – it was a much – very, very hazardous operation.

That's most interesting Ken. Just one final penultimate question which I'll ask – like to ask anybody, is there anything that you feel you would like to add to what you've said?

No, I don't think so, except perhaps to say that it's sounds a dreadful thing in relation to war, but I think it was an experience which I don't regret having had. If I knew what was happening ... well it would be easy I suppose if you knew what was happening – but certainly not one that I would resile from in relation to what I did and the life I led during that period. I think it was a – as I mentioned earlier, it was a wonderfully broadening experience.

(25.00) Now that doesn't mean to say that I'm gung ho and think we should be fighting a war every day of the week, but I do believe that war is not something to be ashamed of if you are forced into it. And I have no doubt in my mind that certainly what we fought in World War Two was a very necessary war. It's not saying in my case I don't – I believe that those we fought in Australia since World War Two were also very necessary from our point of view, but I know this is not a popular view in relation to many other things, but no, I don't think I've got anything to add.

Well, on behalf of the War Memorial, thank you.

Thank you indeed, it's been a most pleasant experience. I'm personally – perhaps if I could just say this. I think it's a great idea that this is being done now, from my personal point of view, had you come along and asked this ten years ago I wouldn't have been interested. Now this is a feature of being sixty-seven years of age as opposed to being fifty-seven years of age, you get, in these last few years, I've found myself getting

garrulous about `warries' and what happened in World War Two. Ten years ago I wasn't interested in talking about it, but now I am.

> Mm, that's most interesting Ken. Do you think that's because of the fact that we all get older and obviously in the end ... die or is that because of – because you see more clearly the events of your youth?

No I think it's – I don't know, it's just one of those quirks of memory, I think. It's easier to start remembering those – some of those things. Already it's easier to start remembering some of those things than some of the things that happened recently. It almost sounds as though I was ashamed of what happened forty-five years – or for thirty-five of those years. I certainly was not, but I've never been one of those who was a joiner of things like the RSL and all these associations and so on, but it's just in these last few years that I've tended to think more of those things that happened. Perhaps more time, I don't know. No idea.

> Oh well, that's good then when we're together. Thank you.

Thank you.

END TAPE 3, SIDE B.