



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE A.

This is Edward Stokes recording with Albert Pearson, No. 3 Squadron, tape one, side one, on 27 July 1990.

Albert, could we begin just with your year of birth and where you were born?

Yes, I was born in Birmingham in England, in the year 1921. And I came to Australia when I was about four, four and a half years old.

Right. And you were saying your father was a silversmith who later went into the timber trade?

That's right.

You grew up in the Sydney area, I think. When did you leave school?

I left school when I was fourteen years of age and - I'm not too sure what year that was now. Fourteen years of age, so on to 1921 (laughs).

Right, well say, '35, '36.

Yes, right.

You'd done third year in a junior tech?

Yes, a junior technical high school. And that's as far as I went in my schooling. But I did continue on into - into night tech, and - and, you know, into the electronic field, and things like that.

Mmm, well you - we'll come to the work you did pre-war in a moment, but you were saying you were always interested in radio, and so on.

Yes, I was interested in radio from a very young boy. And built crystal sets and fiddled around with simple things that didn't cost much money. And slowly developed an interest into ham radio and listening to overseas stations. And when the war started I was just interested in - at that time - in just becoming a radio amateur. I ...

And in that pre-war period were you - did you have your own equipment or were you working with friends?

Well, I had my own receiving equipment which I'd built myself. But I had the help of very many really nice people who were interested in the same field. And a lot of them were amateurs and built their own equipment. When I say 'built it', in those days they built everything, you know.

I guess it was quite exciting at that period too, in that radio was still a relative novelty.

That's right. Well everyone referred to it as wireless in those days (laughs). And it was, you know, a unique sort of hobby. Something a little different. And the ability to be able to talk to people in other parts of the world was a very interesting part of it.

Yes, I'm sure. And I think you were saying that in that pre-war period, besides building equipment, and so on, you'd learnt the rudiments of Morse?

Yes, I learnt that again from, well, an old friend of mine, that used to live in this same area. And he was a world war one digger. And he was a very keen Morse operator. Most of the radio operators in those days were Morse operator people. And he developed me. And, when I mentioned that I was going to join the air force, he ensured that he'd get my number of words per minute up, you know, and he helped me.

That's most interesting. On the other side, I think for work you were working as a motion-picture projectionist?

Yes, I - I spent most of my days prior to joining the air force in the motion-picture field and I found that very, very interesting. And technically I enjoyed that part of it too.

And I'm sure that fiddling with equipment and so on would have crossed over a bit to the radio work?

Well you know, the amplification side of things and the methods used is all related. You know, it's all just an extension of it really.

That's most interesting. Two other things just to ask perhaps about the pre-war period. The general tradition of Australians and New Zealanders in the first war, the ANZAC tradition, were you particularly conscious of that, or not? As a boy, as a young man.

Well I would say that I came from a family that were very much royalists. My dad always used to show the flag, which was a very important part of his life, and I followed through with that. And I used to go into town and see people march on ANZAC Day; and it used to give me certain little feelings, which I thought was something very nice about it really. I - not that I think war is a good thing, I don't - but I think there is a lot of good things that do come from war.

Mmm. Yes, that's obviously a different thing, isn't it? The political developments in Europe in the thirties, that obviously accelerated after the period when you left school, Hitler's rise to power, and so on, how conscious of those events were you?

(5.00) Well I was conscience [sic] mainly I suppose, or my conscience of that sort of world, was from what you saw on motion picture newsreels and things like that, and heard on the radio news, and things like that. I used to listen to Germany on the shortwave band prior to the war and was very impressed by the technical standard of the transmissions, and the type of music that they played, and I thought that it was - you know, they had something going for them in the field of engineering.

Mmm. That's most interesting. Did you talk about the political developments with your mates, and so on or not?

Not very much at all really. No, I don't think I was very much politically orientated in any direction. No, I don't think I spoke very much. But of course when war was sort of coming most of the young fellows seemed to want to do something about it, you know.

I guess of course Australia was very isolated from Europe. Well let's move on to the war. War breaks out, do you actually have any recollection, I mean were you listening on your own gear to the declaration of war?

No, I can remember very clearly the declaration of war from a radio receiver, which I heard, you know, at the time that it was declared. And also the Australian prime minister making his dedication from Australia to assist the mother country, as it was termed in those days.

Looking back to that, could you recall what flashed through your mind?

Not really, I can't say, you know, this was a milestone, this was something that I'd never, ever experienced before in my life - the fact that, you know, that we were at war, sort of thing. I just I think it was a little bit shocking really to just hear that news, and not really fully understand what it really meant. What was really behind it, you know. We were being threatened, or there was - the peace of the world was being threatened, and I think that was an important thing. An important part of it.

Right. Well you have already told me before that in fact you were planning to enlist and I think you'd gone through the motions, leading up to your eighteenth birthday, in the permanent air force.

That's right.

With your background in Morse and so on, I think your enlistment came through very rapidly?

Yes, it came through I think more rapidly than I expected it to. And I think the reason for that was that they wanted people that could operate radio equipment. They had a very small air force reserve which was basically made up of amateur type of people. And they were quickly recruited. And I think the fact that I could do morse code, I did have some background, very basic background in radio, but I think that helped to make my entrance into the air force much, perhaps, quicker than it would have been under normal circumstances.

Well the date we have actually is the 4th December, '39. That was certainly much faster than the generality of men from people I've talked to, it's - you know, it was often six, nine months. You went first to Richmond for your rookies' training, as an AC1 wireless operator. What's your recollection of that first induction into the general discipline, and so on, of the air force?

I really enjoyed what I experienced in the first few days of being at Richmond. The people that I had dealings with, you know, you hear references made to the mighty sergeant, and things like this - I found them all very much down to earth people. And very much human beings. And they had a job to do, and I thought they did it very, very well. And it did not disturb me in any way, the discipline and that part of it did not affect me in any way.

Sure. That early rookies' training, besides the parade-ground bashing that I'm sure was part of it - what were the other aspects of that very first training?

Well the basic aspects of it was to, as you say, you know, to be able to participate in parades and discipline - being able to be told what to do and to do it, sort of thing. And of course I always had that interest of being a part of something which ended up with that aeroplane flying in the sky. So I think that's the sort of feeling you got that you were doing something that was beneficial to other people.

Well let's move on to the more important training vis-à-vis your radio work. You went to 1 Technical Training which was at West Melbourne. What were the different aspects of your training there?

Well the main part of that training was to ensure that people - and some of the people on the course had never done morse code before in their life. So they had to become familiarised with this new method of communication, then to be able to know how to set up a radio transmitter and receiver and to know that it was functioning correctly.

So this is both the maintenance and the operation?

(10.00) Yes, both the maintenance and operation in those days was done by the wireless - what was termed the wireless operator. He was anyone involved with the maintenance, the operation, installation of radio equipment.

Did you work on one or two different kinds of radio receiver-transmitter, or did you have a whole broad range of equipment?

No, worked on quite a variety of transmitters. Some of them were classed as a transmitter-receiver in the one unit and they were identified by a TR number, you know. And others had an identification that meant, because it had a T in front of it - say 1082, T1083 was a typical transmitter - but it meant that T, the transmitter 1083, was a model of a transmitter. And the receiver that functioned with this transmitter had an R in front of it - R 1082. But that was just one of them. And that was a universal type of transmitter-receiver that was used on the ground in a station, that was a permanent structure and also in larger type of aircraft.

Just going on to the aspect of maintenance, were you trained to the level of really being able to strip down complex gear that had major problems, or more just to the level of sorting out minor day-to-day hiccups in it?

Well I wouldn't say that we were trained to work on equipment that had major problems, but you developed a knowledge, you developed an ability of your own, to be able to work on any of these units that you were involved with. And really I'm saying more this about the RAF or the RAAF in comparison to the American system, but we repaired most things. We didn't have other units that you could pull off the shelf and put in in its place; whereas I found with my little association with the Americans, they had a spare unit. If something wasn't fixed they pulled it out and they were serviceable within, well, you know, a short time. Whereas we would probably spend - you could spend days in pulling it down. And I think this happened also with aircraft, with the engines in the aircraft itself. It was a different method used by us in comparing it with the American system.

That's most interesting - I guess reflecting the general industrial power of the States and their volume of production.

I think, and the amount of material available. You know. We were lucky to have a spare valve at times for things (laughs), whereas they had no hesitation in providing many, many valves. And helped us out at times when we were in a bit of a spot, no problems at all.

Right. Going back to the technical training, I think you were saying other aspects included things such as operational procedures, Aldis?

Yes. You know, communication. Really radio was only one part of it in those days particularly. Other methods used were ordinary telephone lines and morse signals being sent over telephone lines. Coded morse signals being sent over telephone lines. Coded speech being sent over telephone lines. Aldis lamp because of - well one thing is the secrecy of messages were very much contained and, unless you were in the focus of the lamp, you couldn't hear what was going on, an aeroplane flying over a ship or something like that. The ideal communication method is passing messages by means of light from one person to the other.

That's an interesting point about Aldis. I've never realised that, that it's very focussed, therefore if you're not in the line of sight you can't really receive it.

That's right. If you get off the - what I'll use as the term 'beam' - you're out of the thing and it's much more difficult to read. So that if it is focussed, and, you know, even a simple Aldis lamp has a telescopic lens system which allows you to focus it on the point that you want to send the signal to. And from hill to hill in different terrain it's a very ideal method of passing information.

Right. And you were also saying morse by flags that must have ...

Yes, morse by flag was used a lot by the army people. And again I think this originated back in the very early days and where you'd have an army unit, again on high terrain and that - they could stand there and just wave this flag and they had a method of actually sending the dots and dashes in the movement of the flag.

It's always amazed me how morse people can transmit at the speed they do. You were talking about this point about it being almost like music?

That's right. You think of it purely as a musical tone. And whereas you see it written, you know, of dots and dashes and people refer to it as dots and dashes, the morse code, and of course it can be used that way. But when you're receiving the tone of this morse symbol, you're listening to really a musical tone, I'd say. And that's how you sort of remember it in the brain. And you don't really think, you write it down - you hear this musical note and you write it down. And I think that's how you become very fast and very familiarised with it.

And I assume it really is operating at a level beyond conscious memory? The morse code is so well-known that it's just an intuitive, instinctive response?

(15.00) Yes, they say - and I think this is true - when you're learning it you go through stages where you'll get to a certain speed - fairly slow speed, we'll say up to five words a minute - and then to move on to the next step, which might be up to seven and a half, eight inches - eight words - a minute, there might be a sort of a barrier comes in. And you develop that method of breaking that barrier down and you go on then. And from ten to fifteen, you might find that comes much quicker. So it's a process that you develop speed as you use it really.

Mmm.

But there are little spots where you stumble. Find you can't get beyond that point. Sending seems to be much easier than receiving to most people.

That's interesting. Well just to prove the point that an old morse hand never loses his memory, let's read off 'the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive'.

[Mr Pearson sounds out the morse equivalent].

(Laughs) that's great. We ...

That was the Keith Murdoch, by the way, that part of it.

Right. Well we might - we might also suggest to the transcriber, I think, that that's skipped over (laughs). Right, well let's move on. Except just one final comment. Looking back on your training, if you had to rate it from poor to good to excellent, how would you rate it?

The actual training I received in the air force? I would say that it was very good but it was a lot of it on your own initiative. A lot of it on your own initiative. The instructors that we were associated with were very, very good people. But again the early training was something they had to do in a fairly short period of time and it really did mean the initiative of the person. The ability of the person to get involved rather than be brilliant was important I think.

Mmm. That's a most interesting point. Well let's move on. You were posted directly from there to No. 3 Squadron, based then of course at Richmond, and arrived there about Easter 1940. Of course then it was an army co-op squadron. What were your basic duties at Richmond?

Well the basic duties of a wireless operator in those days was to first of all maintain the equipment, again install the equipment, ensure that it had its daily inspection. And, like all aeroplane equipment after a certain number of flying hours, there are certain requirements made in the testing of equipment. Like pulling it out of aircraft and possibly pulling it down, and checking all the wiring inside the aircraft. And that has, is performed at regular number of flying hours. I think it - my recollection's thirty hours. There was an inspection at sixty hours, and so on and so forth.

And then the wireless operator in 3 Squadron in those days used to sit in the back of the aeroplane and go up and send the weather reports down to a base station. And they used to take the winds and the barometric pressures and all those pieces of information, which these days are done by a more scientific ground unit, you know, with balloons and devices.

Well why wasn't that information recorded in the planes and then taken down to the ground? Was it just to save time or because the planes were staying up there for long periods to give ongoing weather reports?

No, I can't really say why that was not done. I think perhaps I was going to say that the reason would be that they'd get it from one point to the other with a minimum of distortion perhaps and no irregularities. I don't know the real reason why they did it that way, no.

Right, well the other aspect too I think you were saying, was that because the squadron was an army co-op squadron then there was a certain amount of training in the army co-op procedures?

Yes, well the Army Co-operation Unit is a unit that functions very much so with the army artillery units. And its main purpose is a spotting force that observes where the shells are falling. And they send back - or they did in those days - send back, in morse signals, information which the operator, which was an air force operator who was associated with the battery on the ground, would know, decode the thing very quickly - it was a very simple code - and would know that, 'Okay, we're dropping the shells right on target', and they had a code which was 'KT' which meant 'Fire'. And they knew that the shells should be dropping on the right spot. So the means of communication from that pilot who was the observer, to the person who was in charge of the control of the guns, was sort of immediate, and should be very accurate.

Life at Richmond, in a more general sense, both life actually on the base and I'd imagine occasionally getting into Sydney and so on, how do you recall that? Was it good or not?

(20.00) I would say it was very, very good. At the time we went to Richmond most of the airmen were living in very good quarters, perhaps two in a room. And of course the fact that we were a unit that was going to move out (laughs), we eventually ended up living in

tents. But the normal facilities available to you, like washing facilities, toilet facilities, were all very, very good. There was a nice motion-picture theatre - it's still there, stands at Richmond - and entertainment was provided very regularly and very good entertainment. And the general feeling was very, very good, I feel.

Well let's move on to the squadron leaving Australia. Of course there was no knowledge, I know, that - of precisely where you were going. Once you knew you were going to go overseas though, what were your personal feelings?

I think most people were very excited about this. They didn't quite know what was ahead of them but And of course, as you say, we didn't know where we were going. We had ideas but we thought we might end up in England or anywhere. But there was a certain excitement about the whole business. Everyone was - something ahead which we're not too sure about but we felt we were doing a job, I think.

And your own family, how did they feel?

Well being a royalist type of family I think they were somewhat disturbed that I was going away. But in other ways felt that I was doing my little bit for king and country if I might use those terms.

Well let's go on to the actual departure, leaving Richmond, boarding the *Orontes*, how do you recall that?

Well we left Richmond fairly early on the morning of 15th July. All our kitbags were loaded onto trucks and they were transported to the local railway station, to Claredon [sic]. But the squadron as a whole marched through the gates and marched up to the station, which was a reasonable distance, and boarded the train and was transported then to Pymont, via goods lines, really. We went through all the back of Canterbury - I can remember seeing Canterbury and places like that - and ended up on the wharf at Pymont, with the *Orontes* docked right alongside the train sort of thing.

Well she was a a great ship or one of the great ships of that era.

Yes. Yes.

What's your recollection of settling onto the ship?

Very, very good. Of course when we arrived on board the boat the governor-general of the day came and inspected us and said goodbye to us. There were lots of civilian passengers because she was still functioning as a passenger liner at this stage and was transporting people

back to England and other countries. We were not too sure where we were going to - but they were transporting people.

We had very good accommodation - two in a cabin. We had our meals in very good dining-room facilities were available to us and we were treated like lords really on board the boat. And it was a very It was as if we were going away on a tourist trip.

Mmm. This is this sheet of newspaper, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1940, photos taken on your embarkation. It's an interesting comment on censorship that it wasn't until September that this was published.

That's right.

Had things leaked out, were there people, family and so on, down at the wharf when you left or not?

Well there were a couple of people I knew were on the wharf because they were involved with the Harbour Trust and things like that. And they did find out that we were going. Don't ask me how. Well of course we didn't know exactly ourselves how we were going, what boat we were going on.

And all the way in to the wharf in the train, there were people waving to the train. Whether it was just because it was a train with troops on board, I suppose. But there were certain people that seemed to be aware that there was movement, something was happening. And they probably had relatives who knew that they'd gone back to the base on the Sunday and we left on the Monday. So there wasn't a big delay between the time of saying goodbye and departing from the country.

Actually sailing up out of the Heads, do you remember that?

Yeah, very clearly. It was very late in the afternoon and the sun was just setting. It was a very pretty sight to see the whole harbour as we did proceed up the harbour, and out through the Heads. Very, very - very, very touching departure, really.

Were there thoughts for the future, of what lay ahead?

Yeah. Not too sure what lay ahead. Yes, there were those sorts of thoughts though.

Well moving on to the voyage itself, I know you stopped at Melbourne where you picked up No. 1 Squadron who got dropped off at Singapore with their

Wirraways, but going on during the voyage, when you were escorted, I think you were saying there was some ongoing training, at least for wirelessmen?

Yes, radiomen or wirelessmen, as we'll term them, in those days were sort of - considered that there was things they had to learn and that there were certain times that had to be spent on study. Even though they were probably on a little holiday trip, if you might term it, before they got there.

(25.00) And so each day there were lectures arranged on equipment, the type of equipment, on procedures that should be used. And things related to the type of duties they were expected to perform. So that was an ongoing thing that was there all the way across to the Middle East.

Do you think in that sense that wirelessmen were a little apart from perhaps other musterings in that there's a kind of keenness to learn their discipline in a sense, to learn their - what was their great skill?

No, I wouldn't say there was a great difference. I think that they certainly were treated differently. At times, you know where the other people might have to do guard duties, at times the radio people might be exempt from it. But the main purpose being that a lot of them were on duties at all hours, night and day. And so whereas the other people may have only been functioning during daylight hours, they were sort of given this little period where they could be in bed, having a sleep in day-time hours. So they did get sort of isolated a little from some of the other people. But no, I think they appreciated everything that whatever the man was doing, even if it was cooking your breakfast for you, he was doing a very important task. And there was no real separation, from that point of view.

Other aspects of the voyage, recreation, living conditions on the *Orontes*, how do you remember that?

Very, very good. Regular movies, picture shows. The news was broadcast over the PA system on the boat. We were under blackout conditions of course. We were under escort from Sydney right through to the Middle East. Not in convoy but on the *Orontes* we were under, you know, navy escort. Entertainment was organised on the boat, we had our physical instruction, our physical culture - little classes. The people on board the boat were very, very good. They treated us just as other passengers, there was no differences really in that field. And it was very enjoyable.

You did stop off in Singapore, as we've just said. No. 1 Squadron left you there. Were there any feelings then that, although there was a war in Europe, there were tensions in Asia as well? Although Japan's intentions at this stage weren't precisely clear. But were there any feelings that your place was in Australia's region, not Europe?

No, I don't think so. Again, when we got to Singapore we still didn't know where we were going. There was a lot of activity on the wharf at Singapore and a lot of people boarding the boat that were related to army personnel that had been in Singapore doing their tour of duty there. And so there were wives and children and people like that that did travel on the boat. But we still weren't sure where we were going and I don't think we really thought that there was any major danger as far as Singapore was concerned. We didn't feel there was a problem there, although No 1 Squadron had been disembarked there with their Wirraway aeroplanes, so there must have been some reason for that, you know.

Right. Well let's move on a little bit, perhaps skating over the voyage, of course you went to Colombo, on to Bombay. There you transhipped to a ship that was a far cry from this wonderful ship you'd been on.

Oh, a very big contrast. We were transported over - well we were not transported over - we walked along the wharf and got on to - the *Dilwara* was the name of the ship. It was a ship that was carrying English troops to and from the India area for many, many, many years - horses and all that sort of thing. So you can imagine it was a very big contrast from the passenger liner that we'd just left.

The conditions of eating were one long mess table and your hammock was strung up above the mess table. A large number of people crowded into a very limited area and not very hygienic from that point of view. Facilities, toilet facilities and things like that - very, very crude. And in general terms the old Aussie didn't seem to appreciate this very much at all.

Do you think the ship said something about the British attitude to their troops?

I think it was the attitude that must have existed over many years in particularly the British Army. You know there was a very Just the fact that the discipline of course was different. I don't think the British - there were British people on board, British soldiers and that - they were not in any way disturbed by the conditions that we were disturbed by. They'd bring the food up in bulk containers from the cookhouse and you could smell it before it left the cookhouse. And kippers was one thing they used to feed and they used to just about be standing up on their tails.

So I think most of the Australians were eating from what they call the NAAFI, or the little tuckshop on board the boat, and sleeping - they didn't want to sleep down where all the smells of the food and that down inside the boat - and they wanted to sleep out on the open air deck. So there were these contrasts that were different to the English type of serviceman.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

This is Ed Stokes, with Albert Pearson, No. 3 Squadron, tape one, side two.

Albert, you were saying that, after boarding the *Dilwara*, there was some real tension and there was even the threat of Australians deciding they'd be happier on land than on board the *Dilwara*?

Yes, this was very, very much so. The CO of the unit came down and spoke to the people. Representation had been made to him and to the doctor. The doctor came down and was very upset with what he saw, and what was the normal living conditions, and there was a suggestion that perhaps the whole squadron would walk off down the gangplank and camp on the docks at Bombay.

But that was quickly - well what will I say? - Not It didn't happen because the boat moved out into stream in the early hours of the evening and the next morning we were quite some considerable distance from the docks. So to get back on to the docks wouldn't have been easy. But the CO and the officers of the unit were very much appreciative of what the people were objecting to and were trying to do all they could do to ensure that changes were made. And they were made. We were able to sleep out on deck every night. The food did improve and things like that.

Well that's interesting. We might perhaps skate over the rest of the voyage to the Middle East, unless there's anything that you think's particularly significant?

No, it was interesting to be in a convoy for the first time. And we had some ships there that were about capable of six knots or something like that. So you can imagine in a convoy the slower ship controls the movement and this can be very difficult for the navy escorts and things like this.

Yes. I always think that must be terribly frustrating (laughs). Let's move on. You arrive in the Middle East. Of course I'm sure a lot of your impressions occurred not immediately on arriving, but after some time. But just thinking of the first few months generally you were in the Middle East, what were your impressions of the landscape, of the people?

We were in a different world. We'd gone back over years and years. There was the little donkey being used to transport people around, the old methods of crushing their grain and It was like going back in time, back to the days of Jesus Christ really. It was just unbelievable that you'd been transported from what we'd say a modern world into a world that has just gone back over the ages.

Was that a stimulating experience for you or a threatening one?

I found it an extremely interesting experience, one that was very hard to put into words. But you had a feeling that you were amongst something that had happened before. It was just - and this part of the world of course has always been in the history books, you know, and here you were in amongst it. It was very hard to believe you were there at the time.

Other people I've talked to have mentioned occasionally in airstrips, right out in the desert, coming across - or rather Bedouin people coming across their camps. Do you remember that?

Yes, I clearly remember - this was going on a little bit from where we are now - but coming up against a Bedouin group in the desert and being invited into their camp. And feeling a little bit unsure of ourselves. But we were invited in, we were made very, very comfortable. We were given eggs to eat and some of their own prepared meals. Not that we had a lot of it. But I remember their ladies all giggling in the background with their normal dress, faces covered and all this.

But there was a friendliness about these people. There they were with all their worldly goods, all their worldly possessions, animals and chooks and things, out in the never-never, no one else around them. And living under this very dilapidated type of canvas structure. But a feeling of wanting to be friendly with you.

(5.00) Do you have any other particular recollections on this general theme of Middle Eastern life?

Yes, I think the value of Middle Eastern life was not as valued as we would look at it. You know, not as, what That's not quite, no ...

Do you mean that life was seen in a cheaper sense?

Yes, in a cheaper - not as important. There was a saying there that if you knocked someone down in a truck driving down the street, make sure you reversed the vehicle and went back over them, because it would cost more money to bury them or to put them in hospital, than to bury them sort of thing. You know, the value of life, the value of food they seemed to live on a very small amount of food, and things like this.

Mmm.

There was a definite difference.

Let's actually move on to the story of No. 3 Squadron. I know there was this period of confusion when you arrived in the Middle East and that, even at quite senior levels, there was an uncertainty as to what you were to do?

Well I think the first problem arose through the fact that we had an army man in charge of all the troops, Australian troops, in the Middle East - General Wavell. And here was an air force unit pushed on his doorstep. What was he going to do with it? He didn't know how to use it. He didn't really - I don't think - understand what it was all about and he didn't know what to do with the unit. They had no aircraft at this stage so, you know, what could you do with them? I think that was the big problem.

The RAF on the other hand said, 'Oh, trained people, people that know what it's all about, we can use them'. And they were only too happy to take these people and make them a part of their group. No problems at all.

Mmm. Right. Well I know you did go first to Ismailia.

Yes.

And from there men were shunted off to certain different units. I think you yourself stayed there and were involved in the RAF signal station?

Yes, a number of us there were involved. We were placed on a watch - that's a period of time that you were on duty in the receiving station. Some went to the transmitting station. And, being a permanent air force station, it was in constant communication with other parts of the Middle East, England. And so there was a fair amount of communication activity on the actual station. So really we became involved in the day-to-day operations of communication.

Right. And of course during this period there is the move away from being an army co-op squadron to a fighter squadron and therefore the need for fewer wireless men in No 3. After Ismailia I think you went to Abu Suier.

Yes. That was another permanent RAF station. And there we Again a certain number of our people went there. A certain number of 3 Squadron people went there with us. And we had an aircraft allocated to us. Mainly to get familiarised with the type of equipment, which was different to ours - it was RAF equipment which we hadn't seen. And also to go for a flight around the area. They used to do a flight almost on dusk every night. I think it might have been a show-the-flag flight sort of thing. And a wireless operator went in the aeroplane. I think these were Hawker Harts or Hawker Hinds. They were very old aeroplanes, you know.

But this particular aeroplane that was allocated to our squadron was put on some sort of standby duty and therefore it was taken away from us. And we then were allocated an even older aeroplane to - well to practise on, I think, is the term you could use here - to get familiarised with.

Well from there you moved, I know, on to Helwan and I think you were saying there was more radio familiarisation during this period?

Yes, there was still some army co-operation equipment. The Army Co-operation Unit, the man that went with the guns had a portable unit that he carried on his back. Pretty heavy sort of backpack but nevertheless it was a self-contained battery operated unit. And these had been supplied to us, obviously from the RAF. And so we had to check them out, ensure they were operational and get familiarised with them. So we did this, even though we were in the process of not becoming an army co-operation squadron for too long, by the look of things, you know.

Let's clarify something else here too, Bert. Because, as you're saying and I mean it's obvious in a sense, that despite not being an army co-op squadron, there was a very strong role still for wirelessmen. In a fighter squadron, as you became, what were the clearly defined roles, as you'd see it, for a wireless operator?

(10.00) The wireless operator is responsible for the operational and, what they used to term, daily routines of the equipment - other routines which are over longer periods which are dependent upon the flying hours of the aeroplane. And I think, if I recollect, thirty hours was one period when you had to do certain tests, and this was all laid down instructions. Sixty hours was another one. And then there was ensuring that A lot of these things operated from batteries which were not charged while the aeroplane was flying - they had no generator charging them. So they had to be regularly taken out, put on a charging plant, charged up and then reinstalled back in the aeroplane. Should have been enough batteries, and there was in most cases, to ensure you had a changeover unit.

The aerial system on the aeroplane - they'd been in operations so naturally the aerial system could be shot away, the receiver itself could have a bullet through it and things like this.

So there was a general maintenance, a general insurance that the equipment is up to tip-top condition. Communication with another unit on the ground - so there had to be a base station available to them. And that was Generalising that communication to the aircraft was a vital part of the role.

And of course ground-to-air communication with the aircraft while they were actually flying.

While they were in operation, yes, yes. While they were in operations, very interesting. And I can remember one of our pilots, Turnbull - do you remember his name? - He used to come up with some very funny sayings when he was involved in aerial combat.

But prior to this time most of the pilots did still operate morse code. And they sent a lot of their messages on the key. And at this time there was just a slight change coming in - that voice was easier to do. They didn't have to worry about learning the code, although they knew it - most pilots did. And they even did little training courses where they But they could talk and their communication was there straight away. There was no doubts about it.

The idea of fighting a plane or being about to fight a plane and, at the same time, operating morse code to me seems almost - I mean a very complex thing to be doing.

Well of course I think in that case the priority would have to be for the role that you were playing in this, to stay up in the air and to ensure that you got the first. But they still had to be able to communicate. If they were in a one-seater aeroplane and the equipment wasn't for radio-telephony, then they had to be able to send morse code.

Well let's move on a little bit. Some time after this you were seconded to an RAF squadron, 112, which was part of 202 group.

Yes.

You were telling me that - or one of the interesting things at this point was that your daily radio checks actually could be listened to, and vice versa, with the Italians?

Yes, the Italians at this stage had CR42s which were somewhat similar in age and that to the type of aircraft we were using - the Gauntlets and the Gladiators. And they would come up every morning on their radios, on their particular frequencies, which were almost directly on the same frequency that we were on. And they'd be doing their radio checks from plane to plane and from plane to their control. And we'd be doing the same thing.

So it wasn't uncommon to hear the Italian, 'Pronto, pronto', which I think is 'Attention' coming across on our frequencies. So you can see that the distance between the two landing grounds, the strips or parts of the desert, were not very far apart because the range of these receiving equipment and transmitting equipment wasn't that great.

What was the average range at this stage that you could operate, for instance, with ground to air contact with your own planes?

Well in the type of planes and the type of equipment we were using, I couldn't really honestly say I know exactly how far it was. But it wasn't very far when you compare it with modern ...

But are we talking about ten miles or fifty miles?

Well certainly, if you could see the aeroplane in the sky you could hear him quite okay (laughs). But we could hear aircraft - we were on El Adem which was an aerodrome to the south of Tobruk - and we could hear aircraft over Tobruk - and possibly over the Mediterranean - quite clearly. But it wasn't a long distance. It wasn't a large distance.

Right. You were saying that - this is just to put a date in here, January '41 - you were still with this RAF squadron and this is the beginning of the first push against the Italians.

Yes.

This sounds very interesting, that you were - mostly then, you were saying, I think - out to forward landing grounds?

(15.00) Yes, well the object of a unit is to have the aircraft as close to the front-line, as close to the enemy as they can get. For one thing the hours that you can fly it for, the petrol consumption and all this sort of thing. Being able to get quickly back into battle after you've had an encounter. Being able to put new armament into the guns and things like this.

So they did have advance landing strips and these were almost in amongst the army units. They were right up near the front-line and of course communication again very vital. So they had to have radio people there and mechanics there, in case aircraft had problems, came in, and wanted to be reserviced and go back out into operation. So ...

How many men would there have been at one of these forward landing grounds?

I would say at some of them possibly eight or nine people. Total. About eight or nine people.

Oh, so a very, very small number.

Pretty small, yes.

I mean you're looking at a wireless man, a refueller, a few mechanics and that's about it?

Yes. Well cook usually, if possible a cook or - yeah, a few people like that. But it wasn't a large number of people. It wasn't a large number.

Would you have had an officer with you or a sergeant, a warrant-officer?

The unit I was with, the highest ranking person there was a sergeant, RAF sergeant. And there was no officer there. No.

And so while you were on these forward landing grounds you basically led a very independent life did you, from other - I mean you were self-contained?

You were completely isolated basically. You might have an ack-ack group or something like that around you. Because if the aircraft came in to land, for refuelling and other purposes, they had to be protected, so that if the enemy did come in and attack them, they had some means of keeping them away. So that there was usually an army ack-ack unit very closely associated with the advanced landing grounds.

Well I assume that living conditions were fairly primitive?

Very primitive. And because you were getting up closer and closer to the battle line you spent most of your time in a hole dug in the ground and even installed your radio equipment in the ground. It's no good being above the ground if they start throwing shells around, so you've got to get out of the way as much as you can. And of course you start off, you think You see a tent there but a tent's no good when you start getting so close to that sort of operation. So you'd be in very ...

So you had your radio, your wireless, set up in a little foxhole.

In a little foxhole basically, yes.

Well tell us about that. Could you picture being in it? What it was like?

You got quite used to it. It didn't worry you. It wasn't too small. You made it - you'd made this yourself. You dug it and made it big enough to get your equipment in. Sometimes they'd take the equipment out in the daytime and probably go above ground and use it because it wasn't very difficult to move the equipment. But night operations and that, or any battle areas

that were active, you kept it out of the way. And it was a means of making sure that it was still functional.

Dust of course was, both in terms of living conditions being a sort of gritty unpleasantness but with aircraft a great problem with their engines and so on. What about dust and wireless?

Very bad. Very bad. Although they still seemed to function. And this one thing I must say for the type of equipment that we were using - it still seemed to function. We didn't get too many failures that you could say, 'The thing is no good, throw it away'. It still functioned. But yes, it is a problem. When you can't see more than about two feet in front of you or something like this and that's not exaggerated.

One advantage if your aerial comes down in the desert, you could quite often operate with the aerial laying on the ground because the conductivity of the sand or - it's not so much sand, it's a dust rather than a sand - is so good that the aerial will still function laying on the ground. And to ensure that you did get a good earth system, you used to have to run out chicken wire, or similar wire to chicken wire, and lay this right along the ground under the radio installation. And that became the earth system.

And the ground itself - if you put a stake into the ground it just didn't mean a thing. It may as well not be connected to the ground. There was very little conductivity.

Was that because the ground was extremely dry?

Very dry, yes. That's the main purpose, main reason for it. Yes.

That's interesting. So that in a situation as say we are here in Sydney - ground conducts. I mean you can earth something.

It's very good, yes.

It's the water not the earth that's conducting, is it?

Well it's ...

Is it the water content?

... it's the water and the type of rock that we have, the type of ironstone and things like this in the rock, that is a good conductor. But you can lay the thing on the ground in the desert and you possibly wouldn't know the aerial was laying on the ground. I've seen cases where this has happened.

Well on to a couple of other aspects of this period. I know they were very remote little spots. And you apparently yourself were lost at some point. Tell us about that?

Well the squadron knew that I was on an attachment to this English squadron which was 112. They used to call them the Shark Squadron because the front of their aeroplane was painted and it looked just like the front of a shark. And they were a similar squadron to 3 Squadron - in the same group. And, really the squadron knew I was with 112 Squadron. Okay, they knew where 112 Squadron was but they didn't really know where the advanced landing group was or if I was with them. They just lost track of me really.

(20.00) And it was only when one of our pilots landed there one day. Because, being an advance landing ground, it was used by just not the one squadron - many squadrons could use it. Bombers would come in in the daytime and stay there for a while and then go off in the night, so it put them closer to the target. And they just didn't know where I was for quite a while. But eventually, after meeting one of the pilots from the unit who landed there, I was able to make him aware where I was and that I was still functional.

Oh right. When you said you were lost, I thought that you meant you'd lost your bearings and wandered off (laughs).

No, no. As far as the squadron was concerned I was lost. They didn't know where I was at that stage.

Right.

Mind you I probably didn't know where I was either (laughs).

One interesting aspect perhaps of the whole wireless story in the Middle East, not just this period, was did men listen much to radio broadcasts from Europe, from Germany?

Yes. One of our spare-time jobs, if you might use that term, was to build little radio-sets up - one in the sergeants' mess, probably. Although the mess, sergeants' mess really didn't exist but the area where perhaps they might eat on a reasonable-sized station. And was to build

little radio receivers up that were capable of receiving overseas shortwave stations and hearing what was going on.

And I frequently listened on one of these R1082 receivers, which was a very, very simple type of receiver, very early type of receiver. And I could hear Australia quite clearly and listen to the news. We used to listen on the longwave band, which they used in Europe, to Germany regularly, in the desert. And we first heard *Lili Marlene* played regularly from the German short - not shortwave station - longwave station which was coming from part of Europe.

Because that's ...

There was very much an interest in listening to what was going on in the outside world. Frequently we knew we were in an operation. Our squadron had been in an air battle and quite often we'd hear the BBC make reference to the fact that the Australian squadron in the Middle East had shot down so many aeroplanes.

Well moving on a little bit, in late January. This is just after a pause. You were telling me an interesting anecdote about rats?

Yes. In the desert itself there are large rats, and they are very big rats and there [sic] are plentiful. And sometimes in the tent area of a unit these things come out, particularly at night-time. Probably hungry, because - looking for something to eat.

So we decided these things were getting too bad so we would build up some sort of device to get rid of them. So on the aircraft there was a big induction coil which is used to fire the spark plugs. And they decided that they would use one of these coils, connect it up to an aircraft battery and generate a very high electrical charge.

And they made up - a couple of us did this - we made up a little plate and insulated the plate and put the cheese on the plate. And so then the big rat would come along and stand on the bottom plate which was insulated. And when he stood on there he would start the thing off. He would start it going and then he would reach out and hit - reach out to eat the cheese.

So the first time we used this, we were sort of sleeping and we woke up by this little noise and there was a bit of buzzing noise. And it was enough to illuminate the plate and also the rat. And the buzzing noise was coming from the contacts between the two plates. There was a little contact there, a vibrating contact, which generated the high voltage - and this rat was reaching out, eating the cheese, with this illumination from the contacts with the very high voltage. And just sitting there eating the cheese. So the only thing that was thrown at him was boots. But the electrical charge didn't do anything (laughter).

That's a lovely story.

We never got it.

And you never perfected this sort of ...?

We never perfected it to the stage where it would have hit him and he really fell over dead or went for his life.

And another little one was - again for something to do - we used to enjoy listening to the Egyptian national anthem. When we used to go to films, theatres, they always used to play this. So one fellow decided he'd build up a little oscillator which was a little valve circuit. No condensers available, so he got all the scrap tinfoil, sort of silver paper off chocolates and wound his own little condensers, and this is quite a task. And to ensure the notes of the music were reproduced you had to have different values.

So these were all hooked up. He had a little rotating disk that went around and as it went around it made little contacts, and so he was able to reproduce the Egyptian national anthem by a rotating disk (laughs).

That's amazing. That does bring up something I was in fact going to come on to talk to you about, it's the whole thing of Well you were saying in talking about the training that the training was rather thrown on to you, that, you know, you had to use your initiative. In the desert how much did your initiative matter? How much did wireless people improvise?

(25.00) To say improvise, it's very difficult to improvise, in that you've got a piece of equipment, very little spares for it, and your main improvisation, if I might use it that way, was to ensure that that thing kept going. But very difficult to make up too many bits and pieces.

But it was possible. I mean you could make a resistor up by rubbing a pencil along a piece of material and measuring from one end to the other. And you would have some sort of resistance to a flow of electricity. So you could do these sort of things. I don't think they were done very often but it could be done. And you could make condensers. You're going back to early amateur radio theory where fellows made all their own tuning condensers. They made all their own coils. Everything was manmade, homemade, you know; unbelievable what they did accomplish.

Well what about scavenging equipment from abandoned German ...?

Yes, quite a bit.

Why not?

If you saw an aeroplane shot down and it was out in the desert. And a lot of them just laid there - and possibly in parts of the desert there could still even be things like this lying around. The first thing a radioman always seemed to do was to go for anything radio-wise and take it out. And we have used German transmitters, small units, and got them functioning, and used them. And they functioned very, very well. Well-designed, very well-built and no problems. Morse-keys. Frequently an aeroplane gets shot down, there's the morse-key in there, probably might have been burnt up a bit around the handle but otherwise 100 percent perfect. Valves - they always scrounged valves. And I think there was always the thought that when I get back to civil life (laughs), I'll have a few little bits and pieces that I'll have to play around with.

Sort of beginning of a radio ham system?

Yes.

Fear, Bert. We've been talking a little while ago about when you were at this forward base and obviously you were in a dangerous situation. And no doubt you were at other times later. Do you remember any instances when you really thought you might be buying it? And, in a more general sense, how much did fear play a role in your life in the desert?

I think fear is always there. I think irrespective of where you are, there's always a certain amount of fear. And to say that I prayed a lot during the periods of time I was over there, I'm sure I have. And it seems to be one time when you think, 'Gee, I never thought I'd be like this', but prayer is a very helpful tool. And certainly I've found my knees shaking and my legs shaking and feeling I want to go to the toilet, on many occasions. And to be a big, brave hero, I don't think there are too many people that are really the way they might be portrayed in a motion-picture or something like this. I think most people get very scared. And you think, especially if you're in an area where they may be dropping bombs all around you or they're strafing the ground, 'Well, is it going to happen to me now?'.

Was there ever any occasion when you were extremely close to an actual attack?

Oh, I've been right underneath strafing attacks on many occasions when people around me have been injured and hurt and killed. And - mind you while it's there, while it's on, perhaps there's something that builds up inside you that you think, 'It's not necessarily going to be me'. But yes, as I say, we used to move out at times just to get away from that particular area, so we'd have a good night's sleep and at least be able to perform our duties a little better the next day. There's nothing worse than having no rest, no rest, no rest, over periods of night.

And the attacks were always arranged generally when the moon was waning, at the early hours of the morning, and could continue right on up till eight o'clock in the morning. And then they would make an attack on the people lining up for their morning breakfast. And we used to do the same thing. Go over an aerodrome and attack it just as the people were going for their breakfasts.

Just to disrupt?

Just to disrupt, just to disturb them. You know, that's basically what it is. And, you know, it's there all the time. But really to say that I was a big hero, and saw the war, at times you wonder if you've really been there, you really do wonder. And I don't think that I've ever killed intentionally a member of the other forces. I don't think I have.

Well of course you weren't ...

I had to fire at times at different things but not - I have no recollection of being responsible for the immediate death of another person.

That's an interesting point. Obviously as a wireless man, that wasn't your main role but no doubt on occasions you were, I assume, shooting anti-aircraft equipment and that kind of thing?

Well when we were at Benina - and this was at Benghazi - we arrived there in the very early hours of the morning. And the first thing that happened, we were attacked. The local inhabitants of the place, certain people there, used to observe everything that was going on at the aerodrome and pass this information on to the Germans. Because the Germans were in the war at this stage. And we had one fellow that - he was a radio fellow, and his whole job was just monitoring radio frequencies up and down the band listening for signals that could not be identified. And we used to know of signals being sent over radios to ...

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

This is Ed Stokes, with Bert Pearson, No. 3 Squadron, tape two, side one.

Bert, just finish the story about Benghazi.

Right, well we arrived there, as I said previously, in the early hours of the morning, something like four o'clock in the morning. And within a half an hour we were being attacked, very

extensively attacked, by enemy aircraft. And the information of our movement into the place, which was in the middle of the night, had been obviously passed on. And they used to have people that sat around the hills, if I might use that term, of the aerodrome, and communicate, and pass information on of our troop movements, and the movements in and out of the aerodrome. And again they attacked this place up till about eight o'clock in the morning, and were back again quickly after that.

So our people got very disturbed about this. There was very little in the way of anti-aircraft fire there, very little in the way of units there. So the next day they went around all the dilapidated German and Italian aeroplanes that were on the ground - and there were a lot of them - took all the guns off them, grabbed any ammunition they can find, and started setting these things up everywhere. Everywhere they could. On the main airport building - and the next morning of course the same thing was on again.

These fellows came over - very low attacks. They knew there was very little opposition. And there was a devil of an opening up of machine-gun and rifle fire and that from the ground, from all these scrounged enemy guns.

And you were firing one yourself?

Firing a rifle at them myself. I only had a rifle. But everyone was in it. If you're being attacked you obviously respond by saying, 'I'm going to try and stop you doing it'. And this was the effect. And they were, I think, quite successful in removing some of this threat that was open to them.

Could I just ask you a general question that in fact led on to that story of yours? Pilots often say that they were conscious, or what they thought of was that they were shooting down aircraft, that they weren't shooting down men. Although obviously they were too, but they saw it as shooting down an aircraft. Would that have been the same for you or not? Or would you have been shooting a man?

I think this is what it is: you feel that the device is what you're shooting at, and you tend not to think of the individual that's controlling the device. I think this is one of the things that happens. And ...

Because that's really what you're doing or as a psychological defence against facing up to having killed someone?

Well if I'm going to hit you over the head with a basketball bat or something, I suppose the natural reaction, if I can't stop you doing it readily by just putting my hand up, I'm going to try and react and knock you down. So I think this is the sort of thing that develops isn't it? It's

survival really, isn't it? If you met the person - and I have met some of these people, and spoken to them. I can remember one German pilot that was shot down very close to us and he was brought into our camp, and he was looked after very, very well. And he said, 'You fellows think this is funny, but in a couple of weeks you'll be in one of our prisoner of war camps'. And he was quite confident. He'd just been taken prisoner, just been shot down but he was quite confident that in a very short time the boots would be completely turned around and we would be in the situation he was in. But very much like us to talk to. But a little bit more confident perhaps than we would be. But very sure that it wasn't going to last the way it was.

Right, well going on with the general story, Bert. It was, incidentally, just for the record, late January we've worked out that you rejoined No. 3 Squadron. At Benghazi I think you were involved in a certain amount of direction-finding work. That sounds quite interesting.

Well the heavy bombers used to fly into Benghazi in the day-time, land and be refuelled, and prepared to go out in the night. So they were again that much closer to the target area. And again I must say that the information used to be transmitted out to the enemy, so they knew that we had a certain number of aeroplanes coming in. They had fairly good information.

(5.00) But in those days radar wasn't a known thing. And these bombers would go out and frequently on their way back they would want to get bearings and know where they were. And the device that was used was called a direction-finding system. It used a system of aerials that were able to detect. And you would then tell the pilot his bearing from you. And this worked very well. It was a portable equipment that had to be set up. It had a very complex system of aerials. And this was the operational area for that directional finding for aircraft coming back into the Libya, Benghazi, area.

The conditions in Benghazi - I know when you arrived the aerodrome and so on had been fairly heavily damaged?

Yes. Very heavily damaged. The town itself had been very heavily damaged. Every evening the people - even though when we arrived there - would go into their air-raid shelters. They'd be working all day I guess in whatever they did there - at that time I'm not too sure what they all did. But you would see them lined up in the early evenings and going down into the air-raid shelter, and they would remain there probably all the night.

Because there were - most nights - enemy attacks. And I guess we had done the same thing to Benghazi when we were attacking it. We bombed it very extensively. And the radio-masts and things like this on the 'drome were all laying on the ground. Some of it may have been done by the people when they moved out. Because the normal procedure was to destroy what you can't take with you. But certainly Benghazi had been knocked around.

Well of course it wasn't very long before you yourselves were being pushed back.

That's right.

And I think the whole control system, the control tower and all the radio equipment was destroyed by yourselves?

Well it was all - there was charges put in in all places. Anything that couldn't be moved was destroyed. And as we left in the late afternoon there was just a big glow coming from the area of the aerodrome and around that vicinity.

Had you been personally involved in setting up this sabotage?

I'd been mainly involved with the loading of equipment from the direction-finding station. But anything around the control-tower area, the administrative area, had all been set up. But I didn't actually do it myself. I wasn't involved in that particular part of it. I was mainly involved in trying to save what we could. But there were lots of things that were destroyed by our own people.

Well of course this was the start of this very rapid retreat, when the squadron's falling back and so on. I mean a very, very rapid retreat, as you I think were saying, it was almost too fast for the whole thing to be controlled?

Too fast for comfort (laughs). Yes, it was. In fact you didn't know where you were going to stop for the night. You were travelling most of the times. At some stages we got involved in minefields and we were lost in the minefield. And someone came along and said, 'I'll lead you out of it.' And we followed. And we got out of it alright too. But even ...

Just tell us about that. That must be rather horrific, I imagine, being in a minefield?

Well you don't know which way to go or which way to move, and you're in vehicles. And it only needs one to go off the track and you're in strife. They do try to ensure that they know their way through these things and I think army units do a very good job in this area.

But when you get lost and then find you're in the middle of it, the best thing is to stop. And that's what we did. And we were assisted by these army people and they did in effect lead us right out of this area which was a highly dangerous area.

Because at one time there everything that was left on the road - and the Italians in their early days did this - they would leave a beautiful motorcar on the side of the road. But it would be set up with explosives. And as soon as the person opened the door or something like that, up she went. Beautiful motorbikes. All sorts of thing. And again you had this problem that you had to be careful with radio equipment. You didn't know. It was uncertainty.

So when you were approaching abandoned equipment, and, say, wanting to scavenge some radio gear, how did you go about it, how did you ensure that it wasn't hooked up to a boobytrap?

I'd say in most cases other people had probably gone through there before you and you hoped to goodness that there was nothing there. But not very methodically, I must say, at times, not very methodically.

During this period of the very rapid retreat, tell us about your work as a wirelessman, both what you were doing and also how this sort of rapid movement affected the gear you used and how you set it up and so on?

(10.00) Well the gear was mounted in the back of a vehicle. It was permanently mounted. It didn't seem to suffer much from the type of transport that it was accustomed to or was associated with. And the equipment had an aerial on the top of it. Or on the top of the van itself there was a very small aerial and this was able to be used to transmit from and receive on. And immediately you stopped you may as well say the radio equipment was operational. Immediately you stopped. It was only low power; it wasn't very high power. But it was operational; you could receive, you could transmit.

So the first thing was you had to keep in touch with your other units because you didn't always travel as a whole squadron. You had certain flights, A flight, B flight, and they might move one squadron back and the other one would stay forward. As soon as you got back to the base you would become operational and the forward base would move back. So you came one after the other, sort of hopping over the other.

And the role of the, again the radio, was to keep in touch with aircraft. The aircraft were continuing their sorties even though this movement was on that you were moving back, but the aircraft were still going out and attacking the advancing enemy and participating in their day-to-day operations.

While you were retreating, Bert, were there ever occasions when you left point A, you didn't know where you were in fact to go to, and the message, your final destination, was communicated to you during the moving period by radio?

No. During the moving period, while we were actually moving, there was really no radio communication. The equipment wasn't operational while we were actually moving. It was only when we stopped. So there were certain times when we were out of communication. And we'd arrive at a place and they'd say if three Very pistols are fired into the air tonight, that means get going. Things like that.

There were, one spot where One attempt was always made to give pilots relaxation and rest and that was to move them out of the operational area as quickly as they could. And being the Mediterranean not far away, they would set up a small camp on the shores of the Mediterranean and they would be able to rest and relax and swim, a little distance away from where things were going on.

But you had to have communication, so there was always a radio operator, a radio van there. And of course they didn't want to tell the enemy that you had certain information, so they'd use a code word. And one I can remember very clearly was the word 'banana'. And this thing came through in the very early hours of the morning, 'banana'. And that meant, 'Get up, and get going'.

And we were right on the base, in the valley, right on the shores of the ocean. And we had a long climb to get out of this area. And, boy, did that van get on the road and moving very quickly.

Well, going on a little bit, Bert, of course after the retreat there was a bit of slack time I know and there was some leave. Just briefly perhaps, do you have any clear recollections of your leaves in the Middle East, what you did?

Yes. Well what most of us did was go to the pictures. I've never seen so many pictures in my life as I've seen in the Middle East. And every time we were in an area, or if we were close to a big city, or on leave in Cairo or Alexandria, I think you would find most of the people from the squadron would be at the local theatre. They used to have a number of sessions. I think the night session started, the late night session, about nine thirty at night. But some of them were very palatial cinemas. So I'd say we spent a lot of time going to pictures. Because once you were out in the desert there wasn't much in the way of mobile entertainment. There couldn't be so. I'd say

And then we used to go to Jerusalem, if we were in that area, and have a look at the historical places, Balbek, and all these sort of places. So we did try to see a lot of things, pyramids, if you were near Cairo. So we did a lot of touring around where possible.

Did you get much drinking done?

I didn't drink. I wasn't a drinker and I'm still not a drinker so I had no problems. I used to get a rum issue and I was knocked over by some of my mates (laughs) to get my mug of rum. Because if you got into an area where things were a little bit hot, the first thing you would know, you'd be given an issue of rum.

But it never worried me. Not that I had anything against people that drink - that's their own business - but I just never wanted to. Never had an interest in it.

Was it easy to meet women much? Either women working as nurses in the hospitals or local women or not?

I met a couple of very nice ladies in the Middle East. Not that I knew them at all well. But I met them through other people. Some of them were civilians, some were from around Alexandria, Greek people, their youngsters. I met quite a number of youngsters. And they were all, I found, very friendly towards us. And again I found anyone that we had any sort of association with was quite good. But to say I knew ladies as girlfriends, or anything like that, I didn't have any.

(15.00) Well I guess there were so many men in the area and basically so few women?

Well I don't know. I think in all these places, if people are looking for women, they will find them. As you probably are aware there are many places that are organised for attracting men to women. Businesses, really, aren't they? - and they existed in the first world war and they still existed in the last war.

Yes, sure. Just moving on now to the period in Palestine, Lydda, the re-equipping with Tomahawks. Perhaps not going into that in detail. You were saying that new radio equipment was also brought in but it wasn't that different from the early stuff?

No, it wasn't that different. I at one time attended a course that was run by the American air force. At that time the Americans weren't in the war. But there were still a number of American people, air force people, in the Middle East. So that there was still something there - you know what I mean - they were not in the war but there was still representation of them.

And they ran courses, radio courses, on some of the very much more modern equipment than we had. And some of it was radio compass equipment and that was made by Bendix: transmitters, receivers and all that sort of thing. And they ran a very comprehensive and a very well-organised training course at Ismailia.

Just for the record, Bert, I know you've got this note here on some of the radio equipment used in different aircraft. Would you like to run through that?

Well the one that we used mainly as ground station equipment was the 1082, R1082, and the T1083. These were a very simple transmitter-receiver. The receiver was what you'd call a super-regen. receiver. I don't know if you've heard this particular term but it's a very basic type of device that will receive radio signals; but very efficient for what's in it, very small in the number of valves used.

The transmitter is what they call a master-oscillator power-amplifier transmitter. The same valve, I think, is used in both the oscillator circuit, and in the - in the output stage. It's only a two-valve thing. To go from one band to the other, from one frequency to the other, in all these things, you pull out a set of coils and put in another set of coils. So they're not in any way modernistic. The aerial type of tuning units with them, very basic. But they all functioned. So we used those as base stations to transmit to the aircraft, for communication between units. And very extensively used - 1082/83.

Then there was another one - I think it was the AR10 - which was used mainly in the reception side of the thing. But the TR9B was one that I can remember; and that was used in our Gladiators and Gauntlets. TR meaning it was a transmitter-receiver in the one unit. And in the middle of it was the compartment where the B battery - anyone that's had any experience with old radio equipment, will realise that the old receivers that we used to use at home for receiving radio signals had a B battery, an A battery, and a C battery, three batteries - and this B battery was like a large number of torch cells all joined together to give you probably about ninety volts. And that was the maximum voltage. So this was the high tension.

And the filaments that heated up the emitting device in the valves that it, lets the electrons go, was little accumulators - little charging type of batteries that you put on a charger.

Just to talk more generally now, because I think those technical details might sort of ...

Yes. Be too much? Yes.

... go over a lot of people.

Right.

In a general sense, how would you say the equipment you used changed during the war years?

Drastically. When the war ended it was unbelievable the type of equipment that was then available. Very sophisticated, smaller in weight and size, which was very important to aircraft. And in general terms very efficient.

But the old stuff still functioned. It very seldom let you down. I've seen some of the old stuff, where a pilot's come back, he's been badly shot up, new fabric's been put on and patched the holes up; you open the little cowl where the radio equipment is - it's usually behind the pilot - there's a bullet right through it, and it hasn't hit anything vital, and the damn thing's still functioning okay.

So it was very robust?

(20.00) Very robust, yes. Now when radar came into being, the first time I ever struck this thing was a little wooden box was given to me. And they said, 'Connect this to the normal radio, between point A and point B', which was just a couple of plugs, 'wind up the clock and before the pilot goes off you release this thing and make sure the clock's functioning'.

This was the identification, friend or foe?

That's right. And it's an identification, friend or foe device which puts out little signals from his own transmitter and the ground station is able to determine that it is one of our own aeroplanes. They became - as you said, 'How did it advance, how did it change?' - in the later part of it this thing was all incorporated in a separate unit of its own. It sent out pulses on its own. These pulses again were observed on the ground. If the aircraft was in strife and the pilot wanted to land, and didn't want them to get this thing, inside the radio was detonators. And as soon as he made a hard landing, the whole thing blew up and all the inside blew up, and the enemy were unable to copy the circuitry of it. Because it was a unique system.

Bert. Just one final thing. In the period, let's say in the Middle East, when you were with No. 3 - so prior to these very major advances - how did your equipment that you were using compare with what you found the Germans were using? And the Italians?

Some of the Italians' equipment that I saw - and I didn't see a lot of it but I did see some of it - it was nowhere - I don't think - as well-finished, as well-designed, as the German equipment. The German equipment was very robust, very solid, to damage it would be not easy. Its technical circuitry is very good. I really don't think we could criticise the type of equipment that they had.

Did they have equipment at that time that - besides its general robustness and so on - but did they have equipment that could in fact perform feats of communication, if you like that your equipment could not?

Well that's a hard thing to say because with communication, given the right conditions, it's surprising how far you can transmit on a very low-powered transmitter and the right aerial system. And this is demonstrated quite clearly these days. You can have a transmitter that's giving out five watts which is a very low power; you can have a transmitter giving out 500 watts. With the right conditions both signals will get from point A to point B. Conditions get difficult, interference gets heavy, as it does these days - not so much in those days - there is more advantage in having the higher-power equipment.

Well let's just talk about conditions finally. In the desert you obviously had a landscape that was very open. Very few topographical interruptions. And a very dry atmosphere.

Yes.

Did that aid or hinder radio?

I don't know really whether it actually hindered radio or aided it. I don't think it had a great effect upon it, depending on the frequencies that you were operating on. But I will say one thing, the requirement in the desert was to have a good earth system which was not naturally provided by the desert terrain itself. And so we had reels or rolls of chicken netting - if you might use that as the term for it; but that's what it looked like - and you roll this thing up in a big reel, as you'd buy it from your local hardware store, and you'd roll that out, and the aerial was then put above this mat. They call it an earth mat. And that was used, the earth connections of the equipment was connected to this mat. And it functioned fairly well.

But the advantage was in the desert, if your aerial got destroyed or fell down and it was laying on the ground, you could probably still be transmitting and not know that the aerial was sitting on the ground. Now where you've got a good earth system, like the ground is good - good conductivity - this problem wouldn't - you'd go off the air as soon as your aerial hit the ground. But we were using frequencies in those days that were around - well in normal operations - around what was termed the five megahertz frequencies, and they were fairly reliable for the type of work we used.

Well let's turn to something quite different and that's the morale of the squadron. People talk very highly, or most people do, about No 3 Squadron. That seems to be a general pattern. Do you think morale was high?

(25.00) I think morale was very high all - most of the time. I have seen times, because of the local situations, where there were some problems. And I think one was when we first arrived there. Here we are. No one wants us. What are they going to do with us? So morale does drop down. And there were times, I think, when people were told, 'Oh, okay, you'll be going back to Australia' - and this happened on a couple of occasions - 'because the conditions in the Pacific are getting bad'. And then the next thing you'd hear, 'Oh no, you're not going

back to Australia because your unit is too much in the demand in this area and we just couldn't let you go'. You'd hear then, 'Oh, the radio people may be relieved in another eighteen months', and then you'd hear, 'Oh no'. And that is what affects morale - the uncertainty.

But I think as a unit, most people that I know had anything to do with the unit and even, I say, the present members of the squadron, I think they have a certain loyalty to that unit to the name of that unit, and it's been going, what, nearly seventy-five years.

What was the cause of that, do you think?

Of why they're so loyal to it?

Well this generally high morale?

The type of people I suppose that are in the unit, I think it goes back to the type of people. Their feeling that they were doing something for Australia, that they were looking after it remotely, because, as you made a statement earlier, that in those days we felt Australia was so isolated no one would ever be going to get - come down here. And the fact that they were trying to help more unfortunate type of people. I think this has had some bearing on it. But there is still a loyalty there that is very hard to - I think maybe the members stayed together. Although there was a number of different people came and joined the squadron, they all seemed to have this same feeling.

You went through the periods of command of Peter Jeffrey, Bobby Gibbes and Nicky Barr. How would you recall them as leaders? Who stood out? And what were their different qualities?

I couldn't select from those three people a very great difference. There was a difference. I think for a start Bobby liked to be 'in it'. There's no two ways about it, Bobby was an active fellow. Even - as I said to you earlier - when he got hurt on one occasion, he still functioned. And they lifted him into his aeroplane and he went out. I think Peter was probably a little bit more reserved type of person than Bobby. Peter started off as a signals officer and ended up as the commanding officer of the squadron. And a flying man at that. And that I don't think happened too often. Generally a signals officer was a signals officer.

I think Bobby was a much younger person. He came in - I've got a feeling he was a sergeant when he first started off - and did very well. He was a good pilot. Nicky Barr I had a lot of respect for. Not that I knew the man very well but I had a lot of respect for him.

Gordon Steege is another person, a very hard man - and this is one that you didn't make mention to - but a very hard man sometimes to understand, but that you had an inbuilt respect for him. And for some reason at times - and I don't know why - he used always want me to check his radio equipment before he went off anywhere. Now I don't know what the reason was but he always did. So I did my best to always do that. But whenever I approached him - and one day he ticked me off. I think it was I went into his office to talk to him because I wanted to go back into air crew. And we'd been told lots of times - most of the people did - and we'd been told lots of times, 'You've got no chance. You are more important to us as a wireless person, a radio man.' And I walked into his office and I didn't salute him when I walked into his office. And he roasted me. The next minute he starts saying, 'Well I'm going to recommend you for this air crew'. I wanted to be a pilot, like most people did, I don't know why, but you do. Or an observer or something like that - and he said, 'I'm going to write a recommendation for you, and it'll go back. And I can't do it now because I don't want you to leave the unit. We need your type of the mustering - your type of people.'

That's interesting, Bert. You did want to be a pilot?

Oh yes, I think most people did. It's something about the air force. You think of what? An aeroplane, don't you? It's like anything else. You don't think of what's going on in the backroom. You go to a film and see a big production on the screen. It's what you're looking at. But you don't think of all the backroom people that put that thing together. The efforts. And loyalty I suppose comes into that too. Without their being really involved you wouldn't get that finished product. But you don't The people out in front are the people that seem to be the people you think of, isn't it?

Yes, that's obviously the truth.

END TAPE TWO, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE B.

This is Ed Stokes, with Bert Pearson, No. 3 Squadron, tape two, side two.

Bert, just a couple of other little things about the daily life of the squadron. You were talking about saluting then. How much were the niceties of discipline, of calling officers 'sir', of saluting and so on, how much did they apply when you're out there fighting?

I think you always did respect the rank of the person and I think this goes in many fields. It's not necessarily the person himself but it's the position he holds, and the responsibility and all that sort of thing. And I think you have a certain respect. But I don't think many people went around the desert saluting officers every time they saw them.

I know officers that have gone into town on leave and - shouldn't do this but the first thing they do is say, 'Well here's a number of stripes, put them on your shoulder, and we'll go out for the night'. Or take their stripes off and put a sergeant's stripes on their arm. The Australian person seems to do this. In Palestine and that area there were lots of places where sergeants and above could go in but the ordinary person couldn't. The Australian would think nothing of saying, 'Here, put these on your arms and we'll go in'. Because they felt equal in many ways. It wasn't as if they were on their job and performing a certain role. And I think this happened a lot.

One of the biggest shocks I think we got was when we first went to a permanent RAF station and we found that the LACs - the fellows with a little propeller on their arm - were sitting on a little raised section of the mess above the normal airmen. Now we were never used to that sort of thing. It didn't happen.

So obviously there was a much more structured ...?

Well I think it was when we celebrated our second year away, we held a little do in Alexandria - I think it was, if my memory's right - and Bobby Gibbes was the CO of the squadron at that time and he invited all of us - well what will I say - originals into town to a dinner. Now you wouldn't find that happening very often in perhaps English squadrons. There was certainly a class distinction that wasn't in the Australian make-up.

We might just move over the Syrian campaign, partly because you went for a period to 450 Squadron where Gordon Steege was CO. And you went on with them right up to Beirut and then, after that period, you rejoined No. 3 Squadron.

Yes. That's right.

The beginning of '42 No. 3 was re-equipped with Kittyhawks. And about the same time, February I think, Bobby Gibbes became CO. And meanwhile, late January, the push into the desert had begun again. What's your recollection of that general period of when Bobby Gibbes took over as CO and of when this rapid push began?

Well I think we normally would say that from a radio person's point of view we still functioned in much the same role as we had in the past. Certain duties to do, so we were always doing our daily routines; ensuring that things were working as well as they could. And our daily routine was very much the same, I think, at that time. But there was the obvious feeling, the general feeling was that Rommel was going to sort of get into Alexandria and go into Cairo, where the big headquarters of the Middle East Command was. And the general feeling was that this might easily happen. There were people looking for ways and moving out of the area. Getting away from the Middle East.

(5.00) This was after the period of the advance, wasn't it? I think you advanced into the desert again and then there was a rapid retreat?

Possibly, I can't - yes, this is - yes, this is after the ...

It's all pretty confusing, I know. Well let's just look at that last period that you were with the squadron, when of course you were being pushed back. Bobby Gibbes was the CO. Then he was shot down. Nicky Barr took over. Bobby Gibbes came back, Nicky Barr was taken prisoner. That general period, this last very rapid retreat you were involved in. How did that affect you, what was life like?

Very hectic. Because again, like any advance or retreat, it seems to happen so very quickly. You don't really get time to sit down and consider very much. You're on the move, whether you're going up or coming back, you're on the move all the time. And I think all the advances we made there were fairly rapid. And we progressed over many miles in a very short period of time. And everything still had to be functioning. The aircraft still had to be flying. So irrespective of where you are or what you're doing, your daily role is much the same.

During this period, for example when you were being pushed back very quickly, and the planes were, I know, at this time flying a large number of operations a day. Sometimes three, four, five a day. Where did you find the time to work on their radios?

Well only when they were on the ground of course (laughs). And as soon as they would come in. You might be doing your daily checks - which generally may have been done in the mornings - you might have been doing them very late in the night, it's possible that you could be doing If they'd been out on a sortie and come back, you've really got to look at the equipment if they report anything to you as very good. If they'll tell you they've had a problem, okay, you'll have a look at it straight away. So you try to do it in between operations. And it's not beyond you going out and taking the equipment out and putting a spare piece of equipment, if you had it, in. And the fellow going out again. Straight away more or less. So it could be a full-time employment between operations.

One thing I did mean to ask you before. On one flight, how many wirelessmen were there? How many of you were there to work on the radios?

Well when Ted Medhurst and I were with 450 Squadron there were two of us. And we were responsible for everything to do with one flight of the aircraft: the equipment, the battery-charging, the checks, the daily checks, the ensuring that everything was up to scratch and ready to be used whenever wanted. So there were two of us there.

And that was generally the pattern with No 3 Squadron too?

Generally the pattern, I would say, yes, at any one time. For that particular section.

Did you generally work together as a pair or would you be often two men working on different units?

No, I would say in - depending, if you had a major problem and the thing was a little bit more difficult than you imagined, then you might work together as a team. But other times you'd probably be doing - I'd go into No. 1, you'd go into No. 2 and so on. They'd all have their own identification but 3 Squadron was CV on their aircraft as far as their normal identification. But I'd go into No. 1 call up.

And at one time, if we didn't have a ground station to work to, I'd call from one aircraft and he would call from another aircraft and we'd check out that way. By intercommunicating from aircraft to aircraft.

When you were doing that servicing - perhaps just one other point that should be asked - was there a security problem?

No security at all. No one around you.

No, but I mean could other people pick up your radio messages and get a directional beam to give a position?

As far as sort of security in that area - when you transmitted, anyone listening to that frequency could receive it. If the signal was getting to them, they could hear it. And the frequencies being used were such that a normally good shortwave receiver would have no difficulty in There was nothing coded, there was nothing special about the signal that you were transmitting. Anyone could hear it. Except if you were sending morse, they had to have a means of listening to the morse which is - a little oscillator's built into the set. But a normal commercial communication or - not communication - shortwave receiver that a normal person would have in the home would be quite capable of receiving the signals. So there was no real security.

Of the period with No. 3, Bert, is there anything that you'd recall of your last month or two with the squadron? As they're being pushed back and leading up to the time when you yourself left?

Well when I left the squadron was just at the time that El Alamein had started. We'd had a breakthrough at El Alamein and so this looked pretty good. I was a little sad on leaving the

squadron. I'd spent a few years with it and associated with it - even if I hadn't been with it all the time - very close to it all the time. And I felt a little sad about leaving it. But after being away two and a half years, I suppose And there were new people coming along all the time. I was I didn't know what was ahead of me, though. Perhaps that was one of the things. But I did have a feeling of some loss in leaving the squadron.

Of course Japan was in the war by now. Did you have a sense that it was a good thing to get back to Australia because of that or not?

I didn't feel that way myself. Although there were a number of people that said, 'Yes, we want to get back to Australia.' There were a number of politicians in Australia that said we want all our troops back here. I didn't really feel that I could do any more by being back in Australia than I could do by being where I was. I don't know if that is true or not but I didn't feel that way at the time.

But when I came back here, again we were still fairly remote from what war was all about. We'd had a couple of submarines that had come in in Sydney Harbour and things like that, but in general terms we felt somewhat - it still appeared to be a place somewhat remote.

Was the Australia that you came back to different from the Australia you'd left?

Yes, it was different because, when I left Australia, I suppose the war really hadn't hit Australia. Not really. It had been going nearly twelve months, I suppose, hadn't it? Nine months or something. But there were many more servicemen around. There were many more Americans around which weren't here when I left. And things like that. But ...

Was that a cause of resentment, incidentally, the Americans. Or not?

Not to me. I was involved with American squadrons. I remember when some of the first American squadrons came from the Middle East. And some of our people said, 'Now when you go out on a sortie, you come with us'. And they said, 'Why?' They said, 'Well this is different. You've never been involved in this sort of thing before. It is something different.' 'Oh, no problems.'

So they went out and they went out on their own. And I think something like one-third of them didn't return because they were not used to desert warfare. They were not used to warfare at all. And when - they'd done all the classroom and all that side of it - but they'd never been actually in an operational area. And they quickly said, 'Right, we will go with you'. And they learnt very quickly the things to do.

When I came back here I became associated with American units in the islands and I found them very helpful, very co-operative and some very nice people amongst them. So really I did not have any resentment for them.

When you came back you did spend some time at 4 OTU, Williamtown. And this was working, training other wireless operators.

No, not training wireless operators. It was an Operational Training Unit. And at that time American dive-bombers were going to be introduced into the Pacific area. And the object of 4 OTU was to crew up young Australian pilots and radio navigators into a crew as a team and to fly these Vultee- Vengeance. And as the OTU, that was its task, was to do this.

And I was associated with training of Aldis lights, because the navigator had to be able to send light signals to ships and ground stations. And so I was associated with that part of it.

And we had with us at that base a lot of very distinguished pilots who were the instructors. And unfortunately we lost a lot of these young fellows in their early days of training. Not so much in Vultees but in Wirraways which they did for night flying. And they used to just keep going. They'd go into a dive and keep going. And really the real answer to some of that was not really known why it happened. But it did.

And one of the greatest thrills I ever had in my life was - being associated with 4 OTU - was we had an RAF Spitfire squadron sent out as the defence of Newcastle, being a big industrial area. And they wanted to test the defence of Newcastle, the fighter section of it. So we, as Vultee- Vengeance, were turned into enemies and we went out to attack Newcastle.

The pilots were all very old, experienced fellows that knew what it was all about. I say very old - they were probably fairly young, but that's the way you felt for them. The fellows sitting in the back were fellows like myself, wireless operators that had been through. And we had the time of our life.

(15.00) We went out to sea and these fellows said, 'We're going to beat this defence of Newcastle'. Of course no one thought it possible. So all they did was come down level with the waves and come in over the beaches of Newcastle. Just, almost touching the waves. And they beat the whole defence of the place. And normally they weren't allowed to fly over Newcastle in normal flight. And they flew over there - of course they were an attacking force. Well they shot up the steelworks, they shot up the main streets, they had the time of their life. And the poor Spitfire squadron didn't even see them. So it was quite a good test for them. It proved that it could be done.

Well let's go on. I know after that you went as part of a mobile fighter control unit with Bobby Gibbes in charge, I think.

He was in charge of the whole group, all the aeroplanes, the whole group was under his charge.

You went to Darwin, then later on to Morotai. Let's finish the story at Morotai. Of course, by now the war has very much passed Morotai by, I think?

Yes. War finished while I was still in Morotai.

Let's end as we began, with projecting films.

Projecting films? Well on Morotai of course, during the time there, entertainment was important. And so an American unit was there - it was a fighter unit - and they moved out and we moved into their position, their role. And they'd started to build a stage and a mobile - I won't call it mobile. It wasn't mobile - it was a fixed, open-air theatre.

So we installed two projectors which we scrounged from different places and we fixed them up and we installed these in a little booth which was a little tin shed. We cut up kerosene tins and made them into footlights and spotlights and things. We got all the hessian we could find and dyed it and made them into backdrops and curtains. And we had one of the best theatres I think was in the Pacific area.

And we used to show three movies nearly every night and the number of people that used to come to that area was unbelievable. And we even had American live shows come out and they were presented from the same stage there. So it was another little thing that I felt I was doing a little bit for the people that were there. And I enjoyed it. I got a kick out of seeing us put on - what will I say - a big theatre production. It was really something that you got a real kick out of.

Sounds great. Well, two final questions. Looking back on it all, looking back on the war years, your involvement in the war how did it all seem to you when it was over?

I thought that we'd accomplished probably what we'd set out to do: to keep Australia free, keep the British Empire's flag flying and make the world a better place for people to live in. And I thought we'd accomplished that.

And one last question. Is there anything you feel you'd like to add to this record that isn't on it already? Anything that you want to put down?

That'd be very hard (laughs). As I age I find it hard to remember things fairly clearly. But recently I went to the fiftieth march back through into Richmond and I thought the whole thing there was terrific. I thoroughly enjoyed the day, the people I met up with - some of them I hadn't seen for forty-five years and possibly a bit longer - and that was something that was a real highlight in, well both my wife and my life. We've thoroughly enjoyed it. We were treated very well.

We find that the present No. 3 Squadron treats us, the oldies, very well and seem to have a lot of respect for us. And we have a feeling of the youngsters of today are not as bad as a lot of people paint them to be.

Well that's a good note to end on. Bert, on behalf of the War Memorial, thank you very much.

It's a pleasure.

(20.00) END TAPE TWO, SIDE B.