ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE:	BOMBING RAIDS OVER GERMANY DURING WORLD WAR II
INTERVIEWEE:	JAMES MCCLEERY
INTERVIEWER:	LAURIE FIELD
SUMMARY:	SHOT DOWN OVER GERMANY AND EVENTUALLY TAKEN PRISONER
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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE 1

Jim, where were you born?

I was born in Belfast in Northern Ireland.

You came out what age?

Four years of age.

And where were you educated?

In Perth.

What were you involved in in the way of jobs before you went to the war?

Well I worked in a printing place - Broker Shay and Shaw it was called - a printing place and I probably only stayed there until I was about sixteen or seventeen. I could have been an apprentice there but I wanted to join up so … as a matter of fact I joined - remember you got this gold badge to wear when you were seventeen and a half you could join the aircrew. They gave you a ….

Was it a reservist badge or something like that?

Sort of a reserve. But you went to classes usually the local technical college or something like that. This was before. But you had the full medical if you were accepted.

But you hadn't turned eighteen.

I hadn't turned eighteen. Then you were going to be called up. So I decided to have six months - or it turned out to be six months - but I thought I'd be called up when I turned exactly eighteen which was in June. So I left the job in about March. I thought well I'll have three months just buggering around. So I went up to Geraldton in Western Australia and lived in a boarding house there and used all my money and I didn't get called up until November. I ran out of money so I went back home and then I got politely told to look for another job. So I got a job in a grocer's shop I think it was; thirty shillings a week.

In Geraldton?

In Geraldton, yes. And I spent … before that I just spent all my time at the beach fishing and surfing and just waiting about. Just waiting for the call. It eventually came in November '41 and then I went to Victor Harbour.

You'd have been in 22 Course?

Actually I started off in, I think it was 19 Course or 20 Course or it could have been 21 Course. I'm not quite sure. Then Pearl Harbor started and there was a lot of Dutch come down and they virtually stopped our training. We were on I think about 19 or 20 Course and then they were training a lot of Dutch converting on to aircraft and we stayed at Victor Harbour for too much longer than we normally would have. And I finished up I think I recall 23 Course.

The same thing happened to me. We went into Bradfield in October '41, that was 21 Course, and we ended up wagged school at Parkes at three months later in 23 Course.

Well that was about what we were.

Where did you do your training just broadly?

Well I went back to Cumden in Western Australia, FTS, on Tiger Moths and then back to South Australia again to Mallala on [Avro Ansons]. And from there back to 5 Embarkation Depot in Perth

and then to No.1 Embarkation in Melbourne by boat. We travelled on this boat and we were the only passengers … or there was an Australian jockey's wife from India. ….Indian team navigation … but we got on a Fremantle and then we went to Melbourne. We were the only passengers on the boat. It took about twelve days; they must have gone down near the south pole I think because there was supposed to be mines and all that sort of thing.

What boat did you go from Melbourne?

The Westpoint, an American …

Yes, I went on that. This wasn't January '43, was it?

Yes. That's the one I was on. And the Yanks were there, cold tea and all that sort of thing.

Sauerkraut. Do you remember the sauerkraut?

Yes, yes. Red cabbage. And ice-cream.

And that bloody OC troops, that shiny bum OC troop. Do you remember him, he was a real shit.

No, I don't remember him. I did a bit of boxing.

I remember those boxing matches. The two chaplains were there. Well, one chaplain was the referee, wasn't he? The Catholic chaplain I think was the ref.

Yes, I used to do a little bit of boxing, only amateur stuff, you know.

There was one particularly very good boxer on that ship, do you recall?

No, no I don't really, I just remember I was mixed up in it. I remember borrowing the drop balloons or something of the back of a ship, do you remember that? You'd lie on the back with rifles, shooting at them.

They might have reserved that for pilots. I never got a go at it.

Yes they ah ...

So you had gone across to the states to xxxx on the Queen Elizabeth?

Yes on the Queen Elizabeth to [Glynoch] and down to Bournmouth, yeah.

You must have done a lot of training there, because I got to the squadron in the beginning on November '43 you must have been later than that.

I got there, I think the first op. I did was in February 11th, but I was on the Squadron for Christmas I remember that so I don't know what happened there. I'd come from ah, where was…Lancaster...February 4th '44, Pembroke, yes. No, it was Brighton I was on for Christmas. Yes so that was December the 13th I went to Brighton and [Hemswell], I don't know what I was doing there….. Hemswell I think that was when you convert it from 4Ms…

And we went to Halis.

Yes. A chap named Jeff [Hartshot], he's since died - I think it was last year.

What did you think of your training overall?

Well it was certainly a wonderful time, you know …

And when you got to the Squadron, do you think you were reasonably well prepared?

I think so, yes.

How did you crew up? How did you get your Wimpy crew?

Well, we went to Litchfield and the bomb aimer, the navigator and the wireless op, all were in the same course as me at Victor Harbour, and we knew each other. I think Jeff Long

He's in the same flight as I was.

Oh we were all put in your … So I just knew them so I thought, right ho, Les Betts was there and Vic xxx, he was a West Australian, he came across in the train with me in civvies, you know. So we just got together and that was it.

So there was four of you who more or less knew each other.

Yes, we knew each other from Victor Harbour. And Don [Dicer] was another Western Australian. He finished up Commissioner of Transport over there; he was one of the big shots I think. He did a few good turns for me: getting the caravan licensed and all that while I was over there without any problems.

And you'd have picked up your mid-upper and your engineer at xxx.

Yeah. I had a bit of trouble with … they more or less told me this was my flight engineer. He was Polish. And he was much older than us; he was in his thirties and we were all in our early twenties, you know. I don't know, but he … we lost a motor one night, on Halifaxes actually, when I was coming in to land and he ran up the back and disappeared and I had to feather it and do the whole lot myself, you know, and I was only making an approach.

What, he just vanished?

Yes.

He was looking to get out or something?

I don't know. He couldn't have jumped because we were only about six hundred feet up and one of the motors went and so the next thing, he yelled and takes off. So when I got to the ground of course I reported it and said I didn't want him any longer. Then they put on some other old bloke, you know, and I said, no, no way. I wanted a young chap and we got this young Bill [Lorne], he was terrific. When we jumped out he jumped out with his helmet on and he broke his jaw. And my bomb aimer, he got shot. He was coming down and the parachute, because we were pretty close to the close, just over here. We just got over the coast and he'd have been the first one out, so he'd be pretty close to the coast.

What, shot at by rifle fire from the ground.

Yes, from the ground. It was dark but I suppose they saw it coming down and just had a go.

I'll come back to that later. Now, were you happy with your crew after this incident?

Oh yes, yes, after that we were right. No problems.

And you got on well together?

Yes.

You socialised together and all that sort of thing?

Oh yes, yes. Well, Wes the navigator, he was a flight xxx so he was in the Officers' Mess and we had one of these houses, you know. Old Vic xxx, he was after the land army girls. She'd supply him with eggs and when we weren't on ops, you know, we go down the local pub, the old Marquise, and then come back and we pinch bread from the mess and we'd have eggs on toast at midnight, you know, all half full. It was funny but I got commissioned on the Squadron and nobody said anything, they just told me that I'd received my commission. I was a warrant officer and I was having such a ball in this that I decided I'd wait until they told me. It was ten days before they … old Hughie came up one day and said, 'McCleery, your presence is required in the Officers' Mess for dinner tonight'. So I thought, well that's the bloody end, I've got to go. But I missed it then, it was completely different. Nothing like we used to have in the house, you know, where we were all in together and had a blinking black woman that cleaned your boots and got your bath ready and all the rest of it.

Yes, that was a better deal than we had in those big barracks with about three crews in a room.

Yes. Well we had a good set up.

I didn't know that any NCOs had that set up.

Yes. I've got pictures of us somewhere. It was a house; a peacetime station, yes.

I remember now. Some of the officers went in there didn't they.

Yes. Well, we were in one. I think it was only an open fire downstairs. I don't there was any cooking things. But we used to light a fire in this grate thing there and do our cooking.

It was a bit of a problem, wasn't it, getting something to eat to eat outside your normal meals hours.

Yes. Although I recall pretty well because we had such things as bacon and eggs for breakfast which was …

Do you remember we'd always get a bacon and egg because went - our flying meals, bacon and egg - but do you recall what the meal was when we came back?

No, I thought it was always bacon and eggs when we came back. I think that you had to be very careful eating anything fatty before you flew because of the oxygen, you know, you were in oxygen from the ground up. And things like cabbage, you know, and things like that, yes.

You'd when you farted that was you. Somebody would yell, 'Who let off?'.

Yes.

It's funny you know, I've asked a lot of blokes this and nobody can definitely say about the bacon and eggs whether it was before and after or only before or only after.

Well I seem to recall it was only after.

So it would have been the normal mess meal for tea until you took off before teatime - it would be the normal mess meal.

No. I don't ever remember having bacon and eggs before a flight. And I understand it was because of using oxygen and some reaction in your stomach or your body so you didn't … but when you came back you always had bacon and eggs, from what I can remember.

I think you might be on the right track because it would have been stupid. I remember thinking to myself, isn't this stupid, having bacon and eggs before you flew. It could be. It's funny that a lot of blokes have forgotten this detail.

Yes, well, it's forty-odd years ago isn't it.

Now you commissioned nav, the fact that he was commissioned and everybody else wasn't, did that make any difference to communications in the crew?

No, no.

You'd go down to the pub together.

Oh yes, yes. Wes and I used to go on leave together as a matter of fact sometimes, you know, when we were a bit broke we'd go to Australia House and get one of these … you know …

Oh, one of the billets xxx

Yes. I God yes. There was I remember, a place in [Falmouth]. There was a pub and we thought, this will be good, you know, living in a pub. Oh God, he was an Australian, but he was bloody hopeless. He'd shut the bloody door a ten o'clock. We be out at some dance - Falmouth, there was a lot of WRENS there, you know - and you're at a dance and we had to bang the bloody door at midnight and he'd come down.

Did you end up with any English family at any period of time?

We had a wonderful time - I don't know whether it was the first time - it was somewhere in Hampshire and you could see the Isle of White from this … it was a beautiful big English country home, you know. He was a colonel from the Indian Army, a retired colonel from the Indian Army and he was known as the village squire. He met us at the station there in plus-fours and cap and everything. And when we got to the home where he lived, his wife took us aside and said, 'You know, the Colonel is not supposed to drink, so I'd be very happy if you didn't encourage him', or something like that. We got up to our rooms and got organised and came down and the old Colonel is standing there, he took us down to the cellar, down the bloody stairs. He's got a bottle of scotch down there. He gives us all a nip and, 'Don't say anything. Don't mention it'. But he was a funny old character. They were lovely people. They introduced us to two of the local girls from the village. It was only a little village. And they would go somewhere; go off and leave the house to us. We had a lovely time.

And did you go back there again?

No, it was only the once. Another time - this was in Falmouth too, I don't know why we liked Falmouth - but the wife of the … she was General Sir John [Jellagrams] daughter and she was the wife of the Governor of Tanganyka, and oh, that was another funny … We'd say to her, you know, mention something about Australia, 'Yes, I know, I know', that's all she could say, 'Yes, I know'. So we'd make things up which were obviously … we knew to be untrue and she'd say, 'Yes, yes, I know, I know'. She was a funny character.

Apart from those …

That's the only three times …

Otherwise you'd head for London, I suppose, would you?

Oh yes. We'd stay in the Strand xxx Hotel mainly. Oh, I went to Edinburgh too. We had a car. We bought a car which cost us fifty-odd pounds.

What, among the crew?

Yes. We all put in and … a Hillman, a little Hillman.

Where did you get your petrol from?

Well we got that from the Squadron. You know the starter accumulators that they plug in to help start the motor, well they'd get a 44-gallon drum of petrol for that. So we'd get on to the ground crew and

say, 'Right ho, save us a couple of tins of that', and of course they wouldn't check on how many times that started the thing up. But we went on leave at one time there and we had our great coats all piled in the back and with about four tins of petrol on the back seat. The window of the car with a cigarette in his mouth the guard would have blown up. All you do was to smell petrol. God, we got through it all right, we just waved to them, probably with a guilty look in our face and …

They be probably in two gallon cans, would you have it?

I just can't remember. I know we had this … it didn't have a boot, the car was a Hillman.

How did you get on for gas outside the station?

You were allowed tickets for - I think it was aircrew - we were given tickets for so many gallons. It wouldn't have taken you very far. But we supplemented with what we got.

I suppose, what, you'd tear off, you'd go down to the market into [Keythorps] or Riversby or somewhere like this.

Yes, yes. Mainly down to the markets at [Granbury] with Reen. Poor old Reens. She used to drink gin and then she'd start crying about all the poor boys, you know, they were way up there. She'd be crying drunk by the time the night was out.

I remember there was a warrant officer, a rear gunner called Williams, I remember her weeping over once. He went I think in January or February. She wept over him for a long time. But Peter what's-his-name, his book isn't too nice about her. He suggests that she was there for the taking by any bloke.

Yes…oh no..

I never got the impression, and even if it was, it was a pretty poor thing to put in about a married woman.

Yes I know, we had one ANZAC day, I was only there for the one ANZAC, and we were actually on ops that night. They used to take it in turn, you know, 463, 467 on one station Ops were on on ANZAC day. They would take it in turns you know, and it was 460's turn on the ANZAC day that I was there, it was snowing and we spent half the day digging out the aircraft and nobody was very happy about going. They were having a bit of a do on in the mess, you know, after we all took off. But we were sitting there at the start of the motors and everything and the next thing they come out, and everybody cheers and jumps into the wagon and straight back, get into your uniform again and that was it.

We finished the next night, which was Essen on 26th April..

Did you, I don't know whether I went on that. He used to stand down for the moon period.

Yes, there was a very definite moon period.

April 24th.

24th you were on Karlsruhe.

Karlsruhe, yes. 25th we didn't, no, we didn't fly again until May 3rd.

You weren't on xxx? No, that was when we lost three including Ricky {Jarman].

Yes..

Yes. I'll get on to your individual ops in a minute. Who was your flight commander?

Alec Wales when I first was there and then Ricky [Jarman], and then I got shot down. As a matter of fact I had done the most ops in the flight so they made me officer and made me acting flight commander, but that was only for a few days. Then I noticed here in my log book I hadn't answered a few xxx you know, and a chap named Vic Neal, he took over as acting flight commander after I got shot down and he filled that in, that's his writing. That was xxx you remember that?

Oh yeah, savage.

That was the worst one I think I've ever been on. Yes that was unbelievable that.

Now apart from the one you were shot down on, what were your most memorable raids?

Well we collided once. We lost a tail wheel.

Was it knocked off was it?

Yeah, it got knocked off. We went over the top of something. My rear gunner said it was a Halifax but I never saw a thing.

Gee, that was close. Were you up that end, did you know what it was?

No, I'll have a look.

Have guess anyhow.

No I haven't written it down. I know when we came back it was daylight, it was still light, so we must have taken off pretty late. I called up the tower and told them I thought I had some damage on the back. I got the rear gunner to come out, you know. They told me to fly up the runway, looking, and they just said you've lost a tail, you haven't got a tail wheel so you had better wheel it in. I couldn't …hear it scrapping, but there was a lot of sparks and that. That was about all that happened.

You were lucky. Another foot…

Oh yes yes well, I think there was many collisions, went down through colliding because this business of turning, you know, not heading straight for your target, and then they are all coming across the front of you, I can still see it. One in my memory, it was another Lanc, I just froze, I wouldn't have been able to do a thing. I just saw this Lanc go across in front of me like that, and just in an instant and there's nothing I could have done.

No it all happens so quick. They would be on you before you could see them.

Well I think you were just lucky were just lucky to get shot down, you know.

This is what Butch Harris never accepted this, the casualties through collisions. He would always put out his back room boys He's xxx had done this calculation of the risk of collisions that was all bullshit.

Well I did that trip on Nuremburg where they lost ninety-six, do you remember the..?

Yes, yes.

We had a very quiet trip. I saw aircraft going down, but not as many that xxx that was the worst I've ever seen.

I remember in Nuremburg we figured that the Germans had perfected [spooks] you know they used to fire the shell up and it used to look just like a Lanc being shot down.

Oh yeah yeah..

They developed those pretty well by then, and I remember the mid-upper gun saying "By geez I got those spooks working well tonight".

Yes, I just remember going through the target area, you know, where everything is lit up with the search lights, and all that sort of thing. But ah…

Any other ops apart from the one you were shot down on that you figured that..

Well the only other one was when we had those intruders, do you remember that?

Yeah.

We finished up landing at [Chelston], and that I can remember [Pop xxx] coming in there, flak going all around him from gun fire..

He was in the xxx.

He had his full lights on, and he just calmly put her down and ah, I know I was flying around at the time and I had taken another pilot and his mid-upper gunner. His mid-upper gunner had the guns out and dismantled before we … he must have taken them over the xxx. He didn't need them at all. Jesus, you know I went crook on him. Well it was his first trip so I suppose, they wanted me to take his crew, you know, and I said, no, I want my navigator, and I want my xxx and I want my rear gunner. So he took his, the pilot himself I forget his name.

It would be in the ORBs.

I took a Major, an English Army Major one night, he was a flak officer from London or something. He said never again, I'm never going again. He'd come out and have a look, I'd say, 'come and have a look at this' We're going through the target area and he'd look out and disappear back in, put the…must have put his… put behind the curtain. My navigator did that one night, he come out, I said come and have a look at this, I've never seen so many..ah…sort of flares you know? Path finder flares and the whole works. He said that's the last time I'm ever going to do that. So…

Where you up the night that..ah.. the fellow went in..

Yes..ah.. Bob [White] was another one that went in I think too, but he wasn't killed. They reckon he did the, he's a portly bloke Bob [White] he used to sit and drink rum or something, and..ah.. there would be a chase and always writing letters to his wife, you know. He didn't mix a great deal. He was quite a portly bloke and he…his undercarriage collapsed I think, full bomb on takeoff, and the thing scooted along the ground - I dot know how many tonnes of bombs he had…(laughs), and it caught fire on the runway. They reckon Bob [White] broke eight seconds for 100 yards. (laughs). Yes.

The other one that I heard was that the rear gunner was the last out, you know that big flying shed, they reckon the rear gunner passed the rest of them before they went 100 yards.

(laughs), yes, I think we had to land somewhere else, we couldn't land on the runway. Actually nobody.. we were just a bit unlucky or.. that we took off. We had to really take off, we saw it all from the air, but..ah…wondered what had happened. But we landed somewhere else I suppose [Chelston] again.

Did the bomb go off?

No, no.

It didn't..

No, no from I…

It was just the aircraft on the runway that blocked the runway?

Yes, yes. I think only about three of us got off, I'm not quite certain how many got on, but..

> Yes, I remember that…but Jock MacKenzie was the bloke that took off, Spike Marsh reckons that we had George xxx. Do you recall what explanations were given as to why he kept on going round and round in that tight circuit he was on?

No..ah.. somebody..I vaguely remember it but..They reckon the trim on a Lanc was the opposite trim on a Stirling, and I think…

> That's the story that I recall..Spike Marsh reckons…

And he'd put it the wrong way.

> Yes, and instead of it being on 0, it was full.

Yes, and he just couldn't hold it.

> Yes, that seems more feasible than George, because they asked him to check George. They said, no George wasn't in. They asked him to check his..trim..

Yes he went in didn't he, and he blew up.

> He told his crew to bail out, and some did get out but they were too close. They were all killed.

I remember it vaguely and I remember something about the trim.

> That's the explanation that I remember over the years, and that's what Bob Howe he remembers too. But Spike Marsh reckons that he had George in, but there was no investigation of it, and of coarse there'd be nothing bloody well left when they crashed at xxxx. Whose going to determine what was wrong? But apparently they didn't worry about things like that in prangs. They didn't look for reasons, they just accepted this as…you know?

Oh yeah, well there was that many of them I suppose it was…couldn't take up their time.

> I remember Bob Howard turned off the RT. He was panicking and what's his name, Healey, was talking to him, and Bob Howe switched off the RT so we could hear it because we were airborne. Now you were on Danzig…

Yeah, mining operations, yeah..

> That's the night we lost three; there was Proud, Crosby and Bourke.

Yes, Bob Proud, he was a great friend of mine. Yes.

> What op would he have been on roughly?

Well I finished with 19 before I got shot down and he had been..ah..we went to the squadron virtually the same time.

> That would be roughly…they were all experienced crews actually that went out that night, their whole operation on Danzig was experienced crews.

Yes.

> That's why the license was ….

… Gulf of Danzig Pole, and that was my 12th . So he'd be around the same, Bob.

I think was all over 10 ops that went on that. We lost three out of eleven.

Five lines, 2514 gallons, that's the maximum. I can remember … I think it took 8 hours, I was that bloody tired that..buggered when we got back. I think it was over eight hours.

That was a very successful operation that, apparently in terms of the results.

Eight hours fifty-five, nine hours actually.

One of your longest trips.

Yes it was, it would have been the longest trip I'd say.

That was a moonlight do?

Yes, I can remember seeing the lights of Sweden. Yes … as we went over.

Ah, you had no trouble over Denmark on the way back?

No, no.

That's were all the other blokes got hit. The Germans were waiting for them over Denmark.

No, as far as I can remember we just had an ordinary….the worst part of it was the time, you know, just…

Do you remember Bourke at all?

Bourke?

Bourke, Kanga Bourke?

No, no don't remember the name.

He went that night, he was getting on towards twenty or so. Bing Crosby was almost finished.

Yes I remember Bing Crosby.

Bing was killed at [Gatralz]. … the navigator got out, Ted [Suffron], but he died a few months later.

That's my navigator in the coat standing at the back. Yeah. The other blokes, I don't know their names, I can't recall their names.

That bloke was [Bishop], Les [Bishop].

That was Jock, I don't know that bloke, Jock Turner might have been there. I had him as a navigator one night. That's the night we collided. I wonder if I've got…

That bloke was killed.

Was he, yes. Most of the ..

Do you remember that face well, do you? xxx no way in the world.

Mmm.

You're on Ruhland on the 18th of the eighth.

We did an xxx

That would have been at ATU. No, this was a …

Oh yes, Ops 14.

One of your remarks there was: bombing appeared accurate, no contact, was skittish. What's skittish?

I'm darned if I know. (laughs)

'Skittish'. Bombing appeared accurate, no contact was skittished.

I'm darned if I know. I've never come across that.

Twenty-first of April you're on Cologne. You said PFF were very late. Now did you strike this …

April 20th, Cologne.

Twentieth or Twenty-first?

Twentieth I've got here.

What time did you take off?

Well, I didn't put that down. Four hours thirty minutes was the trip.

You said PFF were very late. Now I notice somewhere else you orbited for ten minutes because PFF were late. Now did you find that …

I can't remember that either.

It's in the RRB. I thought I'd better check that out with you because PFF were late. Now a lot of blokes around our time complained about faulty wind forecasts. Did you find that, the winds were often up the tube?

No, not really. I never took much notice of what my navigator did.

Well, he'd complain if he had thought that.

Yes, well I sort of left that to him. If he told me to turn on to such and such a bearing I just did that. I didn't know where we were. I might ask him how long before we turned or, you know, onto another leg but, most of the navigation I just left to him.

I thought most of those broadcast winds, you know, there were wind-finding aircraft and then they used to average them out at group and send them back, I thought they were usually fairly accurate.

I certainly never had any trouble with not finding the target, you know.

Were you always or, in the main, were you generally confident that you dropped your bombs in the right place?

Yes, mainly, yes. I had some very good photos I remember that.

Now on the night of Cologne, you said: search lights over base at take-off were unnecessarily persistent. They must have been looking for intruders or something, were they?

I don't really know. I can't remember that either.

I don't remember the bloody searchlights over base.

No, that's something I can't recall. No. Unless at take-off. Remember they used to shoot one off up when you …

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

… there were that many airfields near Berlin. Five square miles.

That's why sometimes the perimeter lights overlapped, didn't they?

Yes.

What did they call that DK eliminated? What was the name for that?

DK?

An illuminator DK at base as well as the …

I can just remember the beacon which flashed Morse code, you know. I don't know whether they changed it every night and they told you what it was going to be or whether it was just permanently flashing.

No, I think they changed it occasionally I'd say. I don't think they changed it from night to night. But I remember seeing this bloody thing and there's a name for it: BK.

BK, I don't remember, BK.

It's a wonder, I've seen it enough times.

Probably.

Now Karlsruhe on 24th April. That was the night we were told to go in low and then climb after we passed the front wasn't it?

I don't really know that either.

'Cause that's the night we got into trouble.

Six hours, that was a fairly long trip.

You mentioned here that you struck clouds from 17 and a half thousand to 23 thousand.

Yes.

You blotted out the targets so you descended to 17 thousand, you saw the iron, you bombed at 17 thousand. So you came down to bomb.

Yeah.

There you say adjustable zero hour was badly needed, could not loose enough time going out and bombed at zero hour. You were ahead of your waves and you couldn't loose time, so that would have been because the winds died out. So you said that they adjusted to zero hour, they changed to zero hour for the entire course you suggested.

Yes.

Makes sense. Ah… now the night on Kassel, that was marshalling yards did you say. What date was that?

Ah….May 11th .

How did it happen?

Well we got hit in the starboard outer motor and it caught fire, and it was obviously a fighter.

Along the coast.

Well, I think we may have been just gone into Belgium over the coast. So the plant engineer and I feathered the engine and pressed the fire extinguisher and got the fire out and then the next second the inner motor caught fire too. So I said this is it we'll have to get out, you know, two engines from the one side and we had a full bomb load. So they all got out.

Any difficulties in getting out?

No. I only remember the navigator calling through the xxx, I remember that. But, Bill and I left and Bill went and he still had his helmet on. He pulled the plug out and apparently I heard later it hit him in the jaw.

Did the plug hit him?

Yes, the plug hit him. He pulled the parachute … pulled the ripcord and broke his jaw. And I can remember seeing the aircraft go into the ground and, whoosh, up she went.

And you'd have been the last out. What height do you reckon you'd have been when you got out?

I got out, if I remember right, about eight to ten thousand feet.

You'd have been hit at about twenty-one I suppose.

Yes. We were pretty well up and the thing just started to spiral down. I remember there was no problem getting out. The bomb aimer opened the hatch.

You were spiralling when you got out?

Yes. Just very slowly, just going around and out we went. I landed somewhere and it was pitch black. I tried to dig a hole and bury the parachute but I don't know whether I did a good job but that's what you're suppose to do. And I got under a hedge. I can remember getting under a hedge, it was in a field. The next morning I saw presumably Belgiums working in a field, you know, and I thought, no, I'd better keep quiet. And I lay there under this hedge out of sight. I never saw a German. Then I went to … I lost a flying boot, one of my flying boots had come off when I jumped. You know what those big unwieldy boots were.

Were these the one that had the knife to cut the top off or the floppy ones?

The real big floppy ones. That's why it probably came off. I must have been upside down and the wind just blew it off. I went into a church there. A nun come to the door and she's going like this. She shut the door and come out a little bit later with an old pair of sandshoes. So I put those on.

She was game to do that.

Yes.

Were you injured in any way?

No.

Were you shocked in any way?

No, not really. No more than you would be.

No well that would be right. Did you make use of that escape kit?

Yes, I wasn't caught for two days, and I cut of the epaulettes and took my wings off and battle dress and…

Keep them or put them in your pocket?

Put them in my pocket, yes. Then I got out the maps and ah… the next day I just gave away all the ID. They were just flat out and nobody took any notice of me. I walk along the street and I went into a couple of taverns. I handed over one of these notes, I remember, she looked at it and the next thing she gives me a great dumb look. Must have been 100 bucks or something (laughs). Belgium money that had come out of this escape kit.

What was in that, what sort of money, Belgium and French I suppose? Dutch? German?

Well, there was probably no German in it, because escape kits were different, if you were only going over to France all you got was French maps and French money and…

I didn't bloody well know that, I didn't know they changed the xxx.

Yes If you were going over to Germany of coarse you'd have German money, and then others had a mixture like Dutch and German and Belgium and French money I suppose. As I recall it anyway.

I'll check that one out but I think you are completely right. So you recall the town you were in?

Ah, no but I was heading back towards Antwerp, I don't know .. ah .. I went into a little café and there was this white haired old lady coming up and there was two German soldiers sitting at a table a few feet from where I was and they never took any notice of me. This old duck comes out starts yabbering away and of course I couldn't speak anything. So she starts saying xxx and I'm thinking Christ I'm (laughs) German soldiers, and she's waving her arms around. She goes out to the kitchen and she brings me back half a loaf of bread, or a piece of rye bread and a packet of cigarettes.

Are the Germans still there?

Yes, still there (laughs) so I thought I had better get out of here in a hurry. How I finally got caught, I went into this, I just can't remember whether it was a tavern or what it was, a place where you could eat or something. And this woman she started yapping to me, and of coarse I didn't know what she was talking about, and so she says 'tommy' so I nodded my head. So the next thing she burst into tears. I thought Christ I had better get out of here too. So off I went, I was walking along, still daylight, and I heard this Volkswagen I remember. The Volkswagen pulled up, went passed me then pulled up. So I thought oh I don't like the look of this, so I just turned into a gate, into a house and went straight through the front door. I could hear these characters running and I could hear their guns clicking, and I thought this is it. So I just walked into this kitchen and all these Belgiums sitting ..(laughs), next thing these two bloody they must have been plain clothed Germans come in and bail me out. Ran their hands over to see if I was armed and took me back to Antwerp prison. They offered me a bottle of beer which I wouldn't take. I'd die for a bloody drink, but I wouldn't take it because of all this talk about trying to get you drunk and get you to talk and all that. They were only being…

Thoughtful..

Yes, yes.

They were Germans not Belgiums?

As far as I know they were Germans, yes. They were in plain clothes, and then we just got put in prison cells. I was in with New Zealanders, two of us in a prison cell. Then they interrogated you and they gave you these Red Cross forms, you know, squadron and all that, I put down name, rank, number, that was it. They started screaming and yelling, say they are going to shoot you, send … down in the dungeons.

Did they produce any weapons when they were threatening you?

Well there was a bloke there with a rifle, standing with a rifle, but he was only a guard I suppose. Then I got put down in these cells down there. There was a red headed yank an airforce yank and he …. German bastard he was calling …(laughs), going on. They had these bloody big dogs, there was no toilet there and you had to call them to take you to the toilet, and they come along with these bloody great dog. That sort of thing. It was … if you talked, if you … they kept you. That was my impression that the more that you would tell them the more..

They would want out of you.

Yes, they took us to a place, [Vetsler] I think it was called. It's another interrogation place and they'd grill you there and one of these characters would come. They used to have heaters in the cells, the nights were quite cold, and the bastard would turn the heaters on in the daytime and then turn them off at night. This went on for a few days, this was to soften me up I suppose. One of these Germans very well dressed you know, leggings and the whole works, big swastika on their hats, silver and all that. They would come in and offer you a cigarette, which everybody grabbed, everybody did. I had a full packet of cigarettes on me, I always carry an extra two packets, but I smoked them before I got picked up. Then this woman gave me a packet of these horrible xxx French cigarettes..

Yes, yes I know.

Bloody awful, but they were bloody welcome at the time at the time, not that I smoke now. I smoked then.

So this German officer is still trying to get something out of you?

Yes well I finally went into a room, and there was this, I don't know what he was .. major .. and he's got a big thing in front of him and he says 'how's [hugey]?' So I sort of looked at him, and 'hows [hugey]?' And I never said a word, and it turns out he meant Hughie.

He wasn't bloody clever after all.

No, then he turned it over and said we know who your from and who you are. Gave me the name Wes Betts, they picked them all up. But he didn't pick my rear gunner up, he got into the Belgium underground and he never got caught. He got back to England yes, [Don Dyson], he got back to England in September. That's when the British army went through Belgium at the D Day, he was back..

So he was round there for 4 or 5 months?

Yes, he was with them. He apparently still has contact with some of them now. Funny part about it was unfortunate for him, they brought in some years ago that all ex-prisoners of war would have full medical treatment, and they wouldn't give it to him because he never got caught (laughs). He spent five months behind the line and …I got it, I got it, I still got all my medical stuff, dental, glasses, the whole works.

Because you were picked up, not because of any disabilities?

No, no, I don't get a pension or anything like that. A war pension, but I do get full medical things which is quite handy.

And your wife too?

No, she doesn't get it.

So where did they take you from then? From the second interrogation?

We went to .. I think it was Frankfurt somewhere. We got of the train and they marched us through - I don't know what the town was, I can't remember, and all these women screaming at us and shaking their fists and going on. There was a little German, he'd be about five foot, corporal, so he was in charge of us.

How many guards did you have?

No, they had other guards but he was a corporal.

He was the boss.

He was the boss of us. So he halted us in the middle of this, he turned on these bloody women and he give them hell. When they were just talking normally, having a normal conversation, any outsider that didn't know what they were saying would think that were having a barney. Of course he gave them hell and they are backing away, and so we went on last time.

That was at Frankfurt?

I think that was at Frankkfurt, I'm not quite certain or xxx, xxx I remember that. I had a book, a war time log I called it, that I kept while I was in Germany. It's now, the Australian War Museum want it. They have got it at the moment. It was a Canadian .. it was a book about that thick full of blank pages but with a foreword from the Canadian Red Cross. It was given actually to Canadian prisoners of war. It said .. a little note in it saying .. it had a maple leaf on the front of it .. a little note saying they could use it to write letters that they couldn't write normally, or use it as a diary and so on. So I gave ah a sort of currency you might call it in the camp was these American [d-bars] which were chocolate bars, you wouldn't eat them now but it was a sort or a fortified chocolate, extra calories and all this sort of thing. That was .. if you wanted something from somebody you'd give him a d-bar or half a d-bar, everything was worked out in d-bars. I gave this Canadian bloke, he didn't want it .. a d-bar for it, and then I started filling it up. A lot of drawings in it, I did a lot of drawings myself in it, and poems that were written by blokes there. Some very good poems, and a lot of them were artists, very good artists, and had all the addresses and names of a lot them I knew. French Canadians, Canadians and all RAF and RCAF. Quite a few New Zealanders. It was the safe camp with the wooden horse, but that happened in March and I got there in May. We sort of got the aftermath.

Everyone kept their eyes on you. So what was that Stalak Luft what?

Stalak Luft 3, yes Bolaria. They had compounds, there was a North compound, a South compound. Bolaria was the compound we were in .. and ah .. there's no, I never even saw the North compound that was somewhere else but it was only a mile away or something.

That's where the wooden horse incident was?

The North compound was there, the actual place for the wooden horse, and they shifted the xxx I always remember a chap named [Wally Floody], he was a Canadian Air Force, I think he might have been a pilot. But he was a mining engineer and he had his sidle light and he was one of the ones that was involved in the tunneling. But he didn't go, he didn't go out.

Now this diary, you've given it to them, or you've offered it to them if they want it?

Well actually Tim Anderson wanted to have a look at it, and he has virtually taken it over. Next thing I know Bill Moffet gave me a receipt from Canberra War Museum .. that they have got the book. It was pretty .. in a dilapidated condition you know, 'cause I was determined to bring that home. I had a lot of trouble with some of them when the Russian's started getting a bit close to our camp, they put us on the road, we marched for a week. We finished up in a camp near Berlin called Luckenwalde and they checked you as you went through, and I had this book with me, I'd carried it all the way. In one of the cartoons you might call it, was a German soldier standing there and under the ground was this (laughs) digging with a hold of a candle you know. This bloody German he took exception to this and he through the bloody book on the ground yelling at me and he hit me on the back with the rifle butt. So I ran and grabbed the bloody book and he was trying to take it off me, and I wouldn't let go, and this German officer came along and he must have asked him what the trouble was. This German ranted and raved and was talking and then they opened the book at this bloody cartoon, and the German officer looks at it and next thing he bursts into bloody laughter. (laughs). He just gave the book back to me and that was it, but I kept the book.

> Well if it's with them I guess it would an open access to any scholars, because I don't think they just take it and store it away.

No I don't know what they are going to do with it, they did say that, well Tim Anderson said they were going to sort of re-bind or something.

> What they do with the log books, they take the original and re-bind it and they give you back a photostat copy.

Yes well there is talk of them doing this, but I don't know how they are going to do that because I got some .. swastika thing, silver I think it is, of a dead German's hat .. cap, and that's in it. There is German money and that sort of thing, and I've got a whole sheet of stamps of Hitler, the whole lot.

> It's all in that book?

Yes, it's all in the book.

> Well I hope they look after it. If they give me a look, can I have a look at it.

Yes, yes, yes. James McCleery, its under my name.

> It might be just stuck away somewhere to be looked at when they get enough staff or something, and it mightn't appear for bloody years, this is the problem.

Well they told me, I asked Tim for it back about four times and he's humming and ha-ing all the bloody time. I think he wanted to .. see they wanted to start a sort of a 460 squadron little museum thing. I don't know where it was and they wanted anybody to give something.

> Well I'll make inquiries anyhow, I read up there every morning.

Yes well it will be there, it's definitely there, I've got the receipt.

> I'll ask them about it. Now how were you released from prison?

Well we were liberated by the Russians actually and we went to this camp Luckenwalde it was out of Berlin 30 kilometers or something out of Berlin and ah..

> You said Luckenwalde?

Luckenwalde it's called and ah, when we went in there they put us down in these, it looked like a ablutions, you know, with all these little windows and showers and things. Everybody's thinking of being gassed and told to take our boots off .. smashed the window if they started putting the gas through, but there was nothing like that. But the German officer .. the commander in the area, the German, he sent a word into the British officer, a group captain he was more or less a CO in this

particular place. I know he was a RAF group captain anyway. But we weren't to let the Russians in otherwise they would open fire, the Germans would open fire. You couldn't stop the Russians they came through and we had locked the gates. Great big huge timber gates, and they were locked and they just rammed their tanks right into them. Boom, down went the bloody gates. There was another tank running along the barbed wire and it was being filmed by Russian .. you know the great liberators who liberate all these Americans and British and they just rammed down the wire and buggered everything up. There's women sitting on these tanks and it's coming in. I can remember one bloke …

Russian women?

Yes, but one of our blokes pulled a cigarette out the packet and held it up to one of them, and she took the whole bloody packet. (laughs), she grabs the whole packet. She was going to just take one but she got the whole packet and he wasn't going to do anything. He wasn't going to argue with her (laughs), so he lost his packet of cigarettes. I heard on my radio, the Germans left the place and of course our mob got in. It was all done .. you know, there was no looting or anything like that …

So there was no shooting of Germans by the Russians?

Ah, no although they brought them back and all you had to do was say 'him, him, him' and they never shot them.

Was there anybody that was a bit of a tyrant and knock them over for you?

Yes, oh yes, we saw them all .. they brought them all back and paraded them all and they asked us to pick out the ones (laughs), but our blokes wouldn't do it. There was some humorous things, they wanted, I presume it was for some thing here after you know, they wanted our name and address and the whole works.

The Russians?

Russians yes, so we all lined up and they had all these girls, Russian girls, and they took it down phonetically. You'd tell them your name and where you had come from and address and they would copy it down in Russian ..

Phonetically?

Phonetically, you know the same sound. So we were told not to give them our .. so that there was about .. all the Australians were Ned Kelly and the Glen Rowan Pub. I said don't tell them anything cause they probably may have come later on saying well we liberated you, why don't you join the communist party and this sort of thing. So bloody Ned Kelly, Glen Rowan Pub they copied down.

Then it would be even funnier if it was ever transcribed back into English.

Oh yes, well how they did that I don't know.

So from there on it was more or less straight back to Brighton was it?

Well they wouldn't let us go. We actually had to escape again. When we were there they wanted to take us back through Odessa, go through Odessa and get on a boat and come all the round. I presume they wanted to show their people, you know, here we are we have liberated all these American and British, .. you know we are the master race.

That's right, we have got that far forward, they are still coming through and we have got right through Berlin.

Yes and so this American officer and he had a big Negro driver. They arrived up and the Russians had got the .. there was about, I don't know how many but there was a lot of Italians that were in the prison camp. The Germans had actually .. these Italians they had sent them to the Russian front and the Germans reckon they were bloody hopeless, you know (laughs) had sent them back and took them

prisoners of war. The Russians when they come in there, they just said we only have two allies, Britain and America. We had Norwegian, we had Italian, French, Polish workers and everything. I don't know how many thousand and the Russians just brought in food. Enough for the British and Americans and our mob just said well we just can't eat .. you know, we will have to share it out we just can't let them starve. So we were virtually worse off than we were with the Germans, you know. But this American bloke, officer, he come up and they had put the gate back up again by this time and they had Russian guards around the wire and up in the things like the Germans, you know. He had about four or five army trucks, big American trucks, and he said he wanted to evacuate, you know, and take us to American lines. The Russians wouldn't allow them to come in, wouldn't allow us out. So the American officer said while I was standing at the gate with a dozen others, and he said well I'll wait down the road about a kilometer down the road in amongst the trees and if anybody can get out and get down there we'll take them back. So we let that be known around the camp and I know I got out and my navigator got out. We got through the barbed wire and sneaked into the bushes and got down there, and I suppose two truck loads, we all just stood in the back of these trucks and hung onto something. So the Yanks off they go. We get pulled up by a couple of Russians on German motorcycle with a side car. Obviously they had never ridden one before, we were told to follow them. So off they go, and they are going from side to side and they are nearly hitting everything, you know, and we get to some village or something and they roar through the village and next thing the Yank driver turns off and we lost them. We got to the Junkers factory, Junkers aircraft factory, they had taken that over. We were sort of billeted there and the Yanks fed us, and you know what they are like, they had everything. We were aloud to .. they took us down the local German pub and no cost, you know, just told them to give us what we want.

This was still in the outskirts of Berlin was it?

Ah this was near Leipzig. We had travelled in the truck for I suppose a couple of hours. So they had to cross the Elbe, that's were they stopped, you know. Somewhere near Leipzig. It was a Junkers aircraft factory, 'cause in this logbook I've got that's in the War Museum I've got photo's that I .. we went through all the offices there was nobody there. They have their mess room where they currently ate and I've got a photo of that and a big German swastika and photo's of Hitler and all this sort of thing in this log book. It had all been ransacked before we got there, but there was a lot of photo's, German photo's, I picked out what I wanted. We were pulling draws out right and left to see what we could get our hands on. Then they took us by truck back to Brussels, and the RAF in DC3s back to England.

How did they treat you back in England?

Very good. We went to Eastbourne I think it was …

Not Brighton

Oh Brighton I mean yes. Yes Brighton that's right. Bournemouth when we arrived and Brighton when we were leaving which I thought was Eastbourne. Somewhere there I know and the Red Cross took us over and gee they were very good. They had sandwiches, asparagus sandwiches, but anything was great after what we had been eating.

How did you get on for clothing in camp, did you have any new clothing, any uniforms sent to you? How did you get on?

No we didn't. I got a bill from [Carson and War], I just ordered a new uniform and they sent me a bloody bill. The bill is in that book, six pounds twelve and six I think it was which was asking the authority to be taken out of my pay book. I think, I don't recall, we got parcels with jumpers and things like that. I can't remember .. about trousers or anything like that, whether we were issued with anything or not I don't know.

Now the rest of your crew, did they have .. well West was in with you wasn't he?

We were in the same room actually for the whole time.

And the other four, did they have similar experiences?

No, [Hammie] the mid upper gunner, they picked him up and he never had his dog tags, he never had anything. They put him in a .. he was in one of these concentration camps for a while. Until they woke up that he was fair dinkum. He was a bloke like that, you know. We were sitting at dispersal one night before take-off. Next thing there is bloody tracers flying everywhere. He pressed the bloody cut on his mid upper gun and the bloody tracer bullets flying everywhere. He was a bloke like that. But he finished up in [Lookenvalda] next to us. He was in another compound. I've got a little note that I kept - it's in that log book - where he wrapped it up in a stone, the bit of paper, and he threw it over the fence to us. We picked it up. 'How'ya going boys?'. He comes from the east end of London, a real Cockney, a funny little bloke. He'd do anything. He'd light the fire and he'd do the cooking and we'd just sit there. He was very happy to do all that.

Have you got any particular memories of any of you superiors? Like Hughie and [Spike Marsh]?

Well I can't say I liked Spike very much.

He's got a name for being rather aloof. A distant sort of a bloke.

Yes, well it started when we were [Litchfield], everybody else had to go and pick their crew and Spike and [Rolo Kingsford-Smith], they arrived at [Litchfield] while I was there. The next thing you hear over PA system: 'Squadron Leader Kingsford-Smith, those wishing to become members of his crew, he will interview them at two o'clock in the mess', you know, and all this sort of thing. One was a CFI and one was CPI, they were squadron leaders. So everybody else got up in arms about this. Apparently, I just can't recall, I can remember one story - I don't know whether it is true or not - but, there was a bloke who had been a pilot and he'd lost his leg and he was that keen that he transferred to gunner. He was on Kittyhawks in the Middle East and so he decides he will go along to this, and as the story goes, Rolo Kingsford-Smith was telling me how many hours he had on Tiger Moths and this bloke said, 'oh, I don't think I'd suit you, I've shot down three Heinkels. I've got 400 hours on Kittyhawks,' and just walked out. Now that's a story I don't know whether it's true. That was a general attitude and Spike was the same. They were sort of aloof in the fact that they were big time squadron leaders, you know, and everybody else was flight sergeant or POs.

He's living up Bilpin, you know where Bilpin is? Up above Kurrajong, Spike's up there.

Oh yes, Spike is, is he?

I eventually found him and went up and saw him one afternoon, he's living on his own, and his second wife died recently. He's got a five acre block and a couple of horses, and he rides his horses around the bloke. He's on his own completely. A keen racing man who goes down to Hawkesbury whenever there is a meeting on and that's about all he gets.

I never really had much to do with him, or with Rolo Kingsford-Smith, 'cause Rolo went to (squadron) 463 or 7 or one of those.

That's interesting. How about Hughie?

Hughie, well we didn't know much .. you know, I've got photo's, particularly in the album in the log book I've got of Hughie, you know, he used to come in to brief and debriefing and all that. I can remember one night, the night we came back, we didn't go on the ANZAC day. We got back and my bomb aimer [Jeff Roland] he got a bit under the weather and he called Hughie a Piccadilly Australian. I got called up the next day, I had to keep my crew in order (laughs). Jeff got a bit carried away bloody Piccadilly Australian, you know, here he used to have an Australia on his shoulders. But he didn't do anything about it, I mean he could have, that's the thing about it. So he's a good bloke. I've actually been to his - when he was alive - to where he lived in Potts Point or whatever it is, up on the 23rd floor or something…

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2 - SIDE A

…and he could play the piano, and he was really the .. after about three drinks he was (laughs)

He was all right.

Yes he was a lot of fun.

[Ops drove west of the drink] you would say.

Yes.

And your xxx [Widdup]?

Bill .. ah, no Vic. [Vic Widdup].

Your mid upper Hamilton?

Arthur was his name but we called him Hammy, he was always known as Hammy. I got a letter from him a while ago, I got a Christmas card from him a while ago. The only one I haven't heard from is Bill [Law], I don't know what happened to Bill.

And your rear gunner [Dyson]?

Don Dyson, yes.

Now did you all get out? …

Ah, you views on commissions, in so far as there was a system of commissions, what did you think of it? You know, a few off course, law is the issue, tour progressed until you got to the point …

Yes, well they got to the point where just said pilots had to be …

Did you go through the interview process or not?

No, I wasn't interviewed at all.

In other words, that was the stage where they said, okay, pilots …

Yes, if you were a pilot you were selected automatically. I never went to any interview or anything. Just out of the blue, all pilots are now - I was a warrant officer at the time - all pilots are now commissioned.

And most other musterings also were commissioned about this time that I'm talking about, around about just before D Day, just after everybody ..

Yes, well I don't think, if you were shot down ..

No, well again this is your bloody, a forgotten man really. So far as gongs or commissions were concerned, you weren't in the race.

That's right, Don Dyson and Vic, they were sub flight sergeants and Jeff Roland was a flight sergeant, no, he was a warrant officer. So I think that's how they finished up, well that's how we came home.

So far as pilots were concerned they were really rectifying something that should never have been.

Yes, well the point was when you were in the aircraft you were the boss. No matter what rank your crew were, it was me and my navigator was a flight lieutenant, not that he ever pulled rank or anything like that.

I have heard the odd case where that was …

Well I suppose depending on what the bloke was like, some of them would resent being told by a flight sergeant to do this or to do that. But there was never anything like that between Wes and I. Rank just didn't count.

Ah .. decorations …

The only decoration I got the Air Crew Europe Star, and about 5 medals but they are all defence medals. 39 49 star.

See this is the unfair part, you did 18 Ops, so you were on you 19th Op. But because you were shot down well okay that's it. I'd say you would have done enough then to get yourself a gong.

Oh well, that was the way they were. If you did 30 .. then again it wasn't very fair, they just usually pick the pilot and the navigator.

I reckon pilot, he should have got one every time for sure. But then we come to, now Bob [White] didn't get one did he?

No.

Merve Stanford didn't get one …

No, the only ones I can remember was getting a gong was .. what was his name …

Not [Reg Mullans].

[Reg Mullans] yes.

He was the only immediate ..

He got an immediate DFC and then he got a Bar when he finished. So he got DFCs.

And somebody was telling me yesterday, down at the Div in Melbourne at Point Cook and there's names up there and Reg was up there just as DFC. He put on a real act because the Bar wasn't mentioned. Anyway Don Delaney said you're bloody lucky, I've got none. Don did a tour at [Breton], he then did fifteen on the Pathfinders before he flew out. He didn't get a gong.

Didn't he. Well, that's strange because … he was flight engineer.

But you'd have figured that that fifteen on a second tour was worth a bloody gong.

Oh yes, that's right. It should have.

I found quite a bit of feeling about this that there was no consistency in it.

No. Well that's the way they worked it and that's what you had.

But most blokes I've talked who have talked at any length about it reckon the American system would have been fairer. You got an air medal after five and you got a plaster or a bar or something for every five thereafter.

Oh yeah.

And on top of that you might get a DFC. But at least everybody got something basic.

Oh well, not that it means that much I suppose in the end.

No, not any more. What part of your life did it play? How do you see it as part of your life today? A very big part?

I think so. I'm not one to … like some of the blokes in 460, that's their life now.

I picked that. But, no, you're so right. It's their life.

Yes. Vic Gray and Phil Knox, even Tim Anderson, if they didn't have 460 to pull on I don't know what they'd do.

Do you recall Bob Wade?

Yes, I know Bob Wade. I met him once a few years ago. He's up at Taree somewhere.

That's right. Out at Warhope or somewhere. He's trying desperately to sell a farm. He was air traffic controller of Canberra for years and he was invalided out of that. But Bob's never left the Air Force. He talks Air Force, I've been to see him a couple of times.

Oh yes. Well see, they're always on my back. Why don't you come to the reunions and why don't you this? And they've got a ladies night every so on. But …

You worked out a life of your own.

Well that's right. I go away a lot. My wife likes going away and so we just … that's it.

And after the war you went through under CRTS did you?

Yes.

And became an industrial chemist.

I worked at Cummings, Smith xxx in Perth. That was about the only - making super phosphates, making sulphuric acid actually. It was used in the manufacture of super phosphate and that. I couldn't see much future in that so I decided to go over to Melbourne or Sydney. I just wrote away. They brought out some books at the Uni, you know, of jobs. I mean you could pick and chose in those days, it's not like now where you just take what you can. But you could pick any particular job you wanted. I came over here and started working for Burgers Paints for fourteen months. That was a bit of a dead loss. They wanted their pound of flesh. They really made you stick to it, you know, no smoking in the laboratories, which was fair enough, but if you walked outside to have a smoke, they'd be on you back, you know. Not allowed to waste time doing that and all this. I stuck it for fourteen months and then joined the Sydney Water Board. I stayed with them for twenty-five years.

So you retired at fifty-five.

Yes.

That was a sensible thing to do. I did that too but I went back to work.

Well I haven't been back to work. I bought a caravan the year after I retired and we just went. The first year we were away about eight months of the year with the caravan. We'd come back and have a couple of weeks, see the place was still here, fix up our mail and pay the bills, then off again. We just came back last September. We went out through Broken Hill to Port Augusta and then - there's a bitumen road right through to Darwin virtually from Port Augusta now. It's all bitumen and we just

went up to Alice Springs through to Katherine and then I'd been to Darwin the first time we went round and I wasn't over impressed so we didn't go to Darwin this time. Then went across to the Kimberleys and the Pilberra and down the West Australian coast to Perth.

That would be interesting. That Pilberra region …

Yes, it's lovely up there. We've got friends at Port Headland and they're all got four-wheel drive vehicles and they take us to absolutely fabulous fishing on some of these cattle and sheep stations. There's one there called Munda Station and it's got about forty miles of coastline up there as part of the station. And they've got these creeks coming in, this Munda Creek and I've never been anywhere … I've never been to a fishing place like it. We would catch these flathead and whiting and bream, even a shark - a three foot shark we caught. And it was just one after the other. You know, you couldn't stop.

So you're a keen fisherman?

Yes. My wife is even keener. Oh, she's mad about it.

Do you remember any of those blokes in particular? They're the forty-nine that were shot down in that six months.

Pilots, are they?

Yes.

Flight Sergeant Martin, I remember that name. I remember PA Cusick, that's Mike Cusick I think was his name. Squadron Leader [Youks], I remember him.

Yes, he was on his eighteenth of his second tour. He went on Nuremburg.

Sergeant Anderson. Bing Crosby I remember him. Bob Proud was a great mate of mine. Provess, I remember him, Sir Arthur Provess. Ricky Downer, of course I remember him. And Warrant Officer Leary, I remember him. Xxx Grants I remember him, he must have been West Australian, was he?

I'm not sure.

Leary. He's a 415 number. I think 5 was West Australia wasn't it?

I haven't worked that one out yet. Something I've got to get around to is little details like that.

Well I think the first two numbers was the year you joined and the next number was the State and then the next three numbers was how many joined up in that particular year. So, Ricky [Jarman] he would be 404, so I don't know what 4 was. I think it went on embarkation dates. 1 was probably for Victoria, 2 New South Wales and 3 would be … 5 was West Australia. I went on most of these trips. Danzig, that's a pretty bad one, wasn't it? Don Proud, I didn't remember which one he went on. Now I know it was Danzig, I can remember us hoping he may have got shot down over or landed in Sweden or some place like that, you know. I remember there was some talk that hoping that that's what happened.

We actually flew over Sweden that night didn't we?

Yes, they routed us right over and I think the Swedes fired on us but we were well away.

Yes, I remember the flak coming up but it was all well below us.

Yes, it was all well away.

Just token flak I think.

I can remember the lights. I can still see the lights.

Yes the lights, no black out.

I remember because it was so unusual. I think it was Arthur Provess, I've got a photo of him somewhere too. Bob Proud. Yes, I can remember getting quite a shock when I walked into a camp and I expected to, 'Hello, so-and-so', and there wasn't one bloke; not one.

That you knew.

No. That was in the compound I was in. There just wasn't one 460 squadron bloke there.

There were more of course died than survived because once you were hit.

Yes. Well that's the sort of thing. I expected to see at least half a dozen blokes, you know, have a reunion. You were interrogated when you went into the camp by your own blokes. If they knew you were from Perth they had a bloke that lived in Perth and he'd ask you questions about pubs and streets and all this, you know, in case the Germans were swinging in a …

Oh I get you. That was an unofficial interrogation.

They had a radio and you got a bulletin and it was carried around in a book from hut to hut. And when there was a new intake coming in of Kriegs as we were called, I think it's short for kriegsgefangener which is German for prisoners of war, I understand. However we were called Kriegs. But the chap that I got I knew him, a chap named Les - what was his name, I used to drink with him in the Palace Hotel. I knew him in the Air Force but he wasn't on 460. He was on a different squadron. Yes, a few memories going back that far.

That was the aircraft … engine change, an overhaul. I got this new aircraft, a C-2 I think it was. Brand new it was and everything was that stiff and you couldn't … oh, I hated it.

H-2 done a few ops by the look of it.

H-2 have done quite a few, yes. I did most of mine in it.

Where are you there in that group?

The one of the right, kneeling down, I've got a parachute harness or something on. Had to take it inside at an angle.

That's your engineer, is it?

Yes. That's the crew there. That's taken at … That's one of the married quarters at Pembroke.

A bit of bloody snow around too.

Here, look at this. I was with some bloke there, we digging away, digging these bloody aircraft out and he said, 'This is like digging your own grave'. When you think of it he wasn't far wrong.

We've got one of our crew digging there and Bob Howe standing back with his hands in his pockets. I said, 'Yeah, that's you Howe'.

Yes. That's taken there. That's me in the seat there.

That's a good shot.

That's another one of me in my seat there.

What did you think of the Lanc?

Terrific. There's three points which you couldn't do with a Halifax or you certainly do with a Wimpie, they were the hard ones to fly, the old Wimpie.

Were they.

Yes. You had to push the stick forward, so heavy. Of course I wasn't … I was about ten stone seven and I couldn't see over the bloody top of it. I always had to have a cushion. And it's funny the night I got shot down I used to tell the ground staff to put two cushions in the seat and they didn't do it so I put the parachute under the seat and then the cushion on top of it, you know, otherwise you sling it up the back. That's what I mean to say, you must have been bloody mad to do those sort of things.

I remember your face now. I remember the other bloke alongside you there.

That's Jeff Long, that's the bomber. That's Bournemouth or Eastbourne or something when we arrived and marching down. They used … I remember we used to stay in old seaside guest houses. I met this bloke, he was Vice President of Universe International, Alfred E Dat, in London. So he gave me his key - he took me out to dinner.

Mr Grahams, who was he?

He was apparently the Universal Pictures manager in Perth. He asked me where I came from and I told him Perth. I never went. I never bothered, but he gave me that. I met him in London, very nice of him.

It's a pity. I remember your face well now. You were pretty bloody young.

Yes, I had my twenty-first birthday in Germany. And the boys put on a party for me. They saved up all their rations and made a cake and we had this what we called [cree brew], the only thing we liked in the British Red Cross parcel, you couldn't blame them. It was the worst parcel of the lot. The best parcel was the Yanks, the next the Canadians and then the British. Of course they were doing their best. The British didn't have what the Yanks and Canadians produced. The only thing we liked there was their bloody prunes. The prunes all went into making this brew. You had this big thing sitting behind the stove so the heat … and you put all the sugar and … all the Red Cross parcels. Everybody got one Red Cross parcel a month and they were all … the Germans used to puncture the cans, you know, so that you couldn't save it up and use it in an escape attempt sort of thing. I have a vague idea they used to give us - there's twelve in a room - and they used to give us three parcels a week and that was our twelve for the month and it meant that we'd only have to keep, if it was a tin of meat or something, we only had to keep it for … cause they punctured it, so we had to use it, you know, so you couldn't sit it in your kit and shoot off. It was all pooled in together. We had two New Zealanders. We'd take it in turns to cook for a week and this sort of thing. It was very build up I think to your character because they were all nice blokes. We had four Australians, four Canadians, two New Zealanders and a bloke called Mike Walsh, he was a fleet air arm. He got shot down on a [Walrus], you can imagine he'd been there. 1940 he got down. He'd been there four years. And one of the New Zealanders had been there for four years, a chap named Bill Hamilton, he'd been there four years.

You had been there just over twelve months, wouldn't you?

Thirteen months. Actually if the Russians had let us go when they actually liberated us we would have probably only been there … they kept us there over a month longer than they should have with all this mucking around.

The allies lines must have been fairly close to you when the Russians came in I would think.

When they came in to [Lookenvalda] - I'm not quite certain how long we were in Lookenvalda, it must have been well over a month or more - but when we left Stalac Luft 3, they put us on the road, you know we all marched and we made little toboggans out of bits of wood and put the - you could take as many Red Cross … they had hundreds and hundreds of Red Cross parcels which they hadn't given to us, and I reckon they'd have eaten well, you know, cigarettes and everything. Well you could only carry two, that was the maximum you could take, even then you had to drag it along. It was snowing. They billetted us at farmhouses. I remember one time - we were sleeping in the barn, you know, in the

hay, straw and that, and there's a couple of them there, I can't remember his name but he was a bloody rouge and he saw this goose walking around the yard and the next thing he grabs it and wrings it neck and the bloody old farmer must have seen it or missed it or something and he complained to the officer in charge. They said if the goose wasn't returned there'd be so many shot and God knows what. Here's the thing sitting under all this straw, blood everywhere. They couldn't return it, you know.

When was this? When they were trying to get you away, the Russians?

Yes, the Russians. You could hear the artillery in the distance. They had waited a fair time. They last us for a week and then we got on a train into these cattle trucks and every now and again they had on the roof, they had these anti-aircraft people. I can remember that, you know. Then we got to Lookenvalda. I don't know how long we were on the train but it couldn't have been very long because it was just outside of Berlin.

Were there any eating substances in that escape kit apart from Horlicks tables?

Not that I can remember.

There were Horlicks tables there I remember.

Yes, there were tablets and then there were also tablets for …

Morphine tablets?

No. [Halisane] they called them. It was a Hallite, you know, Bromine or something to purify water. You know, you could tip a tin or something into a toilet and put one of these tablets in and drink it, this sort of thing.

I know the initial packages included some morphia tablets in case you were wounded or something like that.

I don't remember those. I remember the little hacksaw, what the hell you do with that I wouldn't know. Instant bloody hacksaw to cut your way out.

And there was a knife there, was there?

No, I can't remember the razorblades.

How did you cut up your bread then?

I think I used the hacksaw.

There would have been blokes walking around in similar navy jackets I suppose?

Yes, that's right. Yes.

But the RAF would have been more conspicuous, wouldn't they, the RAF grey?

Well, not that I ever saw one. There was a story going around, I don't whether it's true, but the dressed a bloke up in a German officers uniform and sent him through London during the war and nobody ever stopped him. That was just a story, I don't know whether it's true. They just did this. Nobody came up to him and said, 'You're a German officer'. And also there was people from all over Europe. There was Pols and workers and …

That sort of jacket was fairly common, wasn't it, in Europe?

Yes. Well I never got picked up except for this woman.

The two civilians I would think they wouldn't be the normal German serviceman. They'd be pretty well trained probably.

Oh yes, they had guns. I remember that because I could hear them clicking as I walked into this house. I thought: I'm gone here, this is it. They just put me in the Volkswagen and the next thing I was in Antwerp prison.

Oh dear. It's all right to look back on but it wasn't so bloody pleasant at the time.

No. I probably could say I wouldn't have missed it if I have it all over again. Because it was certainly an experience. It was quite an experience.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A - END OF INTERVIEW