ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE:	REG MULLINS - 460 SQUADRON RAAF
INTERVIEWEE:	REG MULLINS
INTERVIEWER:	LAURIE FIELD
SUMMARY:	RECOLLECTIONS OF EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES DURING SERVICE IN BRITAIN DURING WORLD WAR II.
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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

Right, we are away. Yes, Reg, well, briefly then, your pre-war life. Where were you born?

I was born in Oxley near Wangaratta - Wangaratta in north-east Victoria.

So what course was your IDS?

Twenty-four - Summers.

Well, just roughly, what you did before the war?

Well, I was ledger keeping for a firm of wholesale and retail grocery chain in Melbourne.

And you joined up from there?

Yes.

And you had a bit of a wait for call up, did you?

Only four months because I was on the reserve, I'd put my age xxx, but they found out. Somebody told them and they just let me on the reserve. I was on the reserve when I was seventeen.

Was that the aircrew reserve?

Mm-mm.

Where did you train?

At Summers for ITS, and then Benalla. From Benalla we went to Deniliquin and Essendon because Benalla was held up with wet fields and that sort of thing. That was for EFTS, and then Point Cook for SFTS - got my wings at Point Cook.

That would be on Oxfords.

Yes. So I wasn't commissioned - off course I was a sergeant.

When did you go overseas? What ship?

The New Amsterdam, from Melbourne to Wellington, and San Francisco, and across America by train up to Miles Standish up near Boston; then on the Louis Pasteur - SS Louis Pasteur - from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to Liverpool.

So you would have been in convoy there, wouldn't you?

No, no convoy. We were about eight days - there'd been over thirty - in fact, thirty-nine ships - sunk at the entrance to Halifax Harbour, just in the month before we left, so we went at high speed and we changed course every five minutes so as a sub couldn't draw a [bead]. And we went north and south - we took eight days - we were down where the temperature was very warm and we were up where it was freezing cold. We went all

over the Atlantic, on our own, at high speed, and it was terribly crowded the ship. New Amsterdam had been practically empty and we had lots of room, and the Louis Pasteur was so crowded that we had to take ships with hammocks, we had to sleep in eight-hour shifts in hammocks and we all had to do time on gun duty. We sighted two subs but they weren't - two subs were sighted during the voyage but ...

I assume you were in convoy because the casualty rate at that time was ...

No convoy - we never saw another ship until we - the first thing we saw was a RAF Sunderland patrol aircraft.

And briefly, your training units in England?

Oh, well, we went to Bournemouth on arrival and, of course, I did Whitley Bay for a battle course. Then the flying training units were Kidlington, [Crowton] - Kidlington was near Oxford - then Crowton, and then OTU was at [Ossington], [Bircoats], [Gamston] for OTUs, and then Stirling training at [Strators] Hall - the conversion unit to Stirlings. We were then to operate - we were already posted to a squadron in 3 Group on Stirlings, and they were just - this was the end of '43 and they were taking Stirlings off. So we hung around for a little while and they decided that we would go on Lancasters. So they sent us to - my crew went to [Feltwell] which was a newly formed Lanc conversion unit. From Feltwell up to Binbrook - same time as Tim Anderson; Tim was also in 3 Group on Stirlings.

Right, now, we will skip your ops briefly. You met your wife to be in Grimsby, did you?

Yeah, in Grimsby - at Grimsby Town Hall at a St Patrick's Day dance in '44 (laughs).

What was her name?

Pat - Pat Gowan.

You became engaged eventually?

Yes.

She came out as a ... well, you brought her out, didn't you?

War bride, yes. We were out on a Lancastrian delivery flight for Qantas in '46 - went back and got married in '46 and brought her out then.

So you go to Qantas; how were you recruited?

By Hudson Fish in London about 9 December - 5 December, I think, '44. They interviewed hundreds of pilots.

They picked eight?

Eight.

You were one of the eight?

Yes.

And your career with Qantas from then on?

I was thirty-two years with Qantas and I flew Lancastrians. I finished up with the most Lancaster hours of anybody in the world because I flew, apart from flying Lancasters in Bomber Command and instructing on them, I flew them in Qantas for about five years - four years in Qantas.

And then you went right through - what other aircraft were you on?

Lancasters to DC-4s to Super Constellations, then thirteen years on 707s - Boeing jets - and then six years on Jumbos - 747s. I was a check captain for all that time and all of those - every one of those types - I was a check captain checking other pilots.

And when you retired did you have any special rank or status?

No, just check captain.

Now your ops, Reg; any particular op that you remember, apart from the one where things were so sticky, particularly in this period up to the end of April? Any of that ten that were at all eventful?

Um ... not really. I did my first with - I did my second [dicky] trip with Ron Douglas to [Swineford], and that was the first operation that Bomber Command did in two parts. They had two forces of four hundred or something - it tells you in the book there. My wireless operator was in one wave and I was in the other; he went with another crew on that for a looksee, and I went ...

Oh, no, the Frankfurt one was the worst one, of course, really.

Could you give us an account of that then? Actually, what happened?

Well, we were about fifty miles north of Frankfurt and I'd just been checking the gunners all the way along, and I was saying, 'Alright, Rear Gunner - okay, Skipper - alright, Mid-Upper - alright, Skipper'

How often did you do that?

About every minute. And out of the blue I was looking at the - remember that reading compass, the round one up in front of us - I was looking - I was sitting there looking at it and it blew to pieces in front of me (laughs).

You were running down on to Frankfurt, were you?

Yes. Of course, everything around me was (laughs) disappearing, and the noise and everything was terrific then, of course. I'll never forget sitting, looking at that - just looking at that compass, checking it with the other one, when it disintegrated in front of my eyes (laughs).

And so the whole instrument panel and the cockpit was pretty well shot?

Yes, yes. The flight engineer passed me up my parachute and it was all in pieces; one had gone right through ...

That was enough to ... [strafe it]?

Straight through, yes. The intercom went dead - I tried to call people on the intercom - and the aeroplane went into a terrific climb - of course, wanted to climb because the trip tabs had been shot away and their fail-safe was to up and not down apparently.

Anyway, the flight engineer and the radio bloke, the navigator, came forward out from under the curtain to see what was going on. I sent the radio bloke back. We could then see Frankfurt, the target was opened up and they were bombing it in front. I though, well, we've come this far, we are going to put them there whatever happens - and then we thought of going to Switzerland, but we didn't have enough parachutes - my parachute was missing anyway - so we decided to go on home.

So your only communication with your gunners was through the wireless op, was it?

Yeah. The wireless op went back and he came up and said, 'Ted's dead' - the rear gunner - and I said, 'Are you sure he's dead?' - he said, 'Yes, he's definitely dead, he is dead'. He said Hugh was unconscious and only gave him his oxygen bottle - he gave him his portable oxygen bottle. So he came back and I said, 'Go back and check Ted and make sure that he's ... let us know for certain whether he's dead'. So when he went back the other gunner had gone - there was a huge hole there underneath the turret - he nearly fell out himself, the radio officer - and he put out the fire, the fuselage was on fire. He put it out and got burnt hands in the process.

Where was that, under the mid-upper?

Yes, under the mid-upper - there was a fire there and there was a big hole. So that's where he went out, through the hole.

He was probably getting down, out, was he?

Well, no, he was already down on the floor unconscious when he went back. The hole was near him and there was a fire there.

He probably fell out, did he - didn't have his parachute?

Yes, he had a parachute, yes - he was a prisoner of war. We think he came to and thought everybody had gone, seeing the hole and no communication or anything, I suppose.

So he thought he'd go out?

Apparently.

He survived alright?

He has survived, we've since heard.

Your rear gunner, was he killed?

No, he wasn't dead. We thought he was, practically all the way back. They went back to him a couple of times on the long trip back and they thought he was dead, but after we landed at Binbrook and the ambulance came, I went back and they were getting him out, and he moved. He wasn't dead at all, he was just badly wounded.

Where was he wounded?

Oh, legs mainly.

After you were hit, what height were you flying?

We were at about 20,000 - 22,000 - when it happened. We pulled all the engines off to try and stop it climbing, and we lost height. We got over the target about 18, and we went down and we came back at 8 because I thought he might still be alive and the oxygen was to be xxx. So we came all the way back at 8 with the ... I got the parachute and stuffed in behind the control column because you had to push forward on it all the time and my arms were breaking. So we got the old parachute, which had been partly - had been badly damaged anyway - and jammed it in behind.

Jammed it in behind the stick?

Yes. That, with the RO - Radio Officer - pushing forward also, and even the Flight Engineer in the end, it was so difficult. The only way we could get any relief was to pull the throttles off and we'd lose height then, of course.

Probably just as well you did otherwise you might have lost the rear gunner.

Yes.

Or was his oxygen supply okay? I guess it was - it wasn't?

No, no, we had no oxygen.

How about the rest of the crew? Did you have oxygen?

No, I don't think we did. There was something wrong with the

oxygen - it's hard to recall, I don't know whether it says in one of the accounts of it.

But you'd lost height pretty quickly - well, you were going down ...

We lost height soon after the target - we lost height gradually in about half an hour after the turn - within the fist half hour after the target we were down to 8,000 feet, and we tried to hold that because there were - I always thought of balloons at the coast; they'd always told us don't cross the coast below about 8 because there were balloons. Of course, the navigation was all astray because the navigator was out the front and helping, and the bomb aimer manned the front turret so as we had some sort of defence. And, strangely enough, we went across the North Sea in the pitch black, and came over the coast, and the fist beacon we saw - the first [pundit] we saw - was Binbrook. Wasn't that amazing? The fist one we saw was Binbrook. We fired the red cartridge to say that we were in trouble - and, of course, they had all landed, we were the last - came round and landed. And it was a pretty rotten landing - no tail wheel, of course; the tail wheel was gone. So it touched down reasonably well with the three of us trying to control it.

You, the engineer and the wireless operator?

Yes, the flight engineer, the wireless op and myself, yes.

Were the three of you on the controls all the way back?

Not all the way, the radio officer was helping me with it practically the whole way, and then just in the last the flight engineer also was helping to push ... You know, with the trim in the full-up position it wanted to climb all the time, and we had no rudders, of course - or was it no ailerons? Rudders or ailerons, I'm not sure - it's in the book.

I'll get it out of the book.

No ailerons, I think it was - yeah - not turn - no aileron turn - you could turn with rudders - or was it no rudders? - I'm not sure. It's in the book. It was pretty hard to control.

You got an immediate DFC for you and the wireless op?

There was a DFC out of it too.

Anybody else?

No, that was all.

That was the two, right.

He got burnt hands, and he missed one, he missed a Berlin trip straight after.

He was back on deck with you?

He was soon after - straight after.

The rear gunner didn't fly with you again?

He didn't fly again. He went to Louth Hospital and ultimately to Roresby, and he was in Roresby until the end of the war. He was a long time there.

And the crew went across to see him at Louth Hospital?

The next night, Group Captain Edwards gave us a car and a WAAF driver and he said, 'Don't keep the WAAF driver out too late; make sure she's home by 10 o'clock because she has to work in the morning'. 'But,' he said, 'Go to Louth and see him, then you can have a few drinks'. Well, we went to Louth, but he was critically ill and they said we couldn't see him, but they said he is screaming for his skipper all the time, so I could go in. So they took me in and he was delirious, and they said, 'Here's your skipper', and he was shouting, 'I couldn't see it, Skipper; I never saw it; I couldn't see it, I couldn't see it; I'm sorry, Skipper, I couldn't see it'. Poor kid, he was shouting, 'I'm sorry, I couldn't see it, I never saw him'.

What was his name?

Ted ... oh, God!

You're right, as long as I've got the Ted part, I'll have the rest.

Ted Harry - typical Welsh.

And he was a Welshman, was he?

Yes. Well, he came from Shrewsbury, which is Shropshire, but it's right on the Welsh border and they have virtually Welsh - that's him, a young farming lad, he was a nice kid.

That crew photograph I'll borrow some time and get it copied.

Yes.

Want a few crew photographs to put in - I've got one of Peter Crosby's crew, for example. And your mid-upper's name was?

Hugh - he was a Canadian - Hugh - oh, God! what was his name?

I've got that too, as long as I've got the Hugh, no problem, don't worry.

Somers - S-O-M-E-R-S - Hugh Somers. You forget, don't you? I'm getting old and ...

And your radio ops' name?

Don [Cocrane] - xxx

With an 'e'?

R-A-N-E, yes - youngest airman of World War II he was. That is with out doubt because they wrote that all up in the paper when he revealed his age - he'd put it on three years.

Now a word or two about your crew. You had a Canadian mid-upper and the others were ...?

English.

English. The physical characteristics of your radio op - a little fellow was he?

Yes, yes.

Big? Sandy haired?

Little, sandy haired bloke. He only looked fifteen as you can see in that. And funnily enough, between xxx, he had a girlfriend who he was very keen on. We used to say, 'Why don't you marry her?', and, of course, we realise now - in fact, I said to his mother afterwards, I said, 'We used to always say to Don, why don't you marry that girl you are so keen on?'. She said, 'Marry her? He is only fifteen'. (Laughs)

So when he was on ops he was ...

Fifteen years of age.

Fifteen years of age. So he was probably certainly the youngest DFM, but also the youngest person probably to fly.

I don't know about that, but they wrote him up on the front of the Daily Express as youngest DFM of World War II; they said, 'Now he reveals it'. They'd seen his birth certificate. He only looks fifteen there, doesn't he.

A bit about your crew ages generally; you were a very young crew?

We were a young crew, yes; the oldest was the navigator who was twenty-two.

And when you got to the Squadron, what was your age?

Twenty - just twenty.

And, of course, there was him - and how about the others?

The others were eighteen and nineteen, that's all. This bloke was just eighteen - they started at fifteen - he was nineteen.

You had a mid-upper gunner, eighteen.

That's the rear gunner.

Rear gunner, eighteen.

Yes. He was nineteen - that' the ...

Canadian.

Yes.

Mid-upper, nineteen.

And the flight engineer was a direct entry though St [Athens] and he was nineteen - and this bloke was twenty.

Bomb aimer.

Bomb aimer - and the navigator was twenty-two - he was commissioned, he was the only one commissioned when we got to the Squadron.

So it was certainly probably the youngest crew.

They always said it was the youngest crew in 460, I don't know about Bomber Command.

xxx I'd say.

I remember the in orderly room, the adjutant saying that we were the youngest crew in 460.

At that time he wouldn't have known that your radio op was fifteen.

No, thought he was eighteen (laughs).

So that was your most exciting experience. I won't go beyond the end of April, I've got to stop somewhere.

No, there must have been people that had more exciting things xxx.

Well, certainly wasn't xxx xxx.

That's good, everybody used to want ...

There were eleven Berlins in ours.

Gee. Well, the bloke who did the most Berlins wasn't Ron Douglas - Ron did thirteen, of course - but there was a bloke called [Smiler Lyden]. And there was an American millionaire gave a gold watch for the bomber pilot who did the most raids on Berlin, and a bloke called [Smiler Lyden], who I instructed with at [Henswell], an Englishman.

What had he done?

He had done fifteen; he got it for - he worked for British

European Airways later on; I used to see him in London years later and had a beer with him in Athens a few times. Smiler Lyden was at Henswell at the time we were there and he proudly wore this gold watch donated by an American millionaire for one of the most - and I think it was fifteen because Ronnie Douglas was thirteen - it was either fourteen or fifteen.

> We should have been thirteen because we had two aborts on Berlin - oxygen once.

I fortunately never had an abort on the whole ...

> As a skipper what were your major problems and concerns? What did you feel weighed heaviest on you as a skipper?

Well, I felt you had to be father to the whole crew, you had to worry about them being on time, and being fit, keeping themselves fit and all that sort of thing really. Yes, I always said I never had any youth - I've got two sons and I envy them around that age because they were still enjoying their youth and I was afraid I was an old man at twenty because I was looking after ...

> Those other blokes.

Yes, that's true.

> So you were concerned that, as you say, they kept themselves fit and they didn't go boozing too much?

And were on time for things you had to keep them up to time. I thought when you came this morning at 10 o'clock you were right on time; aircrew are always on time. You notice nowadays, xxx people ...

> Another thing, although I wasn't a navigator, I always would have loved to be the navigator - I've done a couple of bush navigation courses since the war. When I'm driving I'm looking at ETAs - I'll be at Mittagong and so forth, Sydney and so forth.

You know how they used to tell us search, search, search in an aeroplane - you know, you used to search. Well, years after I was flying in Qantas I would be sitting up over the Indian Ocean of a night and I would be searching, and I said you silly xxx (laughs).

> xxx phantom fighters.

After the war was over, you know, habit dies hard, you get these things ingrained into you, and I used to still search.

> And was there a very close relationship among your crew?

Yes, good relationship, yes there was. We used to go to dances together, although there was one officer amongst us - at OTU we lived in the same hut at one place, and we were all the same rank.

So you knocked around quite a bit ...?

Yes.

... xxx crew.

Yes, we did. The system of the RAF had of letting your crew up yourself, letting you find your own crew; did you find that good? That was good, wasn't it?

Yes, it was. How did you go about it? if you can remember.

Well, I do. At Ossington we had a week to crew up, a week from after we started our technical course they said, well, you just knock around with the other categories and if you find anybody you want in your crew you tell us. So the navigator came to me after about two days and said I'd like to be in your crew, and the bomb aimer.

He's been watching you.

But the bomb aimer we went to, we went in to [Newick] to the movies, a few of us, and this bomb aimer said to me I'd like to be in your crew; and the RO came to us and said he wanted to be in the crew; and so it went on. It was very good. And, of course, we only had one gunner there, but you got the other gunner a bit later and he was ...

Disappointed was he?

Yeah.

The engineer?

No, we still - I think we were able to pick him too, but the flight engineer was appointed, and of course, he was on the outer because we'd all been crewed up and lived together for quite a long time before we got the flight engineer. And he was a new bloke, straight through St Athens, what they called a direct entry, and he'd had no experience at all. On the Stirling he was seventeen feet back from the cockpit, and he had something like eighteen fuel tanks - and he's thirty feet back from the cockpit, and he had seventeen fuel tanks in the Stirling - and he used to be able to mix them up so that the engines stopped first on one side (laughs) and then on the other sometimes, and you couldn't seem to get xxx xxx the Lanc - and he was a brand new young bloke. The first time he put his head out and saw the flames from the Stirling - on ops they would dampen the flames pretty well, but on training aircraft they didn't - although I don't know why they didn't because [Stratusfield], where we were training on Stirlings, had more shot down than any other airfield in Britain by intruders - aircraft round the circuit. The first time he put his head out and saw the two lots of flames he stopped the two engines on one side because he thought they were on fire (laughs). It was pretty hard with a new flight engineer like that.

Would the engineer have had any background before he came in?

None whatsoever.

What was he in civvy street?

Nothing, straight out of school.

xxx alright.

Yes, that's true.

On ops, what were your major problems and concerns there? Say, okay, you are in the air.

Keeping the gunners alert and keeping everybody alert.

You call them up just about every minute.

Yes - and good discipline - yes, I used to, about every minute, I used to say, 'Alright rear gunner, alright mid-upper', and they'd say, 'Yes, Skipper - okay Skipper', something like that, which we did. I think most people did that practically all the time.

Bob [Howl] used to do it sometimes, not regularly.

I did it frequently. And if a minute or two went by and there'd been no communication, somebody would pipe up because they liked to keep some sort of talk going; they took comfort from it. Oh, well, you know what the main problems were (laughs), avoiding flack and avoiding other aircraft in the stream.

What were your tactics under attack? Let's say you had a fighter was seen, what did you do? Did you corkscrew or ...

Yes.

... dive? You dived or what?

Corkscrew.

Corkscrew.

Yes. We dived when this happened. I pulled all the - because it was climbing - I pulled all the engines off and we consequently went down, but our normal tactics were the usual corkscrew, which we did many. You know, the rear gunner would say, 'Enemy fighter, starboard quarter, up - prepare to corkscrew - starboard, starboard, starboard, go!' and we went over to starboard and pulled it up hard to port.

I was instructing on the Fighter Affiliation Flight at Henswell and we broke spars of aircraft there, we were doing it so - we had to teach them to do it pretty violently because a well [planed] corkscrew could actually beat a fighter if you could -

we proved that with photographs with the Hurricanes they used at Henswell, and so you had to do it pretty ...

xxx. Howl used to always go for just a dive - dive port or dive starboard.

I did that from searchlights. We got caught in searchlights at Berlin - on that Berlin trip, that last Berlin they did - and we were ringed by a number of searchlights and I put it into a terrific dive and oh, we had trouble getting it out. We were down to about 8,000 feet before we could get it out because it got very stiff in the [dark]. We didn't know that much about controls in those days, didn't know as much as we knew later.

But, of course, Bob Howl probably went through before the corkscrew - it was really just coming in to vogue, I think, when we were doing our training, and we were taught it pretty thoroughly at ...

I'd say we were taught simply dive xxx.

We weren't, we were taught to corkscrew. It was stressed, you know, that if you could do this that you had a very good chance of getting away from a fighter, and we did it pretty vigorously.

The fighter that hit you on that night, he never came back for a second go?

No.

You lost him?

We lost him.

And on that night you dived, I guess.

Yes. We pulled off all the ...

Motors.

... motors and went down. I don't know whether you would call it a dive (laughs) or was it some sort of a controlled xxx.

And how about identifying the target? What problem would that have presented?

No problem at all. When all this shemozzle was going on the target opened up in front of us. We changed heading a few times, and by the time we straightened out on a southerly heading again, which we had been on, all the target was clear in front of us, with the flack coming up and aircraft bombing, and TIs and everything, we could see it.

But generally speaking, was identifying the target accurately a big problem for a pilot?

No, not on most of the trips that I did because ...

xxx.

... yes, the target indicators were generally there.

Most of your comments that are recorded in the ORV, you were pretty happy with the marking.

Yes, most times. Of course, the Nurenburg one was the bad one, wasn't it. Even that xxx.

I'll drop it in to you sometime, it makes good reading.

Yes.

Read through it - ORVs with bomb loads and what not - pilot comments - they usually make it very brief, you are lucky to get three or four lines, but at least you can see there what you said at the time.

When Hughie did a trip that used to annoy most of us because no matter where the trip had been, and no matter how hard a trip you had had, Hughie would, in the briefing room, say, 'Piece of cake - bags of flack, but a piece of cake', he'd say (laughs).

Mightn't be a bad title for the book, 'A piece of cake'. Also 'Press on regardless', he said that, didn't he?

Yes.

I remember him saying that several times, 'Press on regardless'.

Used to say - Edwards always comes back to when he had that Tiger Moth - he had a Tiger Moth at Binbrook, and he'd go off flying in it sometimes. And old - the French control bloke, what was his name? - the control officer at Binbrook. He used to do the Muffin Man act.

Not Foggo?

Foggo, yes. Foggo used to say, 'Oh, don't go, don't fly today, Sir - very bad weather', and Hughie would say to him, 'Edwards always comes back'. He loaned me the Tiger Moth to take - well, he rang Tony Willis and said, 'I want someone to take this fellow over to [Curtain Lindsay]' - Curtain Lindsay was the fighter place across on the Roman road. And Tony Willis said, 'Can you fly a Tiger Moth', and I said, 'Well, I trained on them, the Tiger Moths in [Wackett]', so I said, 'I'll do it'.

So I flew this boffin that was there across to Curtain Lindsay in the Tiger Moth and dropped him off and came back, and I did some - over the fields - to the benefit of our ground crew, I did some slow rolls and loops, and they thought it was very good. And Hughie then would lend - he said I was the only one that he ever loaned that aeroplane to on the Squadron - the Tiger Moth.

Never even knew he had a Tiger Moth.

Yes, he had a Tiger Moth in the Squadron all the time - and Hoppy Ray had an Oxford, and once I flew that down to Holton with a boffin and some equipment that he'd been trying out.

I went for a trip to [Ladfor Bagnor] with Hoppy Ray one day, and an engineer - just three of us as a crew - and he scared the lives out of us. He didn't take off on the runway, he xxx on the grass.

Oh, yes, he was pretty rough alright. Did you know they put out a story about him? It was freely available at the last reunion. He stayed on - he is still flying apparently, he is still flying in his old age. You'll come across it somewhere; in fact, it might be down in library downstairs. I know I've got it somewhere about Hoppy Ray. He was a fantastic old bloke.

He was a bit like the fellow who you probably met at Wadington, old [Bonnam Carter] - remember TR9? - they called him. When I delivered G George over there he met me with his [holding up].

You heard the story about him when he took a new crew one night from Wadington? And they came back and he got a brand new crew, and he's doing everything himself because he's got a new crew - Bonnam Carter, you see. So he comes back and he gets into the circuit, and he looks out, and he calls his name and the girl says, 'Baker prepare'. So he thought he was putting the undercarriage down, and he grabbed the wrong leaver, he grabbed the seat leaver, and he lowered the seat and it went right down and he couldn't see out over the top, you see. So he said, 'They've switched the flare path off', and he said, 'ACW ...' - all this done through this thing, you see - 'ACW, why have you switched the flare path off?'. And she said, 'Sir, we have not switched the flare path off' - and he has to put this up to listen - the bloke telling it was amazing - he puts this up to listen and he says, 'Don't argue with me, ACW, I'm the group captain; and now switch that flare path on immediately'. And she said, 'Very well, Sir' - of course, it was on all the time - he's so low he can't see out over the rim. And so the flight engineer said, 'But Sir, they haven't switched the flare path off, you have lowered your seat instead of the undercarriage'. So Bonnam Carter had to listen to this too, so he looked up at him and said, 'Yes, yes, and you get a haircut too'. (laughs)

When you dropped your bombs did you climb?

No, I'm down, I am going down to 8,000 feet.

Not on this night, but generally speaking.

Oh, generally speaking, climbed a few thousand, yes.

You climbed?

Yeah, a couple - two, three thousand, if we could.

This is where Spike Marsh and Alec Wales - you know Alec I

suppose -

Yes.

- differ. Alec used to go down and Spike always recommended that you climb.

Some of them had some funny ideas. A lot of them weaved all the time; I didn't weave, but looking with this music that the Germans were using, weaving was probably was the better idea. But we didn't know about it, and I thought weaving would only increase the risk of a collision.

Apparently some blokes weaved right through a tour.

Well, when the Germans were having all that success with this upward firing gun - Music - what did they call it? - something Music - that Nuremberg raid, talks about that, that book - it would have been better weaving as it turns out, but we weren't ...

We didn't know anything about that - didn't know they were homing on H2S either.

That's right. I was always suspicious of that; I didn't like them testing that on the ground at aerodromes every morning, every ops day and that. That's how they were getting information.

They were also tuning their radios in the mornings when we went out to check; they were picking that up too.

Yes. We should have been awake - Bomber Command should have been awake up to that.

Have you got any stories? - we've got one or two already - any other things you can recall that were rather humorous? - humorous little stories.

There wasn't very much humour on the Squadron when I was there; Binbrook was a fairly grim place, I thought. First of all, the winter was bad, we had a heavy snow - as you remember, we were cut off with snow drifts - there was a lot of casualties, you lost a lot of friends. Personally, I didn't think it was much of a ... I thought it was a grim place, the Squadron in Binbrook. But, of course, it wasn't until I went back years after, to my inlaws, and went around that Wolds area, that I found out what a beautiful, lovely area it is xxx. It's now been declared an area of great natural beauty, yet if you talk to a hundred Australians who have been to England, none of them have been near the Lincolnshire Wolds. They all go to the Cotswolds, and the Lincolnshire Wolds is a beautiful area there.

I could tell you xxx xxx for quite a long while.

Oh, it's a beautiful area. Isn't it a shame that it's going to be disbanded, and not only that, my wife's sister wrote last

week and said it's going to be a prison.

Binbrook?

Mm.

Art Whitmarsh said it's definitely - the Squadron's gone, the planes are gone, and if they are lucky it will remain a sort of a ground station, but obviously it's going to be a prison.

Yes. But sister Priscilla wrote - I think we got a letter last week - and she said they are abandoning, or disbanding, Binbrook, and she said the latest story here is that it's going to be a prison. Isn't that terrible? (Laughs). They are short of prisons all over the world these days. (Laughs)

Yes, well, I hope Art can keep me in touch with that. He corresponds with an ex-CO, and he goes across there every year, of course.

Yes, he seems to, a lot of [struggling about in life].

Your attitude or memories of any of your superiors. Well, already you've told me a thing or two about Hughie.

Oh, I was always a bit in awe of Hughie, not so much for his VC but because of his rank, I suppose. A group captain was ...

A lot above a [PA].

(Laughs) Yes.

But you found him a very human person?

Oh, I thought so, he was very nice - what, I saw him - we didn't see a lot of him, of course, but when I saw him I thought Hughie was very good, yes.

And Spike, I always found Spike very decent and xxx xxx.

I had a great afternoon with Spike, up in the mountains.

He did leave the Squadron under a bit of a cloud apparently. The ground crew were noticing he was generally on ops when the load was - when the fuel load was lower (laughs).

That's the story.

Yes.

I heard that too, and I've checked his ops, but he had some decent ops.

Yes, of course he did.

The rumour I heard is that he used to pick [Archen] - I think he did one Archen, maybe two.

I think there was only about one Archen all the time xxx.

I heard that too. But did you find him approachable?

Yes. I dropped him over at Litchfield when he went to Litchfield. I took him over on Sunday afternoons, as a matter of fact.

And your flight commander, who was that?

Tony Willis most of the time; he was excellent, couldn't be nicer. It was a tragedy that he died.

Yes, it's a couple of years ago.

Just a couple of your views on things, not to be quoted, but simply I'm trying to write a consensus on a couple of things - or several things - including your superiors - but your views on granting commissions. What did you think about that system in so far as there was a system?

Pretty unfair really, a couple of people getting it off course - there was two off our course at Point Cook, I think, and they were both ones that crawled a bit (laughs). That's the way it generally was.

It was just two off a pilot's course?

Yes.

That's weak.

Yes - that's all xxx, two.

I think there were three off my [wags] course.

Yes, there were only two at Point Cook on ours, and they were the blokes that used to take the flight commander's - carry the flight commander's parachute for him, that sort of thing. And they were course corporals as a result. See, they had a course corporal every time. Well, he was almost assured of a commission, particularly if he ran round a bit after the flight commander and carried his parachute out when he was going to fly, and things like that. I thought that was weak, yes.

And then, of course, when you got to England, what did you think about the system there?

Well, I went for my commission interview at 3 Group Headquarters - I've forgotten what they called 3 Group Headquarters. I'll never forget it. I used to fly - oh, you can switch that off -

She's right.

One night we flew for about four hours of circuits and bumps on Stirlings at [Stratus Hal], and after I landed and came in the

CO was there, a Group Captain Cox. There was Regie Cox and Tubby Baker were the two famous Bomber Command pilots in 3 Group. One of them finished with a hundred ops and the other with ninety or something; they each did three tours - and Cox happened to be the CO at Stratus Hall. I was a flight sergeant, and he said, 'That was fantastic'. He said, 'I've been up in the tower watching you for the last couple of hours and,' he said, 'your landings were excellent. Why isn't a bloke like you commissioned?' And I said, 'Well, Sir, I wasn't commissioned off course, that's why.' And he said, 'Come and see me tomorrow in the office.' He said, 'Come at 10 o'clock' - this was about 1 o'clock - and he said, 'Come up at 10 o'clock and see me in the office', and I said, 'Alright'. Then when I went up he had the application form for a commission. He said, 'Here, make an application for a commission.'

So about three weeks later I was called to headquarters, and it had been snowing. A dispatch rider arrived to take me in a motorbike and sidecar outfit, you know. And I climbed into this - well, there is no heating, as you know, and we had to go about twenty-five miles through villages, all snowed in, on a shocking, slippery road - and we were late getting there, we were at least half an hour late for the 3 Group COs - air vice marshal and xxx xxx - I can't remember. And I was frozen when I got out of this thing. The driver had warm clothes and gauntlets on and everything, I had gloves and my greatcoat, but in this sidecar, several times he had to stop and move snow. By the time I got out I couldn't walk. I got out of the sidecar and I went into headquarters like this, you see, and the poor bloke, he said, 'Oh, come here, Flight Sergeant', he said, 'Bring a cup of coffee'. He said to the WAAF - xxx xxx - he said, 'Now I've got to interview you for a commission', and he was very nice, he just said what schooling did you have, what do you think of so and so and so and so. 'Well, alright, I'll expect we'll see big things of you,' he said. So off I went, and I wasn't commissioned then till after - it didn't come through till after I'd done about three ops at Binbrook, and it was back-dated.

When I got my DFC I got it - although I was in 1 Group and he was 3 Group, I got a telegram from him, which was amazing. He was OC 3 Group.

> Well, the practice began round about the end of '43 giving all pilots commissions ...

Yes.

> ... as soon as they hit there, although Ron Douglas was a bit delayed, his was drawn out, he was a WO for quite a while.

He finished as a WO.

> Did he?

I think - or was he just ...

He could have been ...

Might have been just ...

... commissioned before he left.

No, I don't think he was, he finished as a WO, I think, yes.

And then they send you overboard. Now, all of our crew eventually got them, there were five of us got it on the Squadron and another two later on at OTUs. They did ease up a bit, I think, as the war went on.

When I was instructing at ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

So you were a distance athlete?

Yeah - well, I run half marathons.

Pretty successfully.

Yes, I ran a couple of years ago - third in the over-sixties here in an event that was - we had people from Melbourne, Wagga, Sydney, Brisbane - it was an open event, and I ran third in the over-sixties.

So that's third in the ACT veteran's half marathon in 1985?

Yes, but it was open, it was open to the Victorians and everybody, they came from everywhere.

They are the sort of little points I want, they all add up to a story, that's terrific.

I keep myself fit. We are not abstainers or anything, we drink lots of wine, lots of beers (laughs). There's some in the fridge, Laurie.

No, I'm right thanks, Reg. That's another reason why you are so healthy probably.

Yes, as a matter of fact, we both like a bottle of wine with dinner every night, and we generally have a couple of sherries while Pat's preparing dinner and that sort of thing. And it hasn't done us any harm, we are both - well, I've go an elite fitness rating actually.

Just before I forget it, did you have a crew mascot?

No, only Queenie that was on the side of the aeroplane; we had Queenie at the Burlesque Ball. You can see her painted there; it's a beautiful painting, Queenie, the cutie at the Burlesque Ball she was.

Now, was that on that aircraft when you got it, or did you see that it was put on?

We had that put on.

And what is it - Queenie?

Queenie, the cutie of the Burlesque Ball - it was just Queenie. There was that song, 'Take it off, take it off' - and 'Queenie, the cutie of the Burlesque Ball'.

I didn't know that, I've forgotten that - the song.

Yes, oh yes, it was a popular wartime song. Do you know all those cherries - you know Harry [Carter] was called 'Cherry' Carter, don't you. I was going to tell you, Harry is good now, he's put on about a stone and he's improved. But his wife - he married a girl, she was managing the Wentworth Restaurant, the Old Wentworth Hotel, in Sydney - he was a late starter with marriage, old Harry, I'm godfather to one of his daughters, as a matter of fact. Anyway, she's got some very obscure disease and she's crippled up, and she's in a wheelchair, so they live a pretty restricted life at Burleigh Heads.

Harry, when he got out of xxx he bought a couple of taxis out at Hurstville, and he made quite a lot of money out of the taxis. He bought this place for 108,000, beautiful, overlooking the front of Burleigh, it looks right up along the coast there. They are pretty comfortable there; we see a lot of them. Harry is a great pal of mine.

That's interesting. I just might see him again because I'm working on a 3,000 dollar allowance from the War Memorial.

I can give you his address if you like.

Can you?

Yes. And he'd love to see you, he'd really love to see anybody, old Harry. Harry xxx xxx.

(Break in interview)

xxx here, and oh, some of the stories they tell; honestly, some of the things that go on.

The waste?

Yes, some of the waste that goes on, you know, it's terrible, and they are mostly socialists - real trendy socialists. They think it's just normal to give money to some of these socialist causes.

I was in a Rostrum club here for a year when I first came to Canberra, and that was mainly public servants. Everybody makes speeches there, of course, of their own subject matter. I just couldn't believe the left-leaning

...

Oh, it's terrible, isn't it?

... trendy stuff there. A lot of immaturity too, that was scandalous; there were so many of them so bloody immature.

Yes, oh, I've found that. They have been in Canberra too long and they are just self-centred, and once this government got in they thought we are right, that's it.

There will be a shock for them xxx.

... senior public servant - he's gone now, shot through. It's very trendy to shoot through and go off with one of the secretaries from there, too. That's a real trendy thing in the public service now. But when Labor won he had great champagne parties and invited us to the champagne parties. I said, 'No thanks, it's nothing to sell' (laughs). She's there on her own, she's a very nice person.

The waste that you see. We had a neighbour - a very bloody ordinary woman - and she was working at the National Library shuffling cards, indexing cards, that's all. She couldn't spell five bloody words, I don't think, but she used to get picked up in Commonwealth cars at all hours and brought back.

They spare nothing with those sort of things.

Now, the other thing, the opinion of decorations - now, this is immediate awards aside - you know roughly what the pattern was, all pilots got them.

Practically.

Some navigators.

Not all pilots, you know. Stafford and Bob White finished with me - well, nobody had finished on 460 for months when we finished, and probably not since xxx Bob Howl - and neither of them got anything.

What, Merv Stafford didn't?

No.

Who was the other one?

Bob White, also a flight sergeant - warrant officer, sorry - finished as a warrant officer - and Stafford finished as a one - neither of them were decorated. Oh, no, I was with Stafford a long time afterwards down at [Northgate Bottom] months afterwards. No, they never got anything. And I think one member of Stafford's crew might have - I don't think any of White's crew - and they did [hard] tours over there from before Christmas they were there from 943, both of them; they were fairly long tours.

And do you know anything about the pattern after that time, for example? after you came off. Do you have any idea?

No. I think practically all pilots did later on, but with mine the navigator got a DFC and the flight engineer got a DFM after we finished. The bomb aimer didn't get anything; of course, gunners didn't get anything.

I think it was pretty unfair, the whole thing. I think the American idea would have been better, an automatic award for fifteen trips or something like that; don't you?

Yes, I think so.

It could be pretty unfair.

Spike Marsh has very strong feelings on it because he had to administer the system. He thought it was a very arbitrary, very unjust thing.

Hughie was pretty tough on ... he admits himself that he was pretty tough on ... Well, a bloke that had a lot of himself, I think he was a bit tough on other people getting them - I do, I do. He admitted it. We said to him once at some thing, 'You weren't too free with it', and he said, 'No, anybody that I wrote a citation for deserved it'. He said that to Pat, my wife, he said, 'Oh, I wrote Regie's first citation, and,' he said, 'believe me, if I wrote a citation for anybody,' he said, 'they deserved it'. He said that.

I found there's quite a strong - there must have been an undercurrent there at the time that didn't come out; I don't recall anybody complaining about it.

No, I don't recall any complaining.

But obviously it was there.

I think so.

Now it's coming out.

Oh, yes, it was a bit unfair, there's no doubt.

The Yankee system - which I'll have a lot to say about the system, if there was a system - compare it with the Yankee system.

And the Germans got them automatically, but of course, they never got relief from ops, they stayed on operations year in and year out. I've read a lot of their stuff.

Now, after the show's all over ...

They got plenty of decorations, and automatic ones xxx.

A few of them had a few Lancs to their credit.

(Laughs) So they did, yes.

Looking back on the whole show of the war, Reg, how do you see it now? As a part of your life?

Oh, yes, yes, it is. I'll bet you'll never forget your fist sight of a target, and flack, and everything. I can still relive that, you know, and I do at times - oh, yes, it was incredible. I think it was a fantastic organisation the way Bomber Command trained to that standard. Looking at the flying I did afterwards, and seeing people come along years older than we were and seeing how difficult it was to train them and everything - I did a lot of training because I was a Qantas check captain and I used to have people given to me to be brought up to command standard, and that sort of thing. When I think what training we had in Bomber Command to get us through to doing what we did, it is just incredible that ... we must have been young and keen to do it really.

Yes, it really was an elite bunch, there is no doubt about it. So you commend the whole training very highly?

I think the Empire Air Training Scheme was fantastic.

And the effectiveness, the efficiency, of the bombing campaign?

Well, I thought it was very efficient. I mean, certainly, it can be said in retrospect that the creep back came into it and the bombs fell short and everything, but I must say, we pressed [all of them], we didn't make any ... we didn't turn short or anything, and I'm pretty sure most of the people I knew didn't do anything like that, no. It amazes me when I read that so many people bombed five miles short of the target and all this sort of thing; I can see no advantage in that. If you were going to carry them all the way there, you had to put them right on the very best place, and we didn't do any go-arounds. The bomb aimer had always said that if I'm not satisfied I'll give you a go around, and I always said, well, yes, if you are not satisfied we will go around again. But fortunately he was always able to ... Did you have any go-arounds?

Yes. On Leipzig, the night we had the very high winds.

Oh, yes, that was just as we arrived at the Squadron actually. It must have been in early xxx.

We went round that night.

Yes. We didn't, but I would never have hesitated.

And your opinion of the fellows, the fellow crews of all sorts?

I thought they were all very good standard, didn't you? I thought they were excellent blokes, the cream of the ... Like

that poem about Lincolnshire says, the cream of the Empire really, I think.

That's going to be mine anyhow, I think I can prove it too.

I think that's been one of the troubles with Britain and Australia, I think the 'Brain Drain' was such, I think, you know, when you think there were 58,000 people killed - aircrew killed - 38,000 of them were British and 12,000 Canadians. I think the Canadian effort in Bomber Command has been underestimated, particularly in Australia. They maintained two groups, you know - 4 and 6 Group.

I was surprised to find that out, I didn't know that.

Yes. Their effort was very good. They lost 12,000 killed - Australia lost 4,000, and New Zealand 2,000, and the other two were South Africa, French, Norwegian - odd bods - but the break-down of the 58,000 was 38,000 British and 12,000 Canadian. It's a tremendous effort really. I'm a great admirer of the British aircrew, I thought they were ... the poor beggars were getting practically nothing, gunners were getting about four shillings a day. They would press [on and up, they were good types].

So your opinion of non-Australian aircrew would have been as high as it would have been for Australians?

Oh, of course. I never saw any ... well, I did, I roomed with a bloke (laughs) who was LMF, or I lived in the same house as a bloke who was LMF, but I didn't see much of that sort of thing. You could see he was getting frightened weeks before.

In my time there was only one, there was a rear gunner - a xxx rear gunner.

And he came home to Australia?

Yes.

When I went to Melbourne to get my discharge, Harry [Lock], the Squadron Leader, DSO, DFC, and myself, we were getting our discharge together and they said - he was commissioned - they said you'll have to see Flight Lieutenant so and so for your final interview, and we went in, and who was it but the bloke that had been a gunner on 460 and been sent off 460 - I think it was an FO on 460 - he was back in Australia as a Flight Lieutenant and he was doing this job of interviewing me. I said to my mate Harry [Lock], I said, 'Good God! he was an LMF on 460; he can't have anything to say to us, Harry', and Harry was amazed.

Harry made some enquiries and he found out later that the bloke's papers had all been lost, nobody knew what his record was in England or anything. That was the bloke. I don't know his name or anything now.

I've forgotten his name.

He was in Melbourne as a flight Lieutenant and he had quite a big administrative job when we were being discharged.

There was a bloke from Forbes in xxx also went LMF - well, the whole crew went LMF on 1 Group - no, 5 Group - and he came back, he was accepted round the town as a hero, nobody knew anything about it. Obviously nothing had happened to his rank. And here's me come home and there he is walking around the street, and comes up and shakes hands with me, 'Welcome back'. And he was LMF.

Yes, I know, a lot of this sort of thing went on you know, it was terrible really.

A matter of poor record keeping.

Yes.

xxx follow-ups.

Relations with English families, English civilians?

I married one (laughs).

Before that, did you ...?

Yeah, they were marvellous I think.

Any particular families or family you got ...?

Well, it's hard ... Remember, under the [Lady Rider] Scheme - well, my friend, [Morrie McKue] who was killed - he was another sergeant - and myself, we decided we wanted to go somewhere round the centre of England, so they sent us to - the Lady Rider Scheme arranged for us to go to a place in Buckinghamshire, a place called ... oh, I can't think of it - anyway, it was not far from Thame where Amy Johnson was lost from, and it was a solicitor's wife, Mrs Vaughan - and her husband was still commuting to London every day. They had ponies and two little daughters, and she said, 'Now, this is your home for the war, you make it your base, you come here any time you want to'. And we did go back a few times, and then we ultimately lost contact because, you know, the fleshpots called (laughs) - we got knowing people having such a good time in London and that sort of thing.

So when I was based over there I went looking for the Vaughnes - Hadnatn was the village - H-A-D-N-A-T-N - Hadnatn.

Where was it near?

Well, it was fairly close to an airport called Thame - T-H-A-M-E - 'Tayme' or 'Tem', call it what you ... where Amy Johnson was ferrying the Oxford from when she was killed. The reason I know that was because Mrs Vaughan had a daughter in the civilian flying group there - I've forgotten what they called

them now - and she had them over to dinner one night, and we were there with these girls. We went on picnics with her little daughters and they had ponies, and it was beautiful. I went back there a couple of times - Morrie and I split up, he was killed on [Arnum] - he didn't get in to operations until Arnum, he got sent to that tactical group down south, and he flew a Stirling in to Arnum. His first operation he was shot down, at Arnum, and killed.

We both went back on our own at different times to Mrs Vaughan's place and stayed a couple of nights. He husband was commuting - he was a top London solicitor. I don't know whether he was medically unfit, or a bit older than us - a little bit older than us anyway - he might have been too old. But they were lovely people. I found - oh, well, probably the reason we didn't go back there, Neil Ross had relatives on the Isle of Man - one of my friends - so we went over there. So I went to the Isle of Man about six times on leave, I had a marvellous time there, they were terrific to ex-servicemen, or to servicemen. Cinemas were free and beer was a penny a pint for servicemen, and all that sort of thing. And I found English people everywhere were marvellous to you, a fantastic spirit there was. You could do no wrong, they'd give you their last egg. It used to be embarrassing when I first went to Pat's place and mother used to cook me an egg, and I knew they didn't have any eggs, you know, it was terrible.

> Yes, that's a pretty common attitude of most of those I've spoken to. I certainly had a wonderful time with English families.

When I retired I wanted to go back and live in Lincolnshire because we've got two sons out here and grandchildren, and Pat said, 'Oh, come the bad weather, and you get months of bad weather, and in the winter you'll long for Australia's blue skies again', which, you know, you would. So we finally didn't, but of course, we couldn't now, we are trapped with this wretched dollar, you only get about 40 pence for it now and it doesn't buy you anything over there any more. We go over occasionally - of course, I get 90 per cent rebate on trips for anywhere that Qantas is.

> Any number?

Yeah. It's supposed to be one a year - it probably is one a year since the fringe benefits tax came in because they had to pay the fringe benefits on that, but prior to that they didn't.

> This is why [Art Whitmarsh] is such a [regular visitor], I suppose.

Yes - he doesn't get first class though, I get first class.

> Because you were a check captain?

Because I was a captain, yes. But nevertheless, we don't use it. We've been to Honolulu a couple of times, we've been to England once - now we've been to Singapore - but we don't - all

the public servants here are very jealous of that if they find out you were with Qantas - I don't tell anybody, but if it ever comes out - they sort of force it out of you - the first thing they say is, 'Oh, you get ...' - they know that very well, you see. But I say, 'Yes', and we used to spend seven days at a time in a place like Karachi with no refrigeration - and 120 degrees in the shade and no refrigeration - and stomach trouble the whole time and all that sort of thing, so I think we earned some of those gimmicks anyway.

I've noticed among all the fellows I've talked to in the last twelve months there are very few trendies, lefties, among them, they've all got a very conservative, sensible, balanced view of things.

Yes.

I don't know of a real leftie among the returned aircrew blokes.

I'm a bit with Bruce Ruxton on some of those things (laughs).

So am I. Even old Jo's rubbished off a bit - I go along with old Jo with quite a few of these things.

Unfortunately he's become senile. He'd have pulled out ten years ago if he'd made a bid for Canberra.

No, it's too late.

Yes, he's making a fool of himself now; the last couple of years he's making a fool of himself, silly old xxx.

It's very sad really.

It is really, yes. Oh, this country is in trouble; I don't know what's holding things up the way they are. When you come to look at it we haven't got much going for us really when you come to think of it, you know - our exports. It's all very well to say that tourists are coming here in thousands from America and Japan. We could offend either of those nations - I know, I went around those countries so much and we had a bit to do with Australian representatives in those countries, and they are terribly sensitive to any sleight or anything. I guarantee there's hardly any Americans going to New Zealand now, and if we start restricting their bases or getting out of the pact with them, or something like that, the American tourist flood can stop like that, and so the Japanese. My youngest son is married to a Japanese girl - beautiful girl. He was sent to Expo as an Australian representative at Expo for nine months, and she was brought up in England, she was an interpreter in the British Pavilion, and she was educated in England, and she's a lovely girl. She's just going home to her parents soon in Japan, taking the two kids up on the 24th of this month again - they've got plenty of money, they, every now and again send down a few thousand dollars for her to go home.

But anyway, I know how sensitive they are too. The Japanese

tourists are flooding here in thousands now, but if there's some sleight against the Japanese, real or imagined, that tourist stream could just ...

Anyhow, the novelty is going to wear off, it's not going to last forever the tourist boom.

Well, frankly, Australia is not a good tourist place, there are a few good things to see, but a lot of my American friends - I had a lot of friends in America that I advised not to come here, and a lot of them went against my advice and came, and they said afterwards (in American accent), 'When are you going to do something about these godam flies', and they reckon we are not really adjusted to looking after tourists very much.

What worries me about Australia is the poor standard of political leadership.

Oh, it's terrible - on both sides. Yes, you see John Howard's not much ...

You look at Paul Keating, Howard and Peacock. By gee there's not much xxx.

Oh, Peacock - well, that reveal Peacock, that telephone call, I know they shouldn't have done it, but it revealed him in his true colours. Do you go about speaking like that? Would you speak to your wife, and in front of your wife, would you use the four letter word and everything? I wouldn't, I couldn't. And Peacock, I couldn't have a bar of him after listening to that loutish behaviour.

That was shocking. And yet Paul Keating comes back in as the alternative, number two.

Poor little John Howard, he's a trier, but he's got the world against him. I don't think he quite has it, you know. But as for the other lot, my God! that Keating is a bombastic, horrible bastard - and he's a cheat, he's cheated on that allowance.

And so bloody arrogant.

Yes.

Now, okay, Gough Whitlam was arrogant, but Gough did have a bit of ability there and a bit of culture about him.

Yes.

Keating is just ...

Oh, he's an arrogant - he's a gutter-snipe.

To do the things he does, now, this living away from home thing and the late return of his ...

Tax.

... tax. A normal person with normal sensitivity would have ...

Apologised for it.

... apologised, buried their head and whatnot, but xxx.

Bombastic about it.

Old Jo last night, he was being interviewed by - no, it must have been George Negus at lunch time yesterday - and Jo said something about the present government. He said, 'But you said that about Howard and Sinclaire before the election'. He said, 'Well, have you heard from the government since.'

(Laughs)

True.

How biased that ABC has become though, hasn't it. See, this government has completely politicised the ABC, they are so biased it's incredible, and how we will ever get out of that. They've got ...

xxx to change that.

Oh, I'm afraid so, you can't change those people. All their current affairs programs are sickening because they give the socialist view all the time.

The thing is, that's influencing young people - I've had a lot to do with young people.

I'm a great believer in young people, I don't think that young people are all bad like some people. We know some lovely young people, some tremendous young people.

I've had lots to do with them over the years, and I'm all for ...

And I've always believed in that saying when duty was xxx xxx, youth replied, 'I can'. And it's true. People say, oh, they wouldn't be able to do it today if there was a war, but they would, they would do just as well as us, and better. I wouldn't condemn young people, but I condemn loutishness which is encouraged by a lot of people now. You can go down here, Hughes Primary School - and I love to see kids playing or anything; if I am out walking and kids are playing soccer I've got to stop and look and laugh and enjoy it - and the girls and boys play soccer together down here, and they are really keen, it's great. But there are the teachers standing supervising, and the children are using the four letter words - swearing - and the teachers are taking no ... and there are kids about this high, swearing at the top of their voices in front of teachers. That to me is disgusting.

It's partly the fault of the leadership in the school, the deputy and the headmaster. Teachers today, I've found, with half of them, unless you keep an eye on them they wont give their best and they are very lax.

Teachers, and bank managers, and people like that, when I was a youngster, were really somebody. There was the local station master, the teacher and the policeman, they, in the country where I was, you could look up to them, but you can't now - to look up to - a lot of bank managers.

We lived at Blackheath for ten years, at the top of the mountains, and the local bank manager there, he used to go around in bare feet and a pair of shorts - you know, would be around the town in bare feet and shorts, he was a dreadful, loutish fellow (laughs).

Well, I wear collar and tie, and I'd have sports clothes or a suit, right throughout my teaching career, from the time I first started to the time I was a principal. Nobody could divert me from that - by gee, it wasn't standard though.

There are still some very nice teachers - in the bushwalking club I've met several young teachers and they were both sexes, and some of them were very nice, but others were a bit socialistic - but some were very nice.

Where did you go to high school, by the way?

At [Elton] High in Victoria, in Melbourne.

Now, your level of competence as you preceded on your tour. They say that the most dangerous parts of ops were the first five and the last five.

That's undoubtedly true, that the first five was the five xxx, don't you think?

Yes. You were learning in the first five?

I think so. We had a very good navigator, Jim Duckworth, his logs were displayed all around training units in Bomber Command when I was instructing at Henswell and Blighton. They had actual logs of his in the navigation section saying this was done under actual operation conditions, why can't you do the same? You must try to do the same. He was very good, and consequently we were [Win] broadcasters most of the time were at ... we had H2S and we were Win broadcasters.

DFS support?

Yes. Most of the time we were at Binbrook we were broadcasting, yes.

Did you use H2S much for the bomb on when xxx support?

Yes, when you were identifying a target, yes, but it was no

good on Stuttgart, it was recalled because of the hills. One of the raids we did on Stuttgart was pretty unsuccessful because of that - it was the second. We did Stuttgart twice in a short time, and one of them was quite unsuccessful.

So you'd have used H2S simply as a guide, but it was always visual bombing?

Yes.

Unless you were there before the markers went down.

Yes. Sometimes we did occasionally bomb on [Wanganui] - was it? that system of the markers on the xxx. That Stuttgart was, the hills upset the H2S apparently. It was an eight hour twenty trip too, it was a long way to Stuttgart.

Stuttgart, that was the 15th.

Yes. That wasn't a very successful raid. This is a great reference book, Laurie, it tells you, you know, the success of ...

I'll certainly be on to that. As a matter of fact, there's two or three very crucial references I'll buy so that they are alongside me all the time.

When you get this, he goes in to your history too to see that you are on the Squadron and everything because he wrote in that I did thirty - I never told him, I just wrote for the book, just sent the form for the book, and he put that in, so he must have checked somehow - the [Martin Miller book]. It didn't come back from xxx.

His research is fabulous.

Yes, it must have been because somebody sent me a form, an order form, and I just filled it in with my name and address at the bottom of it and sent it off with a postal order, and months later I got that back, so he'd obviously checked that I'd operated on 460 Squadron.

And the last five, did you feel yourself getting a bit cocky in the last five?

Er, oh, I sweated the last one out I remember. We pushed the button and said, 'Guess who' when we were first back to Binbrook. Hughie came around before we took off and said, 'This is your last', and I pressed the button and said, 'Guess who', and they said, 'Queen prepare' (laughs) - they knew.

Yes, I think we were glad to finish. I wish now I'd gone on, but the crew didn't want to, they were all very glad to be finished.

You'd done your bit for xxx.

Well, I wish I had, anyway, Hughie said, 'Go across to Henswell

and instruct them for a few months; you can get back if you want to'. Well, I did, I wanted to go back, but I wanted to go back on Mosquitos, and I'd just got that all arranged when I came home actually.

What, Mosquito bombers?

Yes, [Upward], you know, [Bennett's] Night Striking Force - Upward we were posted to. Jack Grant was going to be my navigator there, flight leader navigator over at [Blighton], and he wanted to go back, but, as I said, Tony Willis arranged it, but then this other thing came up. I still wanted to go back and Tony said, 'Oh, don't be bloody silly, go home, go home'.

Bob Howl never thought of going back - he flew Dakotas home for Canada, or flew a Dakota home.

Did he?

He was one of the group that went across there. He asked me to go with him, go home, but for some reason the squadron leader had asked me to go back on a second tour so I went back with him.

You did a second tour, did you?

Only seven on the second tour.

This is when the war finished, I suppose. That was with 460?

463.

With 463 at [Wodington]. Wodington is still going strong.

Of course. Was your leave ever stopped to go on an op?

No, never.

I struck a couple of blokes where that happened and they were as nervous as hell - the black spot put on them.

Yes, you would think it's ... There was a very good Bomber Command book called 'Maximum Effort' and I've never been able to get it. Someone loaned it to me, and I read it, and it was about Halifax Squadron, and it was very, very, good.

Yes, I think I've got it on my reference list.

I don't think I've ever been able to get hold of it, I don't think I've ever seen it anywhere; I've looked for it and I've never seen it anywhere since. It was about that sort of thing, about girls that were - what did they call those girls on the Squadron that - [chop] girls - if a crew was friendly with a particular WAAF and one of them taking her out, and they got the chop, they used to call her a chop girl. And strangely enough, there were some girls who'd had about five boyfriends go through the chop, and they got to the stage where no-one

would talk, none of the aircrew would talk to them - amazing that people are superstitious.

Don Delaney claims that several WAAFS were taken on ops; I don't believe it. Don's got some funny stories. Could you imagine ...?

Don told me that and I xxx xxx.

It's rubbish.

I would never think of even putting that down as a rumour.

Could you imagine anyone on 460 taking - and xxx claims that they used to drink a lot, they were often drunk when they were going - they had three or four scotches before they went on ops. Now, I saw no drinking before ops. Nights that ops were scrubbed we'd get stuck into it, and if you got in the aeroplane and was scrubbed, you'd always going out to the mess, or get a case of beer or something. But I never saw any - I think we'd had a half pint at lunch time, but half a pint a week, English beer, we never even thought about it as drinking.

I don't even remember having that.

I think I might have sometimes had half a pint at lunch time, but we never thought about it, no-one ever thought about it as drinking or anything. '[The Paint]' claims that they were drunk or pissed all the time on operations - he was shot down on his eighth, of course.

There is another book somewhere I came across that I've got the reference because I made a note in my notes, and there it suggests that there was drinking before ops.

It wasn't on our squadron. Hughie would never - or Spike - no-one would have stood for that.

Does he mention that in that book, 'The Paint'?

I don't think he does, I think he mentions it in another book, or he told me about it. Only I saw it in a newspaper report because he was in a court case up in New Guinea when he lived up there, and he showed me the newspaper reports of the case, and he told the judge that they were always - that he, on his operations, were always drinking, that they were always full of scotch when they went out, they had to be, and all this sort of thing. He also claims that in the op he was shot down on - it was a Berlin, a Stirling to Berlin - they were hit by flack over Berlin and they were pranged in Holland. And he claims that he was on a special operation; he wasn't bombing Berlin, his crew were bombing Goering's residence, twelve miles north of Berlin, and that they scored a direct hit on it, but Goering wasn't there.

You know how they say every private is a general forty years after, thirty years after? Well, this is him, you see. He was frustrated and thwarted really. They gave him a Military Medal

three years after the war - five years after the war - he talked them into it, he's a real bull artist, and, you know, he reckoned it was worth an MM for what he'd done when he was loose in Germany and everything. So he got an MM. A lot of people were angry about that.

He did get it?

He has got an MM, yeah. But he's an odd bloke, he's a real bull artist - a big, fat, Yorkshire man. As I say, they were a German family and he was a reporter on the Yorkshire Post, so he had the gift of the gab and he spoke fluent German - he spent time in Germany before the war and everything - which must have helped him in his escape because if you could speak the language fluently ...

You'd have it made.

Yes. Oh, yes, he is a funny bloke, but gee, he's made a lot of money out of that book.

I hope I don't meet him because I bristle pretty well nowadays.

His other books are mostly - he wrote a few other books but they are all real rubbish, I don't think any of them sold. There you are, he's got the gift of the gab, they get him to go to give talks. When 460 was coming down here we were having dinner at the old one up near the War Memorial - the Ainslie Hotel, isn't it? - so I paid for he and his wife, I said, 'You come along'. He admitted himself to hospital four days before, he didn't want to come. He's afraid of somebody on 460 ...

Finding him out.

... he knows some ex-POW or something because he's scared that somebody that's been in the same camp as him - he didn't come to that at all; he doesn't like to meet ex-460 people or anything. That's why when I said I met this navigator from 460 that was in the same camp as him - 'What did he think of me? What did he think of me?' you see.

He is obviously sensitive, he's worried.

Yes.

Well, thanks, Reg, for all that.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

4/00