ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: MERVYN STAFFORD - 460 SQUADRON RAAF

INTERVIEWEE: MERVYN STAFFORD

INTERVIEWER: LAURIE FIELD

SUMMARY: RECOLLECTIONS OF EVENTS AND PERSONALITIES OF 460 SQUADRON RAAF SERVING IN BRITAIN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

DATE RECORDED:

RECORDING LOCATION:

ACCESSION NUMBER: S01274

TRANSCRIBER: C L SOAMES

TRANSCRIPTION DATE: JULY 2000

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

... passed this scholarship, in Howard, when I was fourteen, at the Howard State School. The only high school that you could go to - well, the only high school from Maryborough, or Bundaberg, and you had to board there, there was no daily [board and private visitors] kind of thing - it was private people. I went to Maryborough, and two years past junior, and I got a reasonably good pass. But the only job I could get was as an apprentice panel beater and motor painter at the Ford Garage in Maryborough. I worked there for about two years, until I was about eighteen and a half, and then a recruiting train come around, and they set up headquarters, they set up in the drill hall in Maryborough.

What, purely air force recruiting?

Just air force it was at that particular time. I think they used to travel by train - this was March '41 - and I joined aircrew - actually, I wanted to be a wireless operator/air gunner, I didn't think I was capable of being a pilot (laughs). What happened, I went down at work one day for a drink of water, and there was the deputy foreman there, and there was a Wirraway flying over, and he said, 'If I was you, Staffy, I'd be up there, I wouldn't be here painting' - of course, the garage was practically closed down then, everybody in Maryborough - or tradesmen and that - were working down at the shipyard xxx xxx. So I joined up, it was some time in March I signed up and got everything, and I was called up on June 21, the day Russia come in the war, on 16 Course.

So there wasn't much of a delay between your ...

No, I was pretty quick actually, I was the last one in Queensland to do - we were the last course to do a two-month ITS, after that it was all three months. See, I didn't pass in English xxx, but I had good passes in all the mathematics, and physics, and chemistry, and all that. That might have made them think I was a ...

Pilot potentially?

Well, I wanted to be a wireless operator. Even at ITS, after about - before you finished, about two weeks before you finished, they asked you what did you want to be. They marched us out on to the [Horneybrook] Highway - and I don't know if you know, it's about a mile long, and we used to route march over it every morning. This morning they pulled us up in the middle and the warrant officer, Administration, was there, interviewing us to see what we wanted to be, and I said, oh, I wanted to be a wireless operator, and he said, 'Why do you want to be a wireless operator?' and all this. Anyhow, when the postings come out - there was approximately 100 of us on the course - I think there was 99 made pilots, and one of them was made a navigator, and it was only because of his height, I think it was, he was just half and inch too small - fellow by the name of Saunders - I'll never forget his name.

That's interesting.

But everybody was classed as pilots for some reason. Then there was twenty of us went to Archerfield and the rest went down southern states - Archerfield was the only FDS in Queensland. And after two months there, seven of us went over to Canada, and we were on the Monterey, first-class passengers - America wasn't in the war - xxx Calvary, Alberta, and the NTS there on - SFTS there on Cessna Cranes. We got our wings on 27 March 1942.

May as well carry on from there and bring you up to the Squadron. Where did you go from there?

Oh, we just went down to New York for leave - the first big convoy across the Atlantic with the Yanks, the first Yanks going to England, and we landed at [Greenwich], went down to Bournemouth, and on the way to Bournemouth went through Bath, that had just been bombed the night before, and Bath was just a holiday resort for old people and that. That gave me no compunction at all about bombing German cities after I'd seen the damage.

Very interesting, good point.

Well, it was the same with everybody. And while we were in Bournemouth we went up to Canterbury - Canterbury had just been bombed. That was the time when Hitler was just bombing undefended towns, like Norwich and places like that. The casualties were too high to bomb any of the defended towns, and that time in 1942 he was just bombing the undefended towns.

Then I went to an AF, Advanced Flying Unit at Leconfield, up in Yorkshire, not far from Hull, then to a Blenheim OTU at Upwood, near Peterborough, and then on to a Boston squadron, daylight bombing, 107 Squadron, Manor [great] Messingham. The big trouble there was that we never had enough planes. Every time we got a few extra planes they'd be sent out to North Africa, and with America coming in the war, their supply of Bostons dried up kind of thing, and we never had enough to practice and it was all formation flying, low-level formation. You'd go over the Channel low-level, till you come in to sight of the French coast, then you'd climb up to 10,000 and bomb in formation. They called them circus operations. The whole idea was just to entice the German fighters up so the Spitfires could - we'd only carried 2,000-pound bombs, and they'd only be six or nine of them. Only did about three or four trips on them - a lot of sea searches. We used to do the sea searches coast, the French coast, with the Bostons; if there was any Bomber Command bailed out the night before or anything, we'd do the sea searches close to the coast.

At that particular time the Bostons were the fastest plane in the world at sea level. You only had to survive the initial dive from a fighter and you were safe, you could scoot for home again.

That was 2 Group of Bomber Command, and in April '43 they decided to turn it in to a tactical air force - 2nd Tactical Air Force -and when it was a Bomber Command there used to be two crews, in theory, at every plane, although half the time we'd only have about five planes. But when they turned it in to the Tactical Air Force they posted half the crews to Bomber Command. I finished up on 17 OTU, I think, it was at Finningly near Doncaster - then to [Foldingworth], conversion unit, and [Lincoln], I think, for a while. We went to a couple of conversion units, a lot of the satellite stations where you just lived in one hut, so they could convert more at the one time, give you ... the aerodromes were virtually just completed - the runways - so they could use the runways. You might go there for two days and then come back to the base station, and then posted to 460 Squadron in October - towards the end of October.

Where had you picked up your crew, your Lancaster crew?

Well, I had three ...

What, the Bostons?

... Bostons. Actually, the first day I got on the Boston Squadron, my wireless operator/air gunner went with another crew, and they collided over the target, so I lost him, and it took me about a month or six weeks to get another wireless operator, and I got a Newfoundlander - Thomas Kennedy, fellow from Newfoundland - you might remember him. Nearly everybody in the Squadron new Kennedy. He'd been a second year medical student and he got kicked out of the university - his father was a millionaire, lobster canner and fisherman over the Great Banks, in Newfoundland.

I think Dave mentioned him yesterday.

Oh, yeah.

I think Les's daughter called on him when she went to Canada.

Sure that wasn't Carl Hansen, bomb aimer?

It could have been.

I think that would be Carl Hansen, the bomb aimer, he was very friendly with Les. He was the only officer in aircrew. Practically half the time I was on 460 I was a warrant officer, I didn't apply for a commission.

I notice that with you, and also Ron Douglas. Ron Douglas was a WO throughout almost all of his ops.

They seemed to - I don't know why - other people would come there, and they would have done two ops, and they call them such ... I don't know whether there was supposed to be a balance of so many - there was another, Bateman - do you remember Warrant Officer Bateman.

Yeah, Warrant Officer Bateman - yeah, Jerry Bateman.

Yeah, well, he done nearly all his ops ... I don't know whether they ... I just didn't apply for one because I believed in the survival of the crew as a unit kind of thing, and once you get any offers ... like our bomb aimer, he was more or less divorced from us, like when we went in to Grimsby, he was never available, you could never make contact with him, he always seemed to be away somewhere else. But the rest of us, like the two gunner ...

That's interesting that, it bears out something Alec Wales got on about. Alec was all for the crew, and he reckons that if half were in the officers' mess, you weren't a crew. I think Alec and his crew did their first tour as sergeants, the whole lot of them; and then they started to talk about commissions.

My two gunners, you know, they were good gunners - they were champion snooker players too. When Jo Davis come to the Squadron, they were the two that was picked there to play - and he was a world champion. We xxx a trip for 3 o'clock, 4 o'clock, in the morning, I'd sit and watch them, they'd play, I'd sit and watch them, they'd play snooker till seven or eight, till the ordinary breakfast come on, then we'd go to bed. We never, ever, went to bed if we got back, you know, between midnight and 2 o'clock in the morning, they always, you know, unwound, and I used to

sit there. We'd sit there drinking coffee, watching them play snooker.

Were they both Australians?

No, I was the only Australian.

You were the only Australian in your crew?

A Canadian bomb aimer and a Newfoundlander rear gunner, and I reckon I must have had a dozen navigators. The night we crashed, my navigator was with me, but he wasn't hurt, but before I was fit to fly again he went with another crew and they crashed in the funnel coming in - I just forget what crew it is, probably have it in me book - and he never flew any more. So I just had spare navigators until I done twenty trips, then I got a fellow by the name of Ray [Borsnel], he come from some other squadron - must have lost his pilot.

How about the rest of the crew? Did you have any sort of a continuity there?

Yeah, they were all pretty well - the engineer never missed a trip, the wireless operator missed an odd trip with, you know, head cold, things like that - I don't think the two gunners missed a trip - the engineer, the two gunners and, I think, the bomb aimer might have missed one trip.

This young Ronnie Mansfield flew with you once or twice.

Yes.

He was a good friend of mine.

Yeah, Ronnie was ...

He went in with McKenzie.

In the circuit one?

Circuit, yes. Got any clues as to what happened that night?

Well, I always thought they took off with the automatic pilot on.

That seems to be the general ...

Seems to be the only thing. There was no way in the world the ground crew would let them take off with any of the control chocks in, whatever they call them. It took a fair while to build up pressure for the automatic pilot to work; just idling, taxiing, around ...

Wouldn't hurt.

It could have, but it mightn't have, it's pretty hard to say. When you open up to full bore, I'd say - and the automatic pilot would always come in on one extreme, you know, you had to be fed kind of thing. If it come in on a slight bank, or something like that, there was no way you could correct it by ...

I get you, if it came in while you are on a bank, and that's it.

If you were flying straight and level, it never come in, as far as I can remember - I mean, I'm going back a long way now - but as far as I can remember, it might come in, you know, the way it had been disengaged last time, or something like that, and you had to correct it immediately, and you couldn't fight against it. See, they might have been just starting to take their turn when it took over, see, I don't know. You couldn't fight against it. I probably flew more with the automatic pilot than anybody on the Squadron because I was starting to get this leg complaint during the war, and Jack Jones, he put an extension. The automatic pilot lever was away forward on your left, way up in the corner, and he put a lever about nine inches back with a hand so I could - I used to sit sideways coming home, swinging me legs, and you could just pull this leaver to disengage the automatic pilot. You could fly sitting sideways, but if you ever had to corkscrew, or anything like that, you just pulled this lever.

There were some suggestions at the time, I remember, that instead of having zero trim he had full trim. Would that have been possible?

Well, it would have to be - oh, I don't know, I wouldn't like to comment on that. See, most of the trims, I think they would be checked by ground crew and stuff like that anyhow, I don't think that would be the ...

It was just one possible solution, but no. Spike Marsh reckons George - Alec Wales reckons George was in ...

I'd say the - see, the only trim was if he had gone up and stalled, it could have been the elevator trim too far back, but I couldn't see the aileron trim or that causing it - because you could fight against trim, unless it was full extent, and there's no reason for it to be at full extent. See, the trim, was Reg Mullins will tell you, his trim was shot away and it took him and the mid-upper gunner to hold the nose forward all the way back - him and the mid-upper gunner, I think it was, both got DFM. Well, see, their trim was shot away, they could hold against it. I think when you are fresh, taken off, if it had been the trim one way you could have turned it. I'd say it would be the automatic pilot, whether it was left engaged, or whether a valve had stuck. Those thing were all hydraulic valves, like lifts on trucks and things like that - and automatic cars - they all worked on the same principle. A valve could have stuck, he could have had it out, the valve could have still, you know, got stuck in, you never know.

According to Les Tate, McKenzie almost went in to Binbrook village that night, he just missed the spire of a church there as he came round in his circuit, and he crashed about half to three quarters of a mile on from there.

Well, I was in the cinema at the time, I dunno why.

In Binbrook village?

No, on the station. What night was that?

Oh ... I've got it here somewhere - it was well in to January, I think.

This was me navigator mackintosh - MacIntyre - Scotsman - 'grounded owing to cold in head - ops on [Wentworth] flight - Sergeant [Theis], crashed on return - Mac and I were horribly

shaken'. It's a wonder they got out, they just - I was playing poker - he never flew any more, they made him an aerodrome controller.

Well, we'll skip ops there and go on to your post-war life. What happened after you left the Squadron?

I went to Litchfield as an instructor, got married, lived out in the village of Litchfield, [Fradley], and wasn't very interested in instructing - only done day flying because there was a young fellow there, Jimmy [Merthyr], he was later to become an airline pilot, and he crashed and was killed in a Lockheed at Bilinga, Coolangatta Airport. But he was made keen on flying, I was never very keen on flying, I just did what I had to. But he used to do all me night flying - see, I was married - he'd fly at day and then he'd do - legally - he'd do all me nights, cross-countries, and everything like that, he was just keen on flying. Went down to xxx and did an instructors' course. Then it was just we found out, Arthur Doubleday was a CO and he'd got married in England, he married an English girl. And the biggest argument, or biggest discussion, used to be, he used to call for me every now and again to have a discussion on how we could get out wives out to Australia the quickest, and from all he found out, and from all I could find out, the sooner we got home - we couldn't nominate our wives to migrate to Australia until we were in Australia - so the whole object, the idea, then was to get back to Australia as quick as possible. I was posted back just after the end of the war in Europe, that's VE-Day. In fact, I was posted - I was transferred - I made such a good effort to get back to Australia that I was transferred from Litchfield down to Brighton, was going to be put on a boat without any leave to see me wife or me inlaws, or anything. A fellow Barnett or Bartlett was the adjutant - I think he was on our Squadron at one stage - he had red hair - I told him I was going to go AWOL and desert, or anything. Anyhow, leave finally come through, but he was very insistent, the boat or the boat had been made up - but I did, I got a months' leave actually out of it, or three weeks leave, I think it was, to say goodbye to the wife and all the inlaws.

The boat broke down at Colon - we went through the Panama Canal, we were there for about five or six days. Half the boat load was Australian prisoners of war come back from Germany - they took over the ship as far as gambling was concerned, and when we got to the Panama Canal at Colon they took over the town there. And the ventilators in the engine room had broken down, and it took five days to fix. Anyhow, they had to tow the boat up away from the town to control these prisoners of war (laughs).

Were they in the army?

Army - yeah - Australian Army, all the Middle East fellows, all 6th and 9th Division fellows they were, and you can imagine what they ... and they were millionaires, they'd got half their accrued pay, pay they accrued during their three and a half years xxx xxx. When they got to London they received half their pay in a lump sum. There was nothing on the two-up games in the back of the boat, there was nothing to throw for three and four hundred pound. I mean, gosh.

It was a fortune then, wasn't it?

Us air force officers used to sit there and - you know, if we went to four bob (laughs) it was a big bet. There was two New Zealanders were on the two-up game, when we got to Wellington - well, first of all, there was a lieutenant colonel, green beret, a little old man, was the officer in charge of the troops, and he banned all gambling. And he come round (when) this two-up game was going on and he said, 'Stop this tossing' - and there was a little New Zealander by the name

of Cocky, and he said, 'There's only one tossing - if you don't bugger off, there's only one tossing that will go on, that'll be you tossed over the side'. So he went, he had a little bit of a xxx with the senior Australian officers and he decided to allow all gabling, bar crown and anchor, which was a popular decision. And when we got to New Zealand these two New Zealanders that were running the two-up game, they got on the loud speaker, the xxx, and thanked everybody for their cooperation, and they said if you go - they named two hotels in Wellington - they said if you go there you wont need to buy a drink all day, it will be on us. Those two fellows made enough money out of the trip to both buy sheep stations (laughs) for their future - and, you know, they were only taking a small percentage out of the game, but Jesus, there was some money ...

Shows you how much money was flying around.

Oh, yeah. They used to - the canvas cover on the hold - you know, the lid of the hold, how they have a canvas cover over it? - it was a perfect level floor for two-up games. Every now and again the coin would go up that high they'd get in the slipstream of the ... but they had an unlimited supply of the old - what were they? - Edward VII coins they used to use for two-up. It was an old coin, it wasn't one of the modern pennies. But it was dry ship, there was no grog and that on it, but gees, when these prisoners of war got ashore in this Colon at the other end of the Canal they played merry hell. There was brawls and oh, crikey.

I can imagine.

In fact, all us air force officers had a red band on him, as soon as we got off the boat we took off. In fact, in the end the American troops in charge of the Canal zone there, oh, they were tough, they were running practically everybody in the boat in, there was meself and a little navigator I used to knock around with - and we weren't really drunk, they just gathered everybody that was on the troop ship, they gathered them up.

Another interesting thing. You bought the paper and you opened it this way, it was Spanish, and if you start at the back and open it that way, it was English, you know, just on the one page. And the headline, every time a troop ship come through, the headline was, 'Plan to Blow Up Canal' (laughs).

We were talking to an Australian in a little bar over there, a little small place, you know, it was just a bar, it wasn't a hotel, just a bar. And he said they print that every time there's a troop ship in.

How did the Yanks go with the Australians, the Australian Army blokes? Did they get the better of them?

Oh, yes, they were all drunk and that. Most of them were that drunk that (they were) docile and that. The main brawls was between the Australian soldiers and the black native population, and the business people. The exchange rate should have been four American dollars - four dollars ten for a pound sterling, and they were only giving us two dollars - and that's what the trouble started with, the native population. The Americans just held the peace really, there wasn't much animosity against the Americans for running us back in, it was just like a free - we'd all had enough, I think, and it was just a free bus trip back to the boat, which was, you know, a mile or two mile away.

We got back to Sydney - we were in New Zealand when John Curtin died, we were in

Wellington. We got back to Sydney, the boat had to anchor out midstream, it couldn't - the mast - it was the Arundel Castle - and the mast was that high it couldn't go under the Sydney Harbour Bridge - and the wharfies were on strike, we had to unload the boat ourselves. And it was the first time in the history of being in the air force - we were over four years at that stage - where I was issued with a blanket and a bloody knife and fork, a tin dish, and they left us to sleep on the railway station in a troop train for the night until the train was ready to go to Brisbane. That soured me on Australian war effort, especially the wharfies being on strike, and we had to dig down - they had a - the ship's crew had to lift our baggage out of the hold and we had to find it on the deck, the trunks and all that, and load it on to tenders to go ashore at Circular Quay.

> When I came back in to New South Wales from Melbourne, the trains were on strike. I couldn't get home to Forbes, I had to wait about a week, I think, so I was pretty soured too.

When we got to Brisbane the RACQ met us, and there was about 300 come to Queensland, and we were driven through the streets - everybody had done the right thing there - down to Sandgate, which was embarkation depot. Everything was pretty right from then on. I was posted, after leave - I got about six weeks' leave - after that I was posted on 33 Squadron on Dakotas flying to Japan. I swapped with somebody, I didn't want it.

Did I tell you, during my leave I'd been working in the local coal company [mining] for coal and that? I hadn't been home for a long time and I wanted to get out of the air force actually, so towards the end of September, early October, I was discharged.

> '45?

'45, yeah. And I just worked around with me brothers on discovering this new coal field. And then early in January, meself and a fellow that was - his number was consecutive with me - he'd been, you know, Archerfield - through Sandgate, Archerfield, Canada, down to Upwood, and then he went on to 2 Group of Bomber Command flying Mitchells, and when I got married in England he was my best man, and we bough a business together down there, for just a bit of a gimmick, to settle down, a mixed business opposite - a school store it was, at West End. We stayed there for two years.

I'd a - the manager of TAA in Queensland - I'd - he'd been shot down - he was a pilot, he'd been shot down, and he'd escaped from Germany through Spain, I think it was, and he come back when I was at this instructors' school down at [Lulsgate Bottom]. He come there to convert and he flew with me first - I had a, you know - he flew with me - like, I had to convert him, like, oh, give him the familiarisation again because he hadn't flown for two or three years. Anyhow, after the war he was the TAA manager in Queensland when they were just starting up. After we decided to sell this store, the shop, and made our mind on Stevenson, we decided to go in and see if we could get jobs as pilots with TAA, and went in and saw him - he remembered me, and he talked us out of it, he said, we'd be like engine drivers, we'd never be home. The officers' jobs in the baggage department, he said, at the aerodrome or in here at the depot. He said that they'd be far better jobs than pilots. In those days - that would be 1947 - and just goes to show you, you know, what pilots were thought of in those days, because if you were an officer, one of the higher-ups in the baggage department, it was a better job than a pilot was.

And I come back to the family company after the war and just had a pretty free and easy life from then on. We had no worrying about much, we'd established a good coal area over the other

side of the [Paoba] branch line. I was just a super nummary, done anything in a family company, like you do like that. The brother - one of me older brothers - was the managing director and company secretary, and things like that. The coal seams round here are very small and it's a continuous job looking for new mines - see, the average mine only lasts about seven, eight or nine years, and you are looking for coal nearly all the time.

Then in 1969 I got multiple sclerosis, I've been suffering with it on and off ever since the war. As I told you, you know, with that leg complaint. Nobody knows you've got it, I mean, my legs would go dead and all that. Doctors used to tell me it was the way I sat down. In fact, I've got a nephew that's a doctor, in fact he's a heart surgeon, he studies at the Mayo Clinic in America, he does all the bypasses and holes in Brisbane at St Andrews now. During the lay-off at the university, when they get three months off, he used to come out with me boring - of course, you only need ladders and an offsider - every break in the university he used to come and work at the coal mine with us. His father ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

(Incidental conversation)

MS was around in your war days?

Yeah.

How have you got on? Has repat accepted any responsibilities?

Yeah, I've got a [DPI] pension for it. [My son doubts] whether I've got multiple sclerosis. I went to a specialist on me own behalf, a leading MS specialist in Brisbane, and he said what I've got is very similar to it, but it's not it. And he said it was repat that diagnosed it as multiple sclerosis and, he said, they've diagnosed it as multiple sclerosis because they wont have to accept responsibility for it. And as far as I was told by one of the medical officer, I know very well, there's only one other case of multiple sclerosis being accepted as war caused.

He said it's very similar to it. The only way he could detect is that I've got no reflexes in me ankles and I've got excessive reflexes in me knee joints, and he said if I had multiple sclerosis I'd have no excessive reflexes in me ankles - or vice versa, anyhow, and that's what made me go for a ... My local doctor said, well, go for a war pension on it - I couldn't work. I used to get along with two frames in those days.

What years were this?

1969 - nine weeks. See, I was in Maryborough hospital, I couldn't walk, I was in there getting penicillin needles for an abscess in the rump. I just lost all - I just collapsed - but I'd had attacks before that, like sharp electric shocks in me knees that went on for days and days, like they were going to sleep and that. Then the final attack - I was forty-seven then - well, you never get any more attacks after that, so I've been lucky and I've improved since then. But I've had to look after meself, haven't xxx meself. See, I play bowls and that, in fact, I was president of the bowling club over there when I was thirty, and down here. As a routine bowler - well, then, I had to give all that away - give golf away. When the lads started playing golf, I started playing

golf too, but I had to give that away. I could play bowls now, I think, but it's only the last seven or eight years that I've improved, mainly since I've been out here with this land doing a lot of walking and that. I give the grog away, I'm a teetotaller now, which restricts your activities a lot.

It does restrict your social activities a bit. You've still got a few simmentals here?

Yeah, yeah, I'm breading up to get a good one, I'm just weaning one over in that paddock there now, on rye grass and oats.

(Incidental conversation and break in interview)

Well, this is the night that you crashed in to this Normandy site. I'd name that Normandy site - was it a town, village, or what?

I never, ever saw it in daylight.

Could you tell us, what have you got in your diary about that?

'Thursday 16 - on ops - did an air test on P Peter, but it was US - had briefing early - took K2 - take-off 4:15, target Berlin, petrol 1,800, bomb load one 4,000 and seventeen and a third small bomb component. Trip in okay - got a direct hit ...' I've got 'by a scarecrow' because it didn't - remember the scarecrows they used to set up, they were just a big ball of flame, they simulated an aeroplane blowing up. That could have been a scarecrow or it could have been an aeroplane blowing up, but it was too big for a burst of flack, it was huge, you know, it was 100 feet in diameter, right below us. 'Put ailerons out of action, came home via the Baltic and Denmark.' In fact, we were going to land in Sweden because the plane was - you couldn't control it. The pilot's seat was back about forty-five degrees angle and that, and we were going to land in Sweden. We didn't think we could possibly get back to England. And on the way to Sweden we had a ballot to see whether we would try to get back to England or go to land in Sweden, and we decided to go to England. The rear gunner was the one that convinced us - Dick [Garnett], he was the pilot officer - because his wife was pregnant. And when we crashed over England he was killed. That's the way ...

I've just got 'the ailerons US' - that was the main thing, there was no ailerons - 'came home via the Baltic and Denmark - cloud base at base 500 feet. After about three quarters of an hour tried to find base. Crashed on hill, Dick killed, Fred cut up a bit ...' - he got seriously injured there, but he wasn't ... - 'the rest of us escaped, were shaken. Mack and I ...' - that's the navigator and I - 'we went to the searchlight battery for help, which arrived at 2:45 - in bed at 4 A.M.' And in between that time somehow I did an air test. I've got no record of that, but I done a circuit and landing. I can't remember doing that, but it's in me logbook. You know how they make you fly straight away after a crash. And I've got, 'In bed at 4 A.M.', but I'd done that air test before that.

You came home via the Baltic and Denmark. Was that anywhere near your intended track?

I've got no idea - I've got no idea. After we got hit and the plane went into a dive, then it started to roll around, and the seat was laying back here like this, that was the worst thing - knocked all our wire(less) - we had no radio, and that's why we flew into the ground. The millibars, the QFE, barometric pressure at sea level, had changed by ten millibars that night, and that's 300 feet - each millibar was thirty feet, so when we thought we were flying at 300 feet we were on

the ground - and [Caister Top] was higher than Binbrook, I think, and we kept coming down below the cloud. We had no RT and we had no other wireless. The blast, when we got hit - we had intercom for some reason, but we had no radio - we had the intercom.

And there's another thing. Not long before we crashed, in the excitement and everything, the wireless operator hadn't wound in the trailing aerial. He felt a jerk, and he said, oh - of course, there were planes milling round everywhere, you could see lights, you know, navigation lights, everywhere, everybody was trying to land.

And that was a bad night, was it?

Yeah, that's the night.

Supposedly lost twenty over England.

Well, yeah - thirty over England, twenty over Germany - there was three from our Squadron crashed.

But anyhow, the wireless operator said, 'There's another aeroplane, another kite's run in to our antenna' - he didn't know we'd knocked it off, it had hit the ground, you couldn't see.

So that was just an added hazard for you, that visibility, the poor visibility?

Oh, yeah.

On top of your other troubles.

That was a major thing. We would have been able to land if it had been a normal night. By the time we got back - you got used to these things, you know, you got used to flying an aeroplane the way it was - and a lot of the faults had corrected themselves, the trimming and different things like that, you know, I could fly it alright because there's not much to fly an aeroplane straight and level, and there's not much actually doing a circuit, when you come to it. It's not as if you had to do any violent manoeuvres. It was having no wireless and getting no altimeter adjustment that made us think we were 300 feet higher than we were all the time, and you kept coming down, below the clouds. We were just about out - in fact, another ten minutes we'd have baled out, but the wireless operator wasn't, he wasn't as - the engineer, he wasn't as hurt as bad as they made out and that. I read it in that book ... See, that's the air test I done the same day, and the engineer flew with me.

Oh, he was supposed to be seriously injured.

Actually, the only thing is we would have been back on ops a lot earlier, only we never had a navigator, and they put us through an intensive Y course. I used to take up quite a few navigators on these H2S or Y courses.

A good bit of training went on about this time.

Yeah. But that was the only activity I had on any of my trips really - lost an engine once or twice, circled the bloody target a couple of times - real keen.

All your trips there seem to be very straightforward, very well carried out.

We only did the one of Bordeaux - do they have that in there? - it was a daylight take-off, and everybody's going to Germany that way, and we were going that way (laughs). I said to the navigator, I said, 'There's something wrong here' - and I never did find out, I can't remember, I never - I thought he actually might have been given me the wrong course purposely, or something like that, I don't know. I never went in to it, I knew ...

Probably in there somewhere.

That was the first one, it would be ... that would be the first one after the 16th ...

That's right, the 16th.

(Break in interview)

They were short of bombs and when we come back they said, 'You can't drop your bomb load in the sea, you've got to land with it on, you've got to jettison 1,000 gallons of petrol'. I'll have it in here anyhow, just the petrol part of it.

What date was that?

20 December - 20 January. 'On ops, taking xxx target Berlin, took off at 4:30, but went about 130 miles out. Mack reckons we should turn back owing to compass trouble. So back we come, jettisoned 1,000 gallons of petrol and landed with full bomb load, 14,000 pounds. Had a few runs in mess and then to bed.'

'This raid was abortive. D R Clappers went US over base and mission was abandoned. All bombs were brought back.'

Wasn't over base, 130 miles out, according to me. Suppose that would be near enough to base. But I can't understand that. We had to jettison 1,000 gallons of petrol, and in that book 'Strike and Return', or whatever, the Squadron record, there was somebody took off and his hatch blew off, and he just come around and landed, put a new hatch on and went again. My way of thinking, that must have been a short trip where he didn't have the maximum all-up weight. You know, he had full bomb load, only 1,000 gallons.

Your gunner, [P O Garment]. Now, he was English, was he?

Yeah, he was English, a Londoner.

Do you know much about him, his personal life?

No, he was very smart, he got a commission straight off course, come to me straight from a gunnery school at Finningly near Doncaster. I went down and saw his people and went to his funeral - met all his relations, but I can't remember much about them. I haven't got much in here about them, just that I met his family, his wife. On a case like that you can't get to know them because they ... See, when I was without a navigator I fell for a lot of ...

[Spares]

No, a lot of funerals. Friend of yours, [going round], I went to their funeral. In fact, it was the most pitiful sight I've seen, it was down the air force grave - cemetery - at Cambridge, and there was two young mothers there - some of the crew were only eighteen - and the mothers threw themselves down in the graves - you know, there was a mass xxx buried alongside one another, and it was bloody pitiful to go there.

Would that be where young Ronnie would be buried?

Yeah - well, I presume so - of course, the whole crew was buried together. We had to escort them down on the train, you know, had to change stations and trains. They were all put in a guard's wagon, a guard's van kind of thing, from the Squadron - the coffins. They were taken down and they were put in the morgue at Cambridge, and we had to hang round Cambridge for a day, a couple of days, before the funeral was on. Then we went out and there was - I think, if I remember right, there was quite a few funerals on at the same time.

There was a war grave section there, was there?

Yeah, yeah, and there was Australian and RAF at Cambridge.

What was his name, what's H stand for?

I beg your pardon.

What does H stand for - P O Garment - H H - what was his first name?

Dick we called him.

Can you think about his physical build? Was he very tall, very short?

Tall - never thought of it xxx - that's our Boston squadron ... that's him there, that was coming back from our first Berlin trip. Never used to seem to get in these photos, I used to always be ... At Kennedy we used to all get the rum, you know, you'd get the double dose of Jamaican rum when you come back. This Kennedy - see, half my crew - this fellow didn't drink, and the rear gunner I got to replace him, he didn't drink, and the engineer didn't drink. This Kennedy here, he used to get all (laughs) he'd have one of those white enamel cups, he'd have it full of rum, and he used to get all these cigarettes.

There's Jack Jones, if you are going to see (him). There's that photo that was in the war museum - War Memorial - there's the actual one there, that's the actual photo of it, that's at [Senerby]. It had up here in the corner, 'Crews in order of return', and Stafford, you could see Stafford. I think Charlie [Lutton] was the second one back.

When did you do your last trip?

Er, I think it was the day after Anzac Day, I think, '44. Yeah, well, okay, I've got you pretty well covered right through here, until the end of April. How did you go from the end of April? When did you finish? When did you finish your ops?

Well, D-Day; then went on the night of 5/6 - might have actually done two on D-Day because

we bombed just after midnight on the night of 5/6, and we done another one early the next night, just on dark, a place called [Vier].

Bier - where was that near? - in France, of course.

Yeah, it was just inside - the two trips that we done were where the Yanks landed, the road junction just inside - I couldn't dig up me map now, I've got an escape map.

Why I ask, I followed through our L for Love JB700, but she was lost over Vier in July.

No, I don't think that ...

I couldn't figure out where Vier was, but it's a French target.

Yeah, yeah, Vier - it was a ... The night of the 5/6th was [Cherbourg] Peninsula, and the night of the 6th was Vier-Cherbourg Peninsula - height 4,500, the first night was 10,000. When we were coming back from this Cherbourg raid on the night of 5/6th, my navigator picked the landing barges up on the H2S as the coastline, that's how close they were. And we didn't know there was going to be an invasion, and he picked them up. He said, 'Gee, we've come to the coastline quick' - and we were only at about 5,000 feet, and you could look out and you could see the wakes of them.

And this next night was very bad weather, there was icing at the height we were supposed to fly down England - see, it was only 4,500 feet - and there was icing and normally it would have been (cancelled). I can remember old Hughie Edwards getting up in front of us and he said, 'You've got to press on, there's three million men waiting to go ashore there'.

That was your last one?

That was the last one.

A few general questions. You were learning as you went along, of course, from your first op on. What sort of things were making you more confident, more experienced, do you reckon? What things were you finding out that no way in the world you learnt it in your training?

Well, from the first trip - once we'd done our first solo trip, like the one to Dussledorf, my crew, with an experienced pilot, which - in my opinion, was totally wrong - but once we went on our own, everything fell in to line. Like, we had no trouble, everything went as - you know, just like a bullseye, in fact, it went better than a bullseye really, in a way. And from then on we got great confidence. I'd say we'd felt as if we'd had as much experience after two trips as we had after twenty-two trips because the first one - I think the fact that we - you know, even the night when - we'd only done about three or four trips when we got in to this bullseye explosion of another Lancaster, or something like that, and everything fell in to line, what we were going to do, immediately. The first impression was not to try and get back to England, as to try and survive, get to Sweden. Then, when things settled down we found out we weren't as badly damaged, that we could control the plane - like, it was a crew decision to go to England, and we would have landed safely in England and everything would have been alright, only for the bad weather. It was just unfortunate we had bad weather that night. It was like when you lost an engine - we lost an engine a couple of times - once of twice, I just forget now, not many times anyhow. It

just caught fire and it was just a matter of automatically you put the fire out, and you just continued on. I wouldn't know what had happened if we had lost it closer to England, whether we would have turned back or not. But these things, they just happened.

Like another night, the mid-upper gunner's oxygen froze up and he went silly, he went like drunk, he was going round and round, 360 degrees with his guns firing. It was just a matter of one of the crew, the wireless operator or something, going back and freeing his oxygen up and that, but it only happened five or six minute - it was way down the south of Germany somewhere, it was coming home there, I mean, it was not on the way in. But everything seemed to, you know, fall automatically.

> You'd have got a lot of confidence after that bad night, would you? Would that have increased your confidence?

Oh ...

> Or maybe a few, a couple of ops after that you were starting to feel ...

No. My biggest trouble - and I reckon the worst effect on me, and the crew, was when you had the plane and the ops were scrapped, and when you are in them with the engine running - scrapped. The biggest trouble was waiting, you know, you had to get out there an hour or so before, that was my biggest trouble on operations.

And then the only other trouble, the only other time I ever felt scared was when you put the revs up to 2,800 to go over the target, and when you had your bomb doors open, and when you were flying straight and level to get the photo.

> That's when you are really vulnerable.

That's the time when my knees used to knock (laughs) - that's the time everybody was quiet and everything, and once the bomb doors were closed then you'd dive down a bit and get up a bit of speed. Everything seemed to fall in to place.

I don't think actually even the spare navigators I had, and the spare wireless operators, I don't think I had anybody that was ever scared. Like, you know - I wouldn't say incompetent, there'd be no way of judging them unless you get in to trouble kind of thing. But they didn't give you the impression that they fumbled anything, and I had quite a few navigators on their first trip, and they seemed to get you to the target alright. There was a couple of long trips down to [Ogsburg] and [Sweinfert], and Friedrichshafen. I don't think I had a spare navigator, I had me permanent navigator towards the end, at Friedrichshafen.

> In that hour before take-off, did you find that your crew went on a lot of tomfoolery?

Yes, yes.

> Looking back after years, of years on, I realise what we were up to. Cyril [Duet] was our engineer ...

Acting the goat with the ground crew.

Acting the goat and thumping each other.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Wrestling and going on. I figured out years after what it was all about.

The tension was worse there than anything. Once you got in and you were taxiing around, and there was planes and there was hold-ups, and all that, you were doing something and it never seemed to worry me.

Like, when I was in Canada I went out one night and we got on the grog - this was at Halifax, waiting to go home. I got a green trilby bowler hat kind of thing - oh, it was a beautiful hat, it was left in the taxi. Somebody shouted me a ride home in a taxi, this businessman, and he left his hat there. Of course, I kept that and I used - every time we went out with the crew, one of the gunner would wear it, just as a joke around the place, see.

And this night - we used to take it on our trips with us occasionally - well, I think we used to take it on them all, to start with, but we'd only done a few at this particular time. And I can remember the bomb aimer, it was the only time we ever divulged where we were going, and he said, 'I'm going to throw this bloody thing down on Berlin tonight'. The ground crew practically knew where you were going anyhow, or they had a fair idea by the petrol, where you were going. In those days it was Berlin nearly every night. I can remember the bomb aimer saying, 'Gees,' he said, ...

And did he?

I don't know, I can't remember whether he did or not. It was my hat and I never saw it any more, so he must have.

And apart from that, did you have anything in the way of a mascot - any member of the crew?

I met a girl a couple of times, and she sent me a scarf with wolves on it - you know, just a silk scarf - only knew her casually, she was just one of these that was entertaining at some club, it was when I was on leave up north - and we got friendly - she had a boyfriend in the navy anyhow, she was engaged to him. When I got back to the station there was this scarf, she'd just sent it to remember me (her?) by. Well, I took that every time, every time it went with me.

I took a ground crew one night - took a ground crew corporal one night.

He wouldn't appear in that manifest there, for sure.

No, he's not there. He wanted to go all the time - he was one of Jackie Jones's crew, a corporal - Corporal Joe, that's all I knew him by - and we only done a few trips - we only done one - beside those two on D-Day, I only done one other to those gun sites, and that was a place called Eu - E-U. At that time they were all the inexperienced crews used to go there and they used to ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

... just before that Nuremberg raid, you know, when we had the big losses, and after that. The ops seemed to come, for the first two or three months, through no fault of me own, I didn't do many trips. I was there before, I probably (was) there before your skipper, on the Squadron, see. I only done one second dickie, and then I was on trips, and then I was on trips that were scrapped two or three times, then I was on six days' leave, then I was on another one that was scrubbed. You know, you didn't always get on the battle order, and I just had bad luck. Once I got round to about the end of February - no, once I got round - see, we done three to Berlin at the end of January - 28th, 29th and the 31st - and from then on I don't think I missed a trip that was actually on.

But one particular thing in me diary there, I got where we were on ops bloody nine nights in a row and we only went on two. That was in March, I think, round about March 18 - me mother's birthday - and in March 21.

I notice in that record there's a hell of a lull of all those three weeks, I think.

Yeah, well, they were - were you there when they had - when we shovelled all the snow? - well, I didn't.

Yeah.

I had a head cold so I was confined - I was acting flight commander because I had a cold and couldn't go out in the snow. I dished out the shovels to the aircrew.

I've got a photograph of our crew there.

And then the wind changed - it was a waste of time, the wind changed.

We were all working away, and Bob Howe is sitting back like this. I said to him - I'll show you the photographs in there - 'There you are, mate, as usual, supervising'. Fair enough.

Now, what were your major problems and concerns as a Lanc skipper? - you've pretty well answered them. Was it a matter of crew morale? I suppose you accepted responsibility for crew morale, keeping the crew together.

I was pretty casual, in a way. Everybody used to talk about the navigator being the most important fellow, and I had so many different navigators. I just haven't added them up, but I would have had, I suppose, eight or ten different navigators, and quite a few of them were doing their first trip. But I had three trips in a row, I took Bing Crosby, that's Stan Hodges' navigator.

Ted [Sufferen]

Ted Sufferen - and [Farrah] - and I took a lot on their first trip that never made it on their second trip. The same with the second pilot, I took a fellow, I took Charlie [Lutton], he finished his tour - another fellow, Sergeant King. I just (saw) here in the newsletter the other day, Arthur King died in ...

Western Australia.

Well, he flew with me one trip.

He was [Leith Pettons'] navigator.

Yeah. Well, I wanted to make meself known, I get to know somebody from Australia that had flown on operations with me, and I went to the last reunion down in Adelaide, and he was there, and I never found out until he died - from Frank Lawrence and Jackie Jones. You know, I had a list of - there was very few that survived the tour that [did] fly with me. I would have liked to have just made meself known to him because it's something you've got in common, you know. Of course, nearly all the spare gunners and that I had were English - or, well, I didn't have any spare gunners actually - the bomb aimer - the others all got knocked off.

But I never had any trouble with the navigators because you just took their word for where you were going. We always seemed to end up practically where the markers were going down, or where the bombs were going down. I was never - a couple of times I might have been early, and I think when you get those war diaries - have you seen that big book?

I haven't read them yet, no.

You know, the whole force bombed early. My biggest trouble was with this Kennedy, me wireless operator. I don't think he could send morse faster than about two words a minute. And for some reason we went with Pathfinder Force - you know, they used to put ...

PF support.

Yeah. We went with them, oh, from the time we'd done about fifteen trips - I don't know whether it was just because they had spare navigators or just to boost me ego up, but I went with that more than the average fellow did - and you are supposed to send winds back. My wireless operator, he believed in strict radio silence; he used to always make out there was something wrong with it. We never, ever sent a wind back the whole of the tour, I don't think.

When we were doing the OTU, you know, you have to find so many fixes. Well, towards the end of the tour they used to send us up on our own because Kennedy used to hold the whole - he used to have the radio channel clogged the whole time because his morse was that slow, and there was a lot of work in getting a fix. And he used to know the QFE signal for the repeat message more slowly, and in the end the ground - the other wireless operators used to tell me this - in the end the ground station used to send the message back to him, one work a minute. He'd been in England, oh, about two years before he crewed up with me. I don't know where he'd been - he was at [Cranwick] College. Joining up in Newfoundland he come to England, and he was early in the war, he was like a medical student, and he had high qualifications, but he was at Cranwick College and it took him about two years to go through his course. I think they just passed him out in the end to get rid of him.

So you had no morale problems?

No, I had none at all.

How about problems of identifying the target? As you say, you usually got there when there were TIs around and what not. So you usually felt that you dropped your bombs as

well as anybody else did? But was that a big problem, identifying your target?

Yeah.

It was?

Very big. The only time you thought you were confident was when you were bombing on those sky markers when there was ten-tenths cloud. You just took it for granted. But in all what I've read since the war - they always talk about this creep-back.

That's right, yes.

Well, why didn't they make the target ten miles further on to start with?

You're right.

I mean, it appears they knew at the time, this creep-back, everybody was bombing a little bit earlier. But we didn't know what was down below us really, so the simplest thing - I told that Martin Middlebrook a couple of times - I've written to him - the simplest thing would have been for them to just extend the - that would overcome that without Pathfinders or anybody.

Alec Wales was talking about that the other day. He said quite often the master bomber would say, 'Bomb further to the north' or something like this because of this creep-back problem.

I can't remember much about master bombers, I think the only time we had one - I can remember anyhow, I'm not saying this is true - was at Friedrichshafen.

They weren't around much before.

We had one there on Friedrichshafen - it was a good prang that Friedrichshafen, right on Lake Constance, isn't it? down on the border of Germany and Switzerland.

That was the raid after we got screened on that one.

That was a good one, that's where they were making the parts for the flying bombs, I think - that's Friedrichshafen xxx.

Returning to base, was that ever a problem? knowing where to land.

No, no. That's one thing where experience counts. You could be in the circuit area when you are halfway across the North Sea if you had any sense.

You'd call up.

That was where experience counts. If you see the way I landed, like from the last fifteen or twenty trips, you'd always be in the first, second or third down. Most experienced crews used the same method, because you had to keep dropping, every time somebody would clear the runway, you'd come down 500 feet kind of thing, and it was quite ... once you - new crews didn't know that, and I don't think any of the old crews passed it on to the new crews.

Your nav would have given you a course for base. How did you pick base out from all the ...

AR. See, to start with, they used to move it around a bit - I'm not too sure of this - when you first started off, the AR ...

Was that AR or BK?

I thought it was AR.

Funny thing, in my mind it was BK; I'll check it out.

Well, to start with, they used to change the letters, and then they used to change the location.

That makes sense.

They used to tow it around, it was on four wheels, and they used to tow it around to start with, in the early part of the tour, and it used to be [boo]. But towards the end of the tour, it was permanent in the one place, as far as I can remember.

And there is another thing that's just come to me mind; the night we crashed. What they should have done, and what was supposed to be done by the army when there was low cloud, was a searchlight had to point to your air-drome (aerodrome), another searchlight out - so you had a vector - and it was never done that night, those searchlights were straight up in the air, they were perpendicular. That's how we - like when we crashed, with only meself and our wireless operator that felt fit enough - well, we had light clothes on, the others all had big heavy clothes. See, I used to just fly in battle dress and a pullover underneath, and that's why the navigator and meself went for help. See, those searchlights, on an occasion like that, they were supposed to - so that you got a point of intersection to give you - see, once you knew where the air-drome was, within eight or ten miles, and you were low enough, you could see the funnel, you could see the thingummyjig it was.

And there was a beacon too, wasn't there?

Oh, yeah, but this was ten-tenths cloud, you know, that night.

Once things were clear you had a beacon.

Oh, we had the beacon, and you used to - you know, you had to fly, say, north, or west, ten miles, no trouble at all. I think towards the end we used to put our navigating lights on anyhow. I can't remember much about it.

I never, ever had any - I was diverted one night, I think, for some reason. It wasn't any fault of mine, no problem with my aircraft - might have been a crash on the air-drome or a flat tyre, or something like that. I think I was diverted one night - Kelston or one of the other aircrew's air-dromes. I've got it in me book, I just happened to be reading it.

I think it was Bob Wade who landed at Kelston, thought he was at ...

Yeah, that happened very now and again. No, I never had any ... But with the G they could - you know, you should never have had any trouble - if you had a navigator, you should never have had any trouble getting home with G. Didn't work past six degrees east, or three degrees east, at one stage, and then they extended it a bit further, but shouldn't have had any trouble finding base, not on a clear night.

> Your views on a few things now - commissions. Some blokes used to get a commission off course, and most didn't. Then you found that there were commissions given on the Squadron towards the beginning of a tour for pilots, I think - I'm thinking of Howel and Wade, for example, they got to the Squadron in November and they had their commissions in December. And then, I think, most of our crew got it before we finished, or just as we finished, our first tour. I believe it became a bit harder later on, as the war went on, I believe it became a bit harder to get commissions.

No, well, all pilots were commissioned later on.

> All pilots were, were they?

After they left OTU they got a commission while they were at conversion units, so I believe, so Frank Lawrence was telling me.

> Certainly that was after your time?

Yeah, that was when I was ... I come through Litchfield as a flight sergeant, and then they'd go to conversion unit and they would be a PO.

> What's your whole view then of commissions?

Well, see, I spent nine months on the Boston Squadron, I was the only Australian there, and there was a couple of New Zealand pilots, there was a couple of Canadian pilots. Well, none of us would have got a commission there in a hundred years, and none of the RAF fellows would have got a commission there - the RAF sergeants. You know, there was two distinct classes there. See, it was just [catch as catch can], like when you come back from a trip. If you told the right story - it's one of these things, if you had the gift of the gab, you had more chance of getting a commission than if you are ... although I was ... I just didn't ...

> Didn't worry you?

Didn't worry that much about it.

> Because of this crew ...

I think I had a bit of a blue with Group Captain Edwards one night. See, when I first got in the Squadron I used to be in the married quarters right alongside the NAAFI. The NAAFI was stocked by women in their thirties, and they used to treat my crew - we were the closest ones to them - they used to make us supper and cook things for us, and all that; they were like mothers to us - well, they were, you know, they were thirty-five and forty. On the night of January - the closest to Australia Day, we had a party in the airmens' mess - you'd be at this - remember, we used to all give a day's pay? If you didn't know, the beer used to come out with all the leaves and that - the hops and that - because you couldn't get the beer till 10 o'clock, and the English beer

had to settle for two days before.

Anyhow, this boss I was telling you about at [Tarrence] where I worked in there, the Ford garage, that said I had to be in the air force, he was thirty-three and he finished up as an air gunner on Liberators over at Northern Ireland, in Coastal Command. So he come to see me because him being me boss, and me being a bloody pilot on bloody Lancasters, and he being an air gunner, just arrived. I big-noted meself and I had a meeting in Grimsby on this day - I had to go and meet him and bring him out to the Squadron - he stayed there for three days actually. And we finished up at this airmens' mess, and we are both full of life, and I wanted to introduce him to show him how friendly I was with these NAAFI women and that. Of course, see, I was only twenty-one at the time.

And this civilian comes up the stairs and in the haze and all that - a civilian. Well, the only civilian women on the stage were these NAAFI women. So I whistled and called her over and all that, and nothing happens. Anyhow, it just went out of me mind, somebody else started talking. The next morning at 10 o'clock we are up in the flight office - Tony Willis was the flight commander - and Tony said - the phone rang and Tony said, 'Oh, Stafford, it's for you', and I went and answered the phone and I said, 'Stafford here'. He said, 'This is the station commander.' He said, 'I don't mind you talking to my wife, and she don't mind talking to you, but she objects to being whistled to like a bloody dog', and he put the receiver down.

The only other time he spoke to me, at interrogation, was the night after Nuremberg - I bombed Nuremberg, but I thought they knew where we were going, and I said to the navigator, 'Set a course straight for Binbrook', and we come home in a straight line from bloody Nuremberg, straight to Binbrook and we got home an hour earlier than the rest. Like I told him what happened that night - he come out and asked me why I come back early, and I said, 'No, I've been there, but I come back early, and,' I said, 'you'll hear from the other ones'. You know, it was all passed over like, there was nothing said about it and all that. There was quite a few in Bomber Command come back the same way that night.

That was because you figured the Germans were on to the route?

They knew where we were going, they followed us all the way in, they still maintained that part - and [Millsbrook's] got a book in there, 'The Nuremberg Raid', and he maintains they didn't know, but I still maintain they ... Of course, the way the fighter stations xxx, it was easy to follow us around.

Anyhow, I come straight home that night and that was the only other time he spoke to me. And when we done our last trip, he come up to me and he congratulated me, and he said, 'Now, if I give you six weeks' leave will you come back and do another tour?', and then I got a commission the week after that.

I wasn't particularly worried about commissions because I believed if you are going to fly together you should live together. Like in your case, you should have all got commissions together, in my opinion. A commission was a decided advantage because I know from my bomb aimer [was] a commission, and there is no way in the world I would ever have got a photo of an aiming point - I only got one, he could have got me one at every target we went to, you know, from Les Tate. A bloody warrant officer couldn't ... it was just done him back-talk in the mess kind of thing, which you can understand. I had nothing against it though.

You say right now, [Howel] got his commission in December. That was the end of Howel as a member of our crew really.

Yeah.

It was so marked. And also he was the sort of bloke that went for it a bit. I've read all these letters to his mother, and he's been worrying about this commission from the time he got his wings, he was fretting about it - so and so is getting them, and he's not getting them. So when he got it, well, it was just, that was it for him, he'd made it, you see, and he just drew away from us. He used to walk up in to our dormitory sometimes and have a yarn, otherwise you wouldn't see him till you went flying.

Well, I never went to the war to become a wing commander or a group, I went there to do what was asked of me, and once I'd gone back to the war I would have kept on going and they would have called on me - you know, I might have been sent to do another second tour - I would have done a second tour straight away then because I didn't mind it at all really, I'd made arrangements to get married. In fact, there was two or three of my crew would have gone back and flown straight away - the two gunners would have. They really enjoyed it, the Squadron life really, and the leave. Of course, you didn't do that many bloody trips when it is all said and done. I don't think I done twenty-six, twenty-seven on Lancasters or something like that - I don't know what I done, it might have been less - because they counted those Boston ones in for me. You know, that was from end of October to June, and then we got about six weeks' leave after that. You are not on operational flying much, and you had great - see, my wife was in the WRENS and she was, just before the invasion and just after, she was stationed down at Poole, I think it was, near Bournemouth, and you weren't allowed in that thing. Well, I could just say to Tony Willis, 'Look, I want to go down to Bournemouth', and he'd fly me down to [Fordairdo], you know, he'd give a crew a training flight and fly you down inside the eight-mile zone. You know, you had a lot of ... you know, it was a good life on the Squadron.

Before I forget it, do you recall who were the flight commanders in your time?

Spike Marsh and Tony Willis.

Spike Marsh, what flight was he?

He was C Flight, and Tony Willis was C Flight.

He took over.

Ah, B Flight, B Flight.

You were B Flight. Spike was B Flight and then Tony Willis took over from Spike?

Yeah. Now, I was in C Flight for a little while - I don't know what happened, that's when I pranged.

Alec Wales was C Flight, I think.

Mytchel - Alan M-Y-T-C-H-E-L-L, isn't it? - flying officer. It's got flying officer - flight commander.

4 Squadron.

So I don't know who that would be. I'd have only been there a while - that's November ... don't know who that it, it's a Flight Lieutenant [Owen Nivett]. But Arthur was ...

He was CO.

He was the CO, and then Spike Marsh after him.

Nobody can find out where Arthur is or was. He's disappeared.

Did you find Spike Marsh?

Yeah.

I've got an address in there because there's a fiend of mine in Maryborough, Blue Lang, he only got over to England as a wireless operator or something towards the end of the war, he was up at [Kenloss] doing a - up somewhere in Scotland - doing an OTU. Anyhow, he stayed in the air force after the war and re-qualified as a pilot, and he served under Spike somewhere in Australia - Spike's son's a squadron leader or wing commander, he served under him, or served with him.

I've got Spike, he lives in the mountains, at [Bilton], behind Currajong, Richmond, he's up there, on his own. His second wife died two years ago.

This Blue Lang had a - Spike didn't want too many people to know where he was living, he didn't want to be annoyed or something. This Blue Lang said so if you ever went to get his address you could get it from this other fellow.

I know, he's up there on a five acre block with his two horses.

A bit like me. I get on pretty well with Spike, but the only one thing about Spike, he seemed to get all the easy trips. They reckon the only time he went to Germany was Aken - of course, he did do quite a few Berlin early ones, but after that, when he was squadron commander - because I think permanent air force fellows like him, they try to protect them more than the ordinary employees and training scheme fellows.

For sure.

I was instructing at Litchfield, I was instructing a wing commander - Humphries - he'd just come from headquarters in Cairo, and the last air force plane he'd flown was a Hawker Hind or something, and I'm trying to convert him on to a Wellington so he could take charge of a Lancaster squadron - he was going to go CO of a Lancaster squadron. Don't know, that's how they look after them.

How many of your crew got decorations?

Bomb aimer.

You and the bomb aimer?

Yeah - both got DFCs. Bomb aimer, he started off badly, as I told you; he didn't bomb the target the first time, he bombed the spoof. But from then on he was very particular. He would go around again - which I didn't like - which was going in the stream of everything - but we went round a couple of times.

Our bomb aimer did that once one Leipzig, we didn't appreciate that at all.

No, I didn't appreciate it.

What are your views on decorations generally, the way they were given out?

Well, the way they were given, it was more or less self preservation really. I mean, I only got one because I survived the tour, I should have really got one the night I come back from and crashed, in my opinion, because I done something ...

Outstanding.

I mean, the way we were over the target for the first twenty minutes or half hour after xxx, you could have baled the whole crew out - could have been over France where they'd been friendly people, we probably all have baled out that night. I reckon it was an effort to get the aeroplane back. But they just come, I didn't - I didn't even think about getting one until I was down at this [Lulsgate Bottom]. In fact, we were in Bristol, I was with a Canadian, and it was in the paper, one of the local papers there, one of the London papers - you know, decorations - and I just - that's the first I knew about it, in the paper.

I think all pilots got them, didn't they?

Yeah, towards the end they did, I don't know early on. I don't know if at the end they all got them.

Rear gunners did very well in our time, and also navigators, but your navigator would not have done a full tour by then, would he?

He might have, I just can't remember now. I think he come from the other squadron, he'd done trips.

Did he finish with you?

Yeah, he done the last twenty with me - our last ten - from twenty onwards.

That's unusual that the bomb aimer got one above the navigator.

Yeah, well, the bomb aimer was pretty friendly with Les Tate - and he did get good results. Well, Les Tate would have to recommend him. See, Les was a bombing leader, see, he was just like the flight commander.

Yes, Les told me that yesterday. He used to recommend for commissions and decorations where he thought we the case, but quite often his recommendations were ignored. But he said he initiated them.

Yeah, well, it had to start somewhere.

> Wife: Who was the fellow again that we met just out of Brisbane, that goes over to Binbrook?

> Out at Coffs Harbour? Art Whitmarsh.

> Wife: I was wondering if he was at the reunion at Adelaide.

Yeah, he had to leave early, he had blood pressure, he got boozing too much, he'd blown up too much.

When would Art do his tour?

> He started at the end of '44.

I thought he was right at the end of the ...

> Yeah, right at the end. The only reason I wanted to see him was because somebody said he'd been across to England ten times in the last eleven years or something.

He was the same as Reg Mullins, he was a Qantas pilot.

> So he still, of course, now gets these cheap trips. But I wanted ... because he goes back to Binbrook so often. I reckoned, well, here's the bloke that could tell me something about the geography of the place, where the village was in relation to the guard gate and all this sort of thing. Well, he did because he knew it backwards.

Did you see Reg Mullins at all?

> No, I've got him ...

He married a Grimsby girl - he knows more about it - he started talking about the Cotswolds and ...

> So he would have been back a few times?

Yeah, oh, yes. He was back two years ago or something.

> I must go and grab him too. He was the only immediate DFC on the Squadron in our time, in six months.

Yeah, DFC he got, he just got his commission that time. See, a lot of the commissions were recommended from training, I think, and they just carried on to the Squadron. And if they survived about five trips - see, they carried on, they probably all went through Litchfield. See, if you went through an RAF base - my OTU was Polish. When I was on the bloody Boston Squadron, there was a French flight there, and I used to get belted up every now and again because I had a blue uniform on, the same as the French ones. You are walking home at night, the locals didn't like the Frenchmen - bang! - you had to start talking English pretty quick.

Have you got any memories of your peers? - this is opposed to your superiors - other pilots and other aircrew at the time. Have you got any memories of them, in particular?

Well, I always admire Reg [Wellam] taking me on the first trip with my crew - that's his [sprog] crew, because - and yet, I think it's the best thing that happened to me, I think it might have given my crew extra confidence, and might have started us off on the right leg really, because, you know, it was a big thing for a pilot to take a - it would be alright for Group Captain Edwards and these fellows to take new crews, but for a fellow that's done about twenty-three trips - I think Reg Mullins had done that.

He must have done at least that because he doesn't appear much beyond the end of '43 in the records. Anybody else that you can particularly think about? How about any of those fellows who were lost, like Crosby, and Bourke, and Alan?

Well, that Alan and Bourke were particularly good friends of mine, but I think you worked on the principle that if somebody else was getting shot down, then you weren't. I worked on the law of averages. It was the law of averages too - well, actually, on averages you didn't have any hope at all of finishing because when we were there I worked out a rough percentage of losses, you know, from that book, and it was five and seven per cent there, a lot of months when we were on the - especially with you - my last month is June, the losses were down, but right up until from November to May the losses were very high.

The statistics that I'm coming up with for this six months are frightening.

They were higher for a short period back in 1942, I think.

Yeah, that's right, they were.

Only for a short period - of course, there wasn't that many planes involved.

That was Bob Alan, wasn't it? - Bob Alan.

I just forget the name.

But Bourke - we called him Kanga Bourke.

He was just Bourkie to me - tall fellow.

Yeah - Kanga they used to call him.

What amazed me, they got shot down on a trip when they shouldn't have, it was just nine of them went on a mining trip up on the Baltic.

It was Crosby, Bourke and Proud all went on that, only eleven went there. We were out that night.

Freeman, remember much about Morrie Freeman?

No.

You wouldn't because he went very early in the peace ...

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

I'm just trying to build up a consensus, you see, so I wouldn't quote you on this at all.

No, no. Well, Spike Marsh as the flight commander was very understanding, very good flight commander; and Tony Willis, I would say, was excellent. Tony Willis was just ...

Did Tony take over the Squadron eventually?

No, no. Tony's died, of course, I see his wife was ...

Last year, I think.

... at that reunion.

Who took over the Squadron after Spike Marsh?

That young fellow - what was his name? - Douglas. He bombed somewhere, he bombed the bloody Canadians, and they blamed him for the ...

Ah, yes, I know. Not Ron Douglas but the other bloke.

Yeah, yeah - only twenty-two or twenty-three he was, he took over.

Spike?

Old Pop [Falloon], would you remember Pop?

Yes.

He baled out one night. Well, I had a shop at Brisbane, and Pop Falloon done the same thing. He had one out - mine was in West End, he had one out at Mitchelton, which was an outlying suburb of Brisbane - it's right in the heart of Brisbane now, but after the war it was ... We used to go down to Pauls Ice Cream Factory - it's now QUF, Queensland United Foods - but we used to go down there. Myself and my mate - partner - we used to both get out and we'd go and have a couple of beers at the pub if there was any beer on. And who should we meet, getting our ice cream this day, is Pop Falloon. I hadn't got my ice cream, and Pop had got his. And 'Holy Jesus!' he said. Anyhow, we went in to this hotel, and I'll never forget it because I was just starting to give up smoking - I'd given it up a couple of times since then, but I'd just given up smoking. And we are in this pub talking about old times and that - and I was just due to go to see the governor to get the DFC in [Laverang] in Brisbane, and I had no ribbon or anything see. So Pop had made arrangements to - 'Oh,' he said, 'you know the [Grosvenor] in Brisbane? Just go and I'll send some in to the barmaid in there, she lives not far from me, I've got plenty at home' - this is going on.

I'll never forget; when we go back out to Pop's bloody wagon, his ice cream is milk. We've been in there - of course, when it comes up the country they pack it in dry ice, but when he gets it in Brisbane it's only got - in those days, it only had a bit of wood wool or something around it.

But old Pop died of a heart attack about twelve months after that, he died very young.

I thought he died early in the peace.

And Wes Lutton. Now, Wes done his first trip with me, I took him as a second - you'd remember Wes Lutton, would you?

No, I can't place him.

He would have only been on the Squadron a little while.

So Pop had this small mixed business, was it?

Yeah, small mixed business, same as we had, at Mitchelton.

So he would have died ...

He died of a heart attack.

Maybe, what, forty-eight, forty-nine or something?

Oh ... round about the fifties, I'd say, and Wes Lutton, he died about fifty-five. Wes was a pilot, he done his first trip with me. He come back from one - I think it was Nuremberg actually - and pulled his glove off and a finger's missing. He knew he'd been hit, and it had chopped his finger off. He landed at Ford on the south coast. I only know him because he had a sawmill - a case-making factory - one block away from where I had the shop in Brisbane. He got back to Australia about the same time as me. Well, he went flying between Townsville - he got the job I should have had on 33 Squadron, flying Dakotas. He used to fly to Japan, and he used to bring American senior officers back who's wives were in Australia (laughs). Once he come back with a typewriter, the next time he come back with - a captain of a destroyer gave him his binoculars, and he gave them to me for, oh, about six months I had them, and you could see in to those trees - 400 yards away you could shine on to the roof of a house, and on a pitch black night, and I could see the lead-headed nails. They were beautiful - [Blomb and Voss].

But he died. He used to come up and spend his holidays down here with us, down at Harvey Bay, down at [Kiola]. But he died very young. He had a promising - oh, he would have been a millionaire, he had a big box factory.

(Incidental conversation)

Recollections of Hughie?

Well, I used to get on pretty well with him until xxx. When I first got on to the Squadron I was invited to go in to Cleethorpes with his party for a booze-up, when he used to wear the adjutant's uniform - flight lieutenant's uniform - with no wings on, and he used to do that about once a month. He used to send word with one of the senior pilots, you know, you had to go along to

Cleethorpes - the lifeboat, was it? or the life buoy? You'd just play darts or you sat around and talked to him.

Sort of a command performance, was it?

Oh, yes - no, he never - everybody treated him as equal, they just treated him as if he was a ground crew flight lieutenant.

And he'd invite you to come?

Oh, yeah, he used to - well, I don't know how I used to get there, but I was there a couple of times with him, and it wasn't everybody on the Squadron was there, so it must have been - I don't know whether I got it through the navigator or through one of the senior pilots. He might have done it just to initiate new pilots. But see, towards the end, after I'd been on the Squadron a couple of months, I used to spend all me leave - Lynn used to work at Doncaster before she was in the WRENS. Well, I used to go up there, it was just as easy nearly to - once you knew the ropes it was nearly as easy to get to Doncaster as it was to get to Grimsby.

Any other recollections of Hughie? Was it true that he used to go around the mess after the bar was closed and drink all the leftovers?

No. Stan [Hodge] and I used to do that in the sergeants' mess, that's how I first got to know Stan. Stan Hodge had the best memory of anybody. The first night I met him he was skiting - well, not the first night - but when I first met him he was skiting on what a good memory he had, and I bet him that within six weeks' time he wouldn't remember my wife's address, which was 40 Hallgate, Doncaster. Hallgate's like the centre street that runs through Doncaster - her aunty had a restaurant there.

(Break in interview)

Stan Hodge, he bet me he couldn't remember - or I bet him he'd never remember Lynn's address. Now, he was shot down and he was a prisoner of war, and coming back from the prisoner of war camp he had a bad smash - that was half his trouble, he got his head badly damaged and that. And the next time I saw Stan Hodge was one day walking down the street in Maryborough - I think it was a Sunday morning, I think it was a holiday and he was on his honeymoon. And he walked up to me and shook me hand and says, 'Your girlfriend's address is 40 Hallgate, Doncaster'. That would be three years later, and after all he'd been through. And up until when they the opened Isis Centre, a new bowling club, I was up there - this would be ten years after xxx - but he used to always skite about his good memory.

So the first night we met we sat in the mess, you know, when everybody was popped everywhere - of course, I didn't know much about Childers and he didn't know much about Howard - of course, I left Howard when I was fourteen, I go to Maryborough [Board]. And we finished up all the grogs. I'd never, ever heard of - of course, Hughie lived there with his wife - but I never heard anything about him ...

I was in the mess, I think, for about three weeks before we finished our tour, but I never remember seeing - I remember him batting on pretty well, he used to bat on a bit.

We used to go in - you know, you'd get in to Cleethorpes [lifeboat] the few times I was in there,

and you'd drink pretty heavily. He never showed any signs of any grog, in fact, he was very diplomatic, he would be the last one to finish kind of thing, he never got another drink till he finished, all in the one round.

And how about Poppy [Rae], do you remember much about him?

The night after I crashed I had to go and see him. He was more interested in the school I went to. See, Maryborough High School, the first year I went to it - the high school before that, it used to be a grammar school. And he knew all about Maryborough being a grammar school. You know, it was a boarding grammar school in those days, but they changed it to a state school in - when did I go? - 1936 was my first year, it was a state high school, and he knew that, and he wasn't Australian, he was English?

I wrote to this Herb Metcalfe, you know, the chap that used to be me boss - he was a deputy - I wrote to him - when I first got a letter to him I wrote to him in Northern Ireland, and the letter come back censored with bits and pieces cut out of it everywhere. I was up before him over that. I said, 'Well, look, everything has been published in the papers'. That's the funny part, I just said we'd done trips to Berlin, I never put any dates and things like that in it. The Berlin part was cut out - you know, the names and the dates had been cut out, and everything had been published in the paper.

Some of the things were ridiculous. You couldn't give your unit or anything like that, but your aeroplane had the unit number on it. I mean, as soon as it crashed everybody knew where it come from. There are a lot of things that were a bit childish.

But actually, he didn't have much to do with you - us - really.

No, that was the only time - xxx about this letter that was being censored. That's when he - I think he thought it was a joke, but he had to do it, and that's when he started talking about where I went to school, and he was very interested in me - I told him my father was killed when I was three. In those days, to get a job you had to be somebody to get a big job. Jobs were handed down, you didn't get them on your qualifications, you got them on who you knew. All the leading businessmen, they got jobs in banks, all their kids got jobs in banks.

(Incidental conversation)

Was your father killed in the mines?

No. He had a mine, sawmill and an orchard. A boiler blew up in the sawmill - well, not the boiler, the flue tubes, one of the tubes was leaking and it filled up a flue tube, where the smoke goes up the chimney. It just blew the door back and he got scalded. It wasn't the boiler explosion, it was just the exhaust flew back and he was scalded.

Have you got any memories of Frank Arthur?

Very quiet, well-liked. Used to only see him at the - went to see him when we first got to the Squadron, all pilots did. There never seemed to be any animosity or any ill feeling because he was a navigator.

I remember him and his girlfriend, [Shanghai Lill], coming to sergeants' mess parties,

and he used to always appear there for a while I recall.

The first introduction to the Squadron was [Lynn Patience] - you wouldn't know - he was the sergeant electrician, and he was the first one that we met when we got to the station. There was no aircrew we met, we got there late in the afternoon, there was this Lynn Patience. I was friendly with him all through the term. He called in here just when we were subdividing this land.

(Incidental conversation)

There's one particular thing that did stick in me mind in those Berlin raids. I went on leave one particular time - I think it was some time in January - and when I come back, in the sergeants' mess - there wasn't an op on that night - and there wasn't one aircrew that I knew, that's how many had been lost while we were away. A couple of nights there was three, four - and that Flight Lieutenant [Corser] that was deputy flight commander, he was a local lad from Maryborough. Well, I didn't have a chance to meet him when he was shot down.

Bob Wade apparently knew him quite well from somewhere. He's got fond memories of Corser.

Geoff Corser. Well, I had to go and see his father, they were the [Blimber] Brewery agents in Maryborough, which is Fosters now - you know, Carlton-United, they had a big wholesale place - paints and everything in there. His father, Stewart Corser, and his uncle was a local MHR from here - the Country Party. But he was on my squadron and I never had - like, he come there, went on a trip to Berlin, he was shot down, and I never had a chance to make myself known to him.

Looking back on it all from this distance, Merv, how do you see the whole show now? Was it a big part of your life? Is it still a big part of your life?

Well, it's something I practically think of every day, but I don't think of the operational part of it. Life in the air force I'm thinking of. You do a lot of thinking in the day, especially when you are not busy, and I think of me life in the air force, not so much talking about the operations, but just different incidents - you know, when you are on leave in London and going to [Poolies] Golf Club - he was one of me old favourites. When I first got to England I was introduced to this, right opposite the Daily Express office in Fleet Street, down underneath.

That's right.

His daughter used to be like a mother to me - he was about seventy, his daughter was, oh, she'd be forty-five or so, something like that. She used to look after us and give us a bed there if we weren't booked in anywhere. But it's things like that I think of kind of thing. Like a little fellow coming from a place like Maryborough.

Junior is out - it's our - fourth-form. Well, see, there was only sixteen passed in Maryborough when I xxx in 1938. It's virtually a little country town kind of thing. Then next minute you are in Brisbane, and you are learning to fly - and I was only eighteen at the time. The older people look after you. Barney Newman was a medical xxx, he only had a year to go to be a doctor. And there was another fellow, Harry [Lauder], he owned a sheep station, he'd been flying for about five years. And they'd take you under their wing kind of thing. And next minute you are on a boat to Canada. It's those things I think of more so than operations. Only when I read these

different books, like Butch Harris's 'Bomber Command'.

(Incidental conversation)

He's writing another one, 'The Battle of Berlin'.

That's right.

He wrote to me a few times about that. There's a lot of these ops that you are on, the battle order come out that's not listed anywhere. He wanted a list of them. You know, unless you actually got briefed, I don't think they had a record of it. There's a lot of times you are on a battle order and as far as we was concerned, you are on ops, once that battle order went up.

He had a xxx that was shot down on that raid in France - it was after we finished. After D-Day there was five shot down - they got there late - the markers got there late. 460 Squadron had to circle for about twenty-five minutes or something, and there was five crews shot down out of seventeen. His uncle was in one of those. Oh, that's from our Squadron, but his uncle was one of the other crews that was lost there.

(Incidental conversation)

Wife: What is his name?

Martin [Middlebrook]. Some of his stuff is going to be very useful to me for reference, for background.

Another book he's wrote, it's on the Battle of Hamburg - I wasn't on it, that was just before we got - that was in August - July and August '43. It's a good book.

(Incidental conversation)

I would sooner go back to see where I was on the Boston Squadron. It was a grass air-drome, it was dispersed, there were twenty-one houses there - there was five pubs and there was about seven lakes - five pubs and twenty-one houses. Gees, I loved that place. We used to go - my crew used to go to the White Swan, and we were the only air force that used to go there. And every time - the whisky crowd would come in once a month from Norwich - [Stewart and Alsop], I think, was the brewery. The day before the whisky supply was supposed to come in the old publican would have a heart attack and go to bed. And we'd go in - you know, walking down - it was daylight bombing, see - and when you come in at the end of the afternoon you'd always go in to the pub about 4 o'clock, or whatever time it opened. The daughter, she was only about sixteen - red-headed daughter - used to serve in the - there was no bar, you just walked in and sat in a living room, and they used to go and get the beer out of the kitchen. And she'd say, 'Dad's in bed sick, his heart's playing up again', and you'd go upstairs and he'd be in xxx and reach and out would come a bottle of whisky. We'd drink the bottle of whisky with him. It's places like that I enjoyed.

We used to get paid £9 every second Thursday - McLachlan was the flight commander. We'd go to London and ring him up every morning to see whether we had to come back again. We'd stay in London till we went broke. At one stage we had one aeroplane for thirty-four crews. It meant that if it was perfect weather you flew every seventeen days, this went on for about three

months.

How early in the peace did you meat Lynn?

When I went to the OTU, that first week I was at the OTU. See, we got to the OTU in the middle of a course, we weren't posted, there was a course. From the Boston Squadron we were posted to 18 OTU at a place called [Bramcote], it was somewhere down near Bedford. And when we got there they wouldn't even tell us - 18 OTU was a Polish OTU - it had been transferred, and nobody would tell us, for security reasons, they wouldn't tell us where it had gone to (laughs). We were sitting there, no pay, no records. And (that's) another (thing), because our records had gone to 18 OTU - well, they'd gone through Australia House or through Bomber Command, or something - well, they'd finished up at OTU, but our rail passes had gone to the wrong air-drome. It took about a week for them to find out who we were and where we had to go. Well, where we had to go was [Finningly], just outside Doncaster. It was a Polish OTU, but there was only - there were three flights, one flight was Poles and two were RAF. Then we got there in the middle of a course so our crew was waiting there for us, like the extra crew to make up the five, or six, or whatever it was - yes, all but our engineer. We just had to cool our heels for about a fortnight, till the next course started. And that's where I met Lynn, going in to town. She worked at her aunt's cafe, she had an extension, she was in call-up in the WRENS, but seeing her aunt was reasonably old and couldn't get labour, they give her an extension for six months or something. That's when I first met her.

What was Lynn's maiden name?

[Colmer] - she comes from Nottingham, next-door to - xxx actually, next-door to Nottingham. One of the English test cricketers comes from the same place - I just forget his name now - [Hardstaff] - Joe Hardstaff. When they come out here in 1948 we had the shop in Brisbane - Bradman's last - 1946 - when we first had the shop in Brisbane and Bradman made 186 not out anyhow. On the Monday he went out.

They were staying at [Lennon's] Hotel. Lynn rang this Joe Hardstaff up. Of course, it was an honour if you knew an English cricketer in those days. He remembered playing with her brother, like her older brothers and all that. They invited us in to have drinks with him in the afternoon.

(Incidental conversation)

If you were able to spend an afternoon now with an old RAF friend from those days, who would it be?

...

You've got a choice, to meet an old mate from all those years back.

Not out of me crew?

Yeah, it could be your crew.

The one I was most friendly with was the mid-upper gunner, and he was only eighteen. He never drank, and he used to treat me like an uncle, I think, but I was very friendly with him. And I had his home address, but after we finished ops I only saw him once, and I still know his

address: 101, Vale-and-Heath Road, Swansea.

Your memory's not bad either.

I can always remember that - I can't remember one from last week - I can remember a lot of those things from the war - and I never, ever heard from him any more. My wife and I saw him in Doncaster there once - I don't know where he went, where he was [screened] to, I can't remember now. He happened to be in Doncaster when we were going through, and I lost track of him. Even though I only knew him while we were on the Squadron, not like at the OTU, but I was very close with him. But as far as - oh, there's dozens really, I'd like to ... you know, to have a talk with - ones that I'd trained with in Canada, that was a big step - we went to New York together and we were down there for a fortnight, and then Halifax. Then we had about six weeks waiting in Bournemouth to get posted to an AFU, and there was ones there you'd team up with, up at the AFU at [Lichenfield]. But there was nobody particular on the Squadron that I was close enough to because I spent nearly all my time with ...

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE TWO - END OF INTERVIEW

07/00