ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: ROY HOWARD - 460 SQUADRON RAAF

INTERVIEWEE: ROY HOWARD

INTERVIEWER: LAURIE FIELD

SUMMARY: RECOLLECTIONS OF HIS SERVICE IN 460 SQUADRON RAAF DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

... on 25 August 1920.

You told me about your education, how you rode this bike seven miles in to Bega ...

Yes.

Bega Intermediate High School.

The situation was this, that my father died at the age of forty-five in 1925 when I was only five years old. And the eldest of the family - there were eight of us in the family - the eldest was fourteen and the youngest was about twelve months old.

But my father had inherited a property eleven miles west of Bega, and then he had big ambitions and he'd mortgaged that to buy another property, and then bought a couple of other properties - and he was actively involved as an alderman of Bega Council and President of the Racing Club, and the President of the Jockeys' Club, he was involved in all sorts of things. And then he got sick and died in 1925.

Now, while he was alive we lived just south of Bega on Boundary Road, which the boundary of the municipality, just within the municipality, and he ran the farm from Bega and had share families working them, but he kept close oversight on what was happening. My mother came from Sydney and so she was a city girl, she didn't know much about farming. And so she was left with eight kids - the eldest, fourteen.

Then, of course, when the depression came along in 1930 the bottom fell out of butter from about two-and-six down to sixpence, and coupled with drought, you know, the family fortunes were really knocked to [legs] so we had to go out and, first of all, take over one dairy - and they were adjoining properties. And then, as our financial situation worsened because of the depression, we had to put off the other dairy family and combine the two dairies in to one big dairy. Instead of two sixty-cow dairies we had a hundred-and-twenty-cow dairy - and it was all hand milking, all done by [a heap of kids].

And that's when - I'd gone to Bega School up to the age of ten, after third class, and then I moved out to [Buckigo], and so for fourth, fifth and sixth class I attended this one-room country school house.

And then I finished school - because there was nowhere else to go - there were no school busses and my family couldn't afford boarding [school]. But then my mother offered to buy me this pushbike if I was prepared to ride backwards and forwards. Well, look, any kid today, as I mentioned before, would say, 'Christ, you've got to have rocks in your head'. As far as I was concerned, it was like escaping from Alcatraz because it took me an hour and a half to push this bike backwards and forwards - hour and a half in the morning, hour and a half of an afternoon - but I'd been spending three hours of a morning of a morning, at least, in the milking yard, and then feeding pigs and calves, and then doing farm work during the day, and then lining up at the end of the day and milking the cows again and still being there at dark at night.

So it was a piece of cake to me pushing a bike in and out, and so I got to the Intermediate Certificate, which was as far as you could go. And then I started an apprenticeship, with the

General Motors dealers in town at the time, on the grand wage of ten shilling a week for the three months I was on probation. And then, when I was apprenticed, I went on to fifteen shillings; second year, I think I got twenty-five shillings. At the end of my third year, when I enlisted and joined the air force - and I enlisted pretty early because I was called up in the early part of '41 - and I was getting about £2-4 a week, I think.

I went down to Ascot Vale, into the showground, amongst the early draft of people that went in there, and it was a bloody disgrace, what the air force did - this was in the winter, running in to the winter, of 1940. We were put in to the dairy machinery pavilion, and it was just as it had been left after the previous show. All concrete floor, concrete blocks, you know, sticking up with bolts sticking in the air, where demonstration machinery had been. It had fixed louvres, not [cooper] louvres that you could close, fixed louvres right around the building, and the wind used to just whistle through. And the first thing we were given when we got there was a great big hessian bag to march down to one of the pavilions that was full of hay, full of straw, to fill it with straw and we put that straw on the concrete.

And, you know, I was sworn in [holding] a Bible in Sydney with three other fellows. There was one bloke by the name of - there was Howard, Hopkins, King and Johnson, and we called ourselves The Four Musketeers because we were in consecutive numbers. Hopkins lasted about, oh, less than a month. He got a cold and that developed in to flu - and they didn't have any reasonable hospital situation there - and eventually it developed in to pneumonia - and, of course, they didn't have the antibiotics and Hopkins went. King and Johnson, they finally went over to the UK.

So I had these three years with this automotive firm and then, when I went in to the air force, I went in as a Grade 5 Technical Trainee on five bob a day, and I [felt a] xxx. I'd been paying my board at thirty-two and six a week out of the money that I was getting, and I was getting five bob a day xxx, and I just wasn't accustomed to spending that sort of money. And I had four months at Brunswick Technical College on a technical course there, and then I was reclassified to Group 1 - from Group 5 to a Grade 1 fitter.

[Two out of 2E].

2E. So I finished my training at Ascot Vale, was posted up to Amberley, which was Number 3 Service Flying Training School at the time, that had [Wirraways] and Ansens. And I spent about four months there before they called for volunteers to go over and serve with the Royal Air Force.

Now, with any volunteers, the reason why they called for volunteers, volunteers could serve with the Royal Australian Air Force. So they called for volunteers again to go over and serve with the Royal Air Force under RAF rates of pay, in RAF squadrons and under RAF discipline. And there were two drafts were sent, there were about eight hundred went all together. One was the Blue Draft of about four hundred, and we went to the UK. The other one was the Yellow Draft and it went to the desert war in the Middle East.

When I got over there we were broken up and sent to, oh, I think seventy-odd different squadrons, our Blue Draft. And I happened to just be one lone Australian that finished up with number 53 Squadron, a coastal command squadron, which was based at [Birch and Newton] up near King's Lynn in Norfolk, in the Wash are of England, you know, up in the side.

The Squadron at that stage was on patrol work over the North Sea.

What were they flying, Wellingtons?

No, flying - you wouldn't believe it - flying Blenheims; they were a bit of a carry-over from World War I. But we were doing patrol work, keeping tag on German shipping movements in the North Sea. Then, when the convoys coming up from the south started to get clobbered, and any that were going south to try and supply Gibraltar or Malta needed cover, we were moved down to a drome called [St Ebel] down near Newquay in Cornwall, and we operated there up till Christmas Eve 1941.

And then, to give the North Atlantic convoys a bit of cover, we were then shifted across to a drome called Limavady which was just east of Londonderry in Northern Ireland, and we spent the winter there and that was on a new drome, and that was one of the bleakest and coldest winters I spent there because it was new, and like all of Ireland, it never stopped raining. There was an old saying - probably still current today - that if you could see the mountains it was about to rain, and if you couldn't see them, it was raining. It was mud, and slush, and snow all that winter.

Then the Squadron - do you mind if I just ramble on a bit like this?

No, you go ahead.

Some of the silly things that happened. I was sent from Limavady back to a drome called [Cotsford], that was near Wolverhampton - not a drome, a training school at Cotsford, near Wolverhampton in the Midlands - and this was on a senior NCO's training course. And while I was there I got a letter from one of my mates - a Scottish fellow - to say - the letter was written from North Coates east of Grimsby. The Squadron had been, while I was on this training course, had been shifted across to North Coates. So when I finished this course, which was about a month's duration, I went to get my travel warrants; it was back to Limavady. And I said to the bloke, I said, 'But look, that's not where the Squadron is. The Squadron, while I've been here, has been shifted to North Coates.' He said, 'My instructions are, and all your travel documents, are made out for you to go back to Limavady.'

Now, this meant taking a rail up to Stranraer, in Scotland, and going across on the ferry to Larne, which is just north of Belfast, and then getting across by other transport to Limavady, and reporting in there. And they said, 'But your Squadron is not here any more.' I said, 'I know damn well it's not here any more' - and you just couldn't get a passage on the ferry at the drop of a hat. So the bloke said, 'Well, we probably can't get you back on the ferry for a week at least' and I said, 'Well, look, as long as you give me leave for a week.' So I headed off to Londonderry, and then headed back and joined the Squadron at North Coates.

We were there for some time when I was transferred from there to the OTU at Litchfield - and they were drafting a lot of the Australians that had been scattered all over the place.

Yes, but it wasn't mainly an Australian OTU when you went there though.

No, no.

Just started to become one.

Yes. They were drafting everybody back for training - and it was all Wellingtons at the OTU, of course.

This would be about mid-'41, would it?

Yep. And then the Squadron was eventually formed up with Wellingtons, as you are well aware, and I was subsequently, with others, posted from Litchfield to Breeton.

Now, I wasn't posted, I wasn't one of the people that were there when they started operating, I came along after they had been going for round about, oh - look, I joined the Squadron just before they started to equip it with Halifaxes - they'd been operating for about six months.

So you'd have come to the Squadron about August?

Yes, August ...

1942.

And then, you know, we got partly converted with Halifaxes but they were such an unstable aircraft and we lost, as you probably know, a couple of crews in the course of training. Because of their instability they used to go in to a tail-spin.

That's right. Now, just one point: both Arthur Hubbard and Keith Kauffman claimed credit for getting Lancs to replace the Halifaxes; both reckoned that they were responsible because of the changeover just after Hubbard left and Kauffman came. But I think it was just a policy of replacing the Halifax wherever they could with Lancasters, wasn't it?

Well, look, they were just too unstable an aircraft. When we got them they were all equipped with Rolls-Royce Merlins. Now, they withdrew them from service and they then equipped them with the Bristol Hercules.

They also had a triangular fin, didn't they?

Yeah, they also altered the finning to give them more stability. They were finally - from those that finally flew Halifaxes swore by them ...

That's right.

... but they were only a patch on the Lancasters.

They had a very limited range and bomb load actually compared with the Lancs.

Yes. So then, of course, we operated - I was there for a little while. While the conversion was taking place to Halies, we were still operating with the Wellingtons, of course, as they were gradually withdrawing them. And then, of course, they withdrew the Halifaxes from us and we took over the Lancasters, and we operated there, as you are probably well aware, until May 1943.

Yeah, and went down by glider.

And then we moved to Binbrook. Yeah, well, you know - well, I didn't go by glider; I wanted to go, but because I was one of the senior NCOs ...

What rank were you at this stage?

I was a sergeant.

When did you get your sergeant's stripes?

Oh, that wouldn't have been ...

At OTU?

No.

When you went to Breeton?

When I went to Breeton, yeah.

Would you have been a corporal at Litchfield?

I was a corporal there, yeah.

Fair enough, okay, so you are a sergeant at ...

Look, I may have been a sergeant just at the tail end of the Litchfield bit - yeah. No, look, I'm not sure of that. No, I think I became sergeant when I moved to Breeton, yeah.

Okay. Can you recall much about the glider transfer to Binbrook? Any incidents there that particularly stand out?

No. I was there to see them all off and they had the old Armstrong Whitworth Whitleys, towing aircraft.

And the Albemarles too, I think.

Yeah, that's right. No, look, I can't remember any incidents. The only comment that was made by the fellows that were in the gliders was this eerie experience of hearing no noise, just the whisper of the wind as they were towed along. But I was with the final party that left Binbrook after nearly all the other personnel had departed.

It was a very clean sort of operation that transfer.

Oh, it was, yeah, it was an excellent one. It was a good one for the army because it was a bit of a training session for them.

That's right. Now, when did you leave Binbrook?

I left Binbrook the very day the war finished, on May 8 1945. As I mentioned, I'd done three years of my apprenticeship, and I didn't want to go back to motorcars - you know, my job was there, they were required to re-employ you when you came back. But I'd had courses over there with - I went on every course that was going, I'd gone on courses with de Havilland, and courses to Rolls-Royce. In fact, they were continually recalling senior NCOs - and civilian instructors which they used a lot in the air force, in the training establishments of the air force - they were continually recalling them back to Rolls-Royce at Derby for these refresher courses, and I went on one of those and I topped this class there against all these civilian instructors. It was only because I misread - I gave the correct answers to my interpretation of two question - I misinterpreted two questions - otherwise I would have got a hundred per cent.

But anyway, Qantas, in the dying stages of the war, called for applicants for this joint venture that was between BOAC - British Overseas Airways Corporation, the forerunner of British Airways - and Qantas to get a mail and passenger plane service going using converted Lancaster bombers, and there was nobody in Australia that had any experience on Lancasters. So I was one of those that applied and I was one of about a dozen that were accepted, and we were given a priority passage home to get this thing off the ground. And so there were a number of us; we were the key technical personnel of Qantas when they got going with the Lancasters.

But I was posted from the Squadron - this is one of my big disappointments - after having been, you know, through it right from almost the start right to the finish - I left Binbrook about 6 o'clock on the morning of May 8 and was taken by transport in to the rail station at Grimsby. I passed from - oh, it was either Kings Cross Station on the north down to Victoria Station - I went across London - and I remember the newsstands had the big boardings up that they were waiting for a result of the ultimatum to the German Army for unconditional surrender - and I got on a non-stop train at London through to Brighton, and by the time we got to Brighton the war had finished. So after having all these years with 460 Squadron, when it came to the big celebrations that night, I wasn't there.

(Incidental conversation)

Now, quickly, your post-war career. You went with Qantas for a time?

Yeah. I stayed with them until such time as they started to become equipped with the Constellations, and then I felt I discharged my obligation to them at that stage and left and I came back to Bega.

Did you go straight in to business then?

Look, I did all sorts of odd jobs. I didn't want to go - I was offered my job back with the automotive firm that I'd been with, but look, I'd ferried motor vehicles - they cart them by road now, but in those days they used to - the dealers used to drive them through from Sydney - and I used to drive those cars through for Charlie Price, International Trucks - and then I sold insurance for the AMP Society.

And then, one day, I was in a pub having a drink and the beer was hot - the publican couldn't pull it, and the refrigeration plant had broken down. And he was apologising to everybody that it had broken down and because it was hot it couldn't be pulled. You know, they did have what they called the old sweet-water boxes, not the instantaneous [Temprite] coolers they use today, but they were a water tank underneath the bar ...

I remember those.

... behind the taps, that had refrigeration coils going round the edge of the box and then the beer coils spiralling up through the centre. And as the beer came up through the coils, of course, it was cooled by the water - cold water.

Anyway, it had broken down and he couldn't pull his beer, and so I just happened to throw him the question, I said, 'Isn't there anybody here that knows anything about - that fixes refrigerators?' and he said, 'Oh, there used to be an old fellow, but he got a bit long in the tooth and gave it away' and there was nobody. He said, 'And you've got to wait about a week to get somebody from Sydney or Wollongong' - you know, Canberra was only just a small town in those days. He said, '... Sydney or Wollongong,' he said, 'and it costs a king's ransom, in travelling time and expenses, for them to walk in the door, before they even lay a tool on your plant.' So I decided there had to be some future in this, and so I applied to repatriation ...

Oh, I bought up a few books, I went back to Sydney and I wandered in on firms. I asked if I could ride around on their service trucks and give their blokes a hand on commercial installations and service work. I bought up a few books from people who were principal spare parts suppliers for the industry - they had a technical library - and I bought a few books and I used to swat up at night and compare what I'd read with what I observed during the day. And after a few weeks of this I reckoned I knew enough about refrigeration to get me out of trouble.

So then I went to repat and I got a £250 re-establishment loan that had to be paid back at the rate of about six quid a month over a certain number of years. Anyway, I found out that I didn't know enough about refrigeration to get me out of trouble, I just - you know, the old saying, 'a little bit of knowledge is dangerous'. I just knew enough to get me in to a heap of trouble, but there was nobody to refer to. If I got a problem, the only way that I could do was go out and read up my technical publications. But once you solved the problem once that way - and the fact that I'd had this background of technical experience - and furthermore, a lot of the controls on aircraft engines are similar in theory and operations to the controls in refrigeration because as an aircraft climbs and the air became more rarefied, the volume of air still went through the carburettor, but the density of the air was greatly reduces, so you had a compensating control to reduce the petrol flow otherwise you'd have had over-rich mixture as you climbed.

Now, with refrigeration you are dealing with expanding gasses, you are dealing with the latent heat of evaporation and the latent heat of fusion. I got an A in physics at school so this all came pretty naturally to me. So I started off initially just on refrigeration, just servicing, and selling, and installing commercial refrigeration. And I just happened to come back to Bega after the war when the three local government bodies had got together and had formed the county council to produce electricity to supply this corner of New South Wales. There was no grid system in those days and Bega was supplied by a privately owned diesel generating plant which was taken over by the county council, and they put in a hydro-generating plant out on the Brown Mountain to the west. You see a sign as you come down the Brown Mountain now, about half a mile from the foot of the mountain, which leads in to the hydro station, the generating station. But furthermore, at the top of the mountain there's two dams which fed the hydro-generating station.

Now, I came back just at the time that they'd run the line from the hydro station on the foot of Brown Mountain, through to Bega, connected in to the reticulation that was already in the town from this private undertaking, and they'd gone straight through to Tathra. But they were just

starting to work north and south, and of course, every time the power line hit a town, such as, say, Cobargo, you'd just walk in on the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, and you refrigerated the pub, and the butcher's shop, and the cafe. I was the only one, there was nobody else in this corner of New South Wales.

In fact, I did work for the Snowy Mountains Authority when they put in their construction camps, right out in the regions - they couldn't get service, and, you know, when their cool rooms, serving their kitchens, and also their beer cooling equipment in their canteens break down, they couldn't get anybody, and I used to drive all the way from Bega out to places like Tumut Ponds, right out in the regions, and it was half a day's drive on rough roads to get there, and half a day's drive to get home again. That's how I eventually came to establish another operation in Cooma.

And how did you get in to hardware from there?

Well, I eventually graduated from just plain service in to electrical retailing generally. See, I was only on service, I was operating in a side street, and I had a bloke from General Motors walk in on me one day. General Motors, like all the other manufacturers, had had distributors handling all their stuff. For instance, Kelvinator had Bennett and Wood, did all their distributions. General Motors, with their Frigidaire equipment, had [Ward and Franky], did all their distribution in the three eastern states, and General Motors were the first people to decide to set up regional distributors because what Ward and Franky were doing in Sydney, they were supposed to be distributing all this stuff, but they were selling most of it retail. And so General Motors realised that this seller's market wasn't going to last forever, it would eventually get round to a buyer's market, and they'd have no dealers set up. So they break away from this.

And I had a fellow walked in and ask me if I was interested in taking on the Frigidaire distribution which covered from Batemans Bay to the border and also Cooma, Bombala - you know, all this corner of New South Wales - and it was as a wholesaler virtually on wholesale margins, which were about fifty per cent better than I'd been getting before, and a guaranteed quota. Prior to that you used to have to go up to Sydney, cap in hand - well remembered. I would leave at 2 o'clock in the morning, and drive through there, and go round knocking on doors, and pleading with people, saying, 'For God's sake, don't turn me away empty handed, just give me two refrigerators to cover my petrol costs' - so you'd wring two out of somebody. And I had a transport operator had a depot just up along Broadway, and I would race up and slip those off there, and then do the same with somebody else.

So you [go in to] retailing through that?

Yes. So anyway, I eventually my electrical business expanded up when my premises became too small. And I happened to be in a hardware store, which was diagonally opposite, on the first intersection as you come in to town, and I happened to be speaking to one of the partners in this business - and this is 1959 - and I happened to say, 'Gosh, I wish we had all your expanse of room over there on the other corner' and he said, 'What, you are a bit short of space, are you?' - I said, 'Oh, yeah, just can't expand my business' - because there was an expanded range of equipment coming on the market all the time.

Anyway, this was just a casual conversation. A few days later this partner in the business that I'd spoken to came over and he said, 'Look, relative to your comments the other day, at your lack of space, would you like to buy our business' - and this was a pretty big hardware business, and it

was like an exercise of a sprat trying to swallow a mackerel. My first reaction was to say, 'Well, for Christ's sake, what with?'. He said, 'Well, look, we don't want the money; all we want is a deposit' - and the three boys that were in it were prepared to finance the purchase at a fairly low interest rate over a period of years. So that's how I got in to hardware.

Now, what are your business interests at the moment? Still the electrical and hardware?

Electrical, hardware ...

And the farm?

The farm here, yes. I've got some commercial real estate in town - the Department of Social Security would be the biggest tenancy in Bega.

They are in your properties?

They are in my property and just the rent from them represents just on $100,000 a year.

So you've got pretty big ...

And then I've got - there's a menswear store that - I used to have a menswear business and sold it - only sold the business and I still rent the premises.

Now your public activities? You were mayor for ten years.

Yeah.

And that included the last year of the Municipality of Bega.

Yeah. When I came back here, the RSL - Bega sub-branch of the RSL - had their annual dinner on the nearest Saturday to Armistice Day, to November 11. In 1947 - oh, and the mayor was traditionally the patrol of the RSL and was always invited to the dinner and invited to propose a toast to the League, which they still do - and the mayor at that stage, at this dinner, appealed to all these young fellows that were there that were not long out of the services - the local government elections were in December, the following month. He appealed to us to come forward and said that all the councillors were pretty old, they kept the home fires burning while we were away, but he'd like to see us show the same degree of community responsibility we'd shown during our service years by standing for council.

Well, I was one of five that stood as a panel. You know, we got [out a dogger and voted for] progress, and we were going to do - we were all the last angry young men that had seen what towns and villages were like over in the UK, and Bega was a real frontier town in those days. I used to say it was a lost and forgotten outpost of the Empire. It was the biggest urban community in the state that the railway never quite got to, and the roads were terrible - there was a dirt road from here to Milton up the coast, rough and corrugated, it was dirt road going south over the border, or to Cann River, it was dirt all the way to Canberra, over the Brown Mountain - you know, just gravel road. And so we were going to put everything to right overnight.

There were three of us, of the five, went on to the council, but there was still quite a few of these old fellows stayed on. I stuck it out for three terms, until 1956, and I finally gave it away out of

sheer frustration. All they were interested in doing was patching the potholes in the street, and I was interested in arguing that we put the rates up. And the philosophy of some of these old fellows was never increase the rates and never do anything. I used to argue the case that if you put the rates up twenty-five per cent, all that increase would go in to progressive works because you'd already covered your overhead out of other things.

Anyway, eventually I gave it away in '56 and decided to concentrate - oh, because I was so outspoken at that time I got myself in to a heap of trouble. The sale yards used to be almost in the centre of the commercial community, and I was on the sale yards committee and the chairman of it, and I advocated, in a report that we'd put in, that we double the yard dues and build up a [sinking] fund to ship the sale yards out of the town. Well, I was attacked from all quarters by the rural community because the sale yards were only 100 metres from the Grand Hotel, and sale days were Tuesday, and the sale yards were a real club. They'd all come round and sit in the tiers of seats, you know, covered seats round the ring, and they'd chew the fat about rural things and the weather; and then, when they had the inclination, they'd walk up the street and have a few grogs at the Grand Hotel and walk back to the sale. And this was sacrilege to the farming community to even suggest [moving]. I copped so much flack that I felt I'd burnt my bridges with business in Bega, and that's when I concentrated my activities in Cooma.

Anyway, eventually, I was off the council for ten years and in a weak moment, in 1966, at a by-election, I was talked in to going back in again. And then I was deputy mayor for ...

I've got it all here, thanks, Roy.

Now, you mentioned Cooma. What activities in Cooma?

Well, I had the principal electrical retail business up there.

Under your name?

Yes - and Bombala. And I was there in Cooma for eighteen years, from '55 to '73, but then, when they started to scale the Snowy Scheme down I decided at that stage to get out. Oh, and the Whitlam Government had come in and they'd boosted taxation, and they had adopted completely anti-business attitudes.

And wages went up.

Yeah, wages went up and everything was going through the roof, and they increased company tax. It was thirty-seven and a half per cent for the first 10,000 and forty-two and a half thereafter for private companies. They just hiked it to forty-seven and a half in one hit, right across the board - oh, there were all sorts - interest rates blew out - and so I decided to get out of there. I was working myself in to the ground; you know, I was not only covering everything in Bega but burning the midnight oil at Cooma and Bombala. I got to the stage of feeling I was just working for the government because they were the biggest shareholder in the business by a long way, they were getting the biggest rate. So I sold up at Cooma and Bombala and just concentrated my efforts in Bega.

And to what extent are you active in those business today, in Bega?

Well, I still do all the financial banking. I keep a weekly and monthly oversight on our budget,

xxx turnover and cash flow, and that sort of thing. I don't become involved in it very much in a fact-to-face situation with any customers any more, I'm mainly dealing with my staff. Although I spend more time in there, it's mainly at my own pace, and I think it would be true to say that I put in about seventy-five per cent of my time in community activities and about twenty-five per cent of my time with my business. I used to think that the job of mayor was an onerous enough job in Bega, but looking back I now realise that the toughest part of the job was keeping up with the social demands of the office because as his worship, the mayor, you are expected to be at every cat and dog fight that went on in the community, every social function the mayor was invited to. You know, the changeover dinners of all the service clubs, and Rotary, you would be required to propose the toast to Rotary International, at Lions, to Lions International, at Apex, the Association of Apex Clubs. As mayor you are automatically patron of the RSL and so you'd be invited to every RSL function; we used to be invited to every ball that was going - you know, the mayor would be there as one of the guests of honour; but also, at the annual meetings of the Red Cross, and the CWA, and the Historical Society. They used to like to have - they felt that to have his worship the mayor present added some tone and prestige to their proceedings.

> You'd be the busiest man in Cooma. (To wife) How did you cope with all this? You had to participate, didn't you?

(Wife) I had to participate.

And I kept on trying to get out of the office. After I'd had about five years of it I'd had enough, but every time - you often find this, it's a lot easier to get in to these jobs than it is to get out of them, and every time that I tried to give it away, my fellow aldermen used to prevail on me to stay another year, and another year, and finally I was there for ten years until I was - I often said they couldn't get me out because invariably I used to top the pole at the election. They couldn't get me out so the state government legislated me out of office.

(Wife) xxx (inaudible)

> I was about to ask you about family. What family did you have?

(Wife) We have a son and two daughters.

> And the son's in the ...?

He manages the electrical business.

(Wife) He lives in Bega. And we have two other daughters, one lives up at Coffs Harbour and one lives at Muswellbrook. We have five grandchildren.

> Muswellbrook, I was there for several years, a long time before your daughter though. How long has she been up there?

(Incidental conversation)

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

Did the bombs always come off after an op was scrubbed, or only when the bomb load was changed.

Only if they changed the target and they had to change the weight of the bomb load to increase the fuel loaded.

Otherwise an aircraft might stay bombed up for several days.

Yes.

How many were in what I call 'the basic ground crew'? your mob on a dispersal.

On an aircraft there were normally round about six people. There was normally a senior NCO in charge of the aircraft, a sergeant, and then he would have underneath him a corporal who was a different classification.

So if you were a 2E you had a 2A corporal?

I was the sergeant 2E and the corporal was an airframe fitter. And then you had probably, because there was a lot more work to do on the engines than there was on the airframe, you probably had three other engine 2Es, or engine mechanics.

They would have been xxx and 2Es.

Yeah. You normally had at least - it would be either a 2E or a 2A would be the NCOs that would be on the aircraft, and then the others, of course, might have been just engine mechanics or airframe mechanics, but not necessarily Group 1.

The actual airframe mechanics were riggers.

They were called riggers, yeah.

The rigger was the lower ranking of the 2A.

Oh, yes, yes, your right.

So a rigger would have been Group 2.

Yeah.

2A was ...

Group 1.

Group 1, right. So, let's say, you were 2E, you had a corporal 2A, and then probably two flight mechs.

Yeah. You'd normally probably only have one offsider to the corporal as a 2A, you probably only had two airframe fellows, and, say, four engine blokes.

Including yourself?

Yeah.

Right. Was there any shelter at the dispersal though?

None supplied at all, except the makeshift ones you made yourselves.

I thought that. I had an argument with a bloke over that; 'No,' he said, 'they had their own special huts'.

That was not true at all.

(Wife) There was one hut per flight.

Yeah.

Yeah, there was one Nissen hut only per ...

Yeah, that was the flight hut. That was pretty primitive too, wasn't it?

Oh, yeah, it just had one of these coal braziers in the centre, it was very basic. They were unlined, just a corrugated iron Nissen hut - unlined, cold as charity in the winter, and if they had any summer they were like an oven inside.

(Wife) (inaudible)

No, these are aircrew blokes I've talked to, and a [couple of them] xxx, 'No,' he said, 'we used to go and sit in those huts,' he said, 'before take-off.'

The only xxx one I said was a little thing, I think they made it up out of bits of tin.

And look, they were made out of the engine covers that came along with new aircraft. You normally got covers to put over the engine.

What sort of covers?

Oh, they were canvas, and we used to make ...

Oh, I've seen those canvas covers.

We used to make our huts up out of those because we were continually losing aircraft and continually getting ...

Spare covers.

And so we used to just make up some sort of a frame and just drape it with covers, but to say that - I can't recall ever seeing a crew waiting inside a hut. Normally the crew bus - as you'd be well aware of - brought the crew out immediately after briefing, they boarded the aircraft ...

Go and have a smoke or something.

Yeah.

We used to pummel each other. I didn't realise until years later that it was just letting off tension, but there were three or four of us, we used to knock the stuffing out of each other, round the dispersal.

So hard standing in dispersal, were they the same things?

Hard standing in dispersal?

Jack Jones, in his tape, he keeps on talking about 'hard standing'.

Well, they were all the dispersal points for the aircraft. Off your main perimeter track you had a taxi-way running in to the circular pad; that was your hard standing area.

You'd normally call that the 'dispersal' though, wouldn't you?

We used to call them all the 'dispersal points'.

Now, in order to connect up between the huts we built - because they'd be back a bit from the aircraft - we used to have a pathway from the hut to the hard concrete area. We used to get the clinker from the boiler and that was the only time that I was ever called a bloody fool by a subordinate person, and that happened to be my wife.

I went round to get a load of clinker with the fellows, you see, and while I was there I thought, it was good clinker, and I thought, well, we'll hook in to this and take a decent load. But you had to back down a fairly steep concrete ramp to get in to the boiler room, to get this clinker, and we kept on loading the stuff on, and Peg kept on saying, 'Look, you've got enough, I'll never pull out of here' and I said ...

(Wife) There was something wrong with the truck.

And I kept on saying, 'Oh, look, it's only light stuff this.' Anyway, finally, when we had a really good load, that's when Peg exploded and said I was a bloody fool, that she would never pull the truck out of it.

What were the most xxx circulated among a flight? Usually there were electricians to a flight, weren't there, rather than the Squadron?

Yeah. The electricians, they normally didn't work out of the Flight hut though, they used to work out of one of the maintenance hangers. But yeah, you normally had the same electricians that came round from day to day, and they just came round and did their electrical checks, but they normally had their electrical headquarters, they operated out of an electrical section in the hangers.

You might remember the hangers used to have annexes to them, and normally you had your electricians, you instrument makers, they didn't operate out of our flight hut because they were just a Nissen hut, they were just protection from the weather virtually, and with a bit of an office

pinched off in the corner for the flight sergeant. But he only had a desk in a corner, he didn't have it partitioned off.

So you had instrument makers, you had electricians, you had armourers.

We had gun armourers and we had bomb armourers. The gun armourers would come round and check the guns and then the bomb armourers would come round with the bomb trolleys, and load the bombs and check the firing mechanisms.

And you had radar and radio mechs, did you?

Yes.

Anything apart from that? Anything apart from the armourers, the instrument makers, electricians?

The electricians.

Radar mechs, radio mechs? Would be about it, wouldn't it?

That's about it, yeah.

Your basic ground crew was responsible for only one aircraft?

Yeah.

Your sole responsibility?

Well, yeah. We were responsible for that aircraft, but you had the situation where you'd probably have on a neighbouring dispersal point a bloke that was in charge of an aircraft that was a fitter 2A and didn't know too much about anything.

Now, I mentioned, I trained as a 2E, I'd had backup training with Rolls-Royce, and if an aircraft got in a bit of trouble, had a bit of engine trouble which was likely to have it pulled out of the line, normally the 2Es that were on adjoining dispersals would hook in, or if blokes were away on holidays, you'd look after the aircraft, keep an oversight, on the aircraft on adjoining dispersals.

That was just a matter of helping out, cooperation between you?

Yeah.

Now, what levels of inspection did you do out on the dispersal? you did tell me a while ago.

Well, we used to do every time an aircraft went up in the air, every time it went out on a mission, you had to do a daily inspection.

Now what did that involve?

Well, that involved taking the engine covers off. We had these big platforms that we used to work off, one that rolled in from either side. You took the engine covers off and you generally inspected the engine to make sure that there were no leaks had developed anywhere. You used to check on the exhaust stubs because they had ... particularly when we started initially, there weren't covers over the exhaust. You had your six stubs sticking out on either side - and, of course, they used to glow red hot and you get these great tongues of flame from them, so they really stood out like a beacon in the sky. Then they brought along these shrouds to put over the exhaust. Now, once that ...

That was the technical term, was it, a shroud?

I think I used to refer to them as a shroud anyway. But that used to tend to concentrate the heat coming out of the exhaust stubs inside - even though it was open at the front so the air could go through - and because of this extra heat it meant the exhaust stubs used to burn through fairly frequently. And so we used to have to accept all the exhaust stubs and that was one of the worst jobs because the nuts used to almost be, from the heat, burnt on to the - go on to the stubs.

You had to take the shroud off?

Yeah. You had to take the - the shroud was part of the whole side cover of the engine, so when you took the side off the shroud came off with it. These are some of the experiences that I had. I've still got, outside in the garage, a special tool for getting those exhaust stubs off.

Well, I brought it back with me. The tools we were supplied with by the air force were really primitive stuff - not chrome, vanadium socket and ratchets and that sort of thing, they were damn old box spanners, and when you'd be working on these nuts on the exhaust stubs the box spanners will expand, of course, and you had to make sure that they didn't expand to the extent that you took all the corners off the nut and then you couldn't get the damn thing off at all. But then, when we got the Packard Merlins the Yanks used to send along beautiful kits of tools - beautiful kits of tools - and they had a long socket with an extension arm and a ratchet, and it was a piece of cake from then on; but before that, you'd be barking your knuckles and ...

They were fitted to Mk Is too, I suppose?

Yeah.

Their stuff.

Yeah.

Okay, so what else was in the daily inspection?

Well, checking for oil leaks, checking for any burns in exhaust stubs, and replacing them if there was any sign of burn-through.

Oh, well, of course, the things you did was check the fuel level in the tank - the oil level in the oil tanks.

There was one oil tank per motor?

On oil tank per engine, yeah, which held about thirty gallons of oil. You checked those, topped up the oil tanks, and you were also normally given fairly early information on what the fuel load had to be so part of the inspection ...

xxx xxx.

Yeah, that came into it.

Did you run the motors up? Even if there was no op on, would you run the motors up as part of the daily inspection?

Always ran the motors up.

Watch for rev drops and all that sort of thing?

Yeah. After you'd done all the engine inspection you'd put all the cowls back on again, you'd run the motors up, and run them up to about twenty-eight, fifty, I think, before you - you could go up to 3,000 by going through the 'gate', as they called it, but we'd run them up to about twenty-eight, fifty, check each magneto by switching the switches off and checking the rev drop. The rev drop used to be round about a hundred; if it went beyond that, well, you had to look for crook spark plugs.

That book that you had to see, everybody signed that had anything to do with it, what was that called? Was it a 700 or an EE77?

Oh, Jesus, you are testing my memory now.

What's the name? Bill Cook spoke of the 700 - Jack Jones said the EE77.

I would have said a 700, but it had to be signed.

You had to see that that was signed by everybody.

That was signed by the senior NCO on every aircraft at the end of the inspection.

Do you remember the name for that? Apart from a number, do you remember the name of the thing?

I can't recall, I can't recall I'm afraid.

Funny thing, I've got EE77 clearly in my mind, and that's what Jacky Jones called it; but Bill Cook spoke of the 700, and somebody else spoke of the 700. Anyhow, that's something I can get from the technical details of the Lanc.

But after all these inspections had been done, then the senior NCO on the aircraft had to sign this particular form to indicate that all checks had been carried out and that the aircraft was serviceable for operational duties.

xxx aircraft maintenance xxx. Jack Jones spoke about lacing the aircraft after an op. What exactly is 'lacing'?

Lacing?

> Lacing, yeah, to lace the motors, I think he spoke about - lace, L-A-C-E. I hadn't heard of it before.

To lace the motors?

> Lace the motors - lock the [oil] and put the chocks under, three things he said you did when they came back to dispersal after an op. You laced the motors, you put the chocks and you locked the steering column, the controls off. What the devil does lace mean?

I don't know what that would be. We used to - you had the chocks to put in on the rudder, and the elevators, and the ailerons.

> I wonder if that's what he meant apart from the real chocks.

Probably what he was talking about was lacing the airframe rather than the engines because you couldn't afford to have the aileron thing flapping about in the breeze, so we used to have chocks with a red flag.

> Yeah, that's right.

And they were for the rudder, the elevators and the ailerons.

> So you did that, you put the chocks under the wheels and you locked the joystick?

Yeah; and furthermore, we used to have another thing to put over the [peters head].

> I know of a couple of blokes who took off with that still on them.

Yeah.

> Jerry Bateman was one.

So one of the things that you'd always see the pilot do, when he got in to the controls, was to ...

> Make sure the chocks weren't still on.

Make sure that he could see the ailerons working, the chocks weren't there, pull the stick backwards and forwards to make sure that the chock was out of the elevators, and kick his pedals backwards and forwards to make sure they were out of the rudder.

> Right, you've got the crew in the aircraft, you've shut the door on them, they are in the aircraft; now, what happens from that time on? What was your part from there on?

Once the crew were in the aircraft, well, we had to prime the engine for starting. Now, that meant you had to prime up on top of the wheel, from the rear, and get up within the wheel cavity, and there were priming pumps there for all the four engines.

Under one wheel?

No, you had to get under the two ...

Two on each ...

Yeah, get - on the port wheel there'd be for the two port motors, on the starboard wheel there'd be for the two starboard motors.

And you primed those - there'd be a certain order of starting ...

Yeah.

... and you'd prime them in that order.

Yeah, you'd prime them in that order and, of course, you used to prime by giving a certain number of pumps of the priming pumps, and the number that you gave depended on the weather and the weather conditions.

So a mug couldn't have done it?

No, a mug could have either put in too little and had the pilot flattening the batteries, or put in too much and flooded the motors. So you had to have somebody who knew what they were about when it came to priming.

It would have been you or one of your trusted xxx?

Yeah.

Okay, so in turn - any signals to the pilot to start a motor, or did he do it in the sequence?

He used to do it in the sequence.

Generally speaking. I think I've got that down somewhere, the sequence for it. Okay, motors are all going and ...

Well, look, the pilot had been - he'd rev the motors up, and he'd check the revs off, and God help us if there's something happened on take-off, because there'd be one hell of a scramble.

If we found that between the check and the take-off a plug failed - before they put these shrouds over the exhaust covers it was fairly easy to pick which particular plug was crook because you'd find that when the revs dropped too much you'd find from the plume of flame coming out of the exhaust stub where the crook plug was. But once they put the shrouds on it meant that then you had to wheel in the stands to quickly find out where the problem was. Rather than have to take all the plugs out and have a look, you'd wheel in the stands, take the covers off on either side of the motor, and then start the motor up again and get the pilot to check them again and that pinpointed immediately where your crook cylinder was.

Once you got those covers off?

Yeah - well, the exhaust stubs would tell you, and the flame die on one port when he switched the motor off - one stub, exhaust stub.

Oh, I see, you took the shroud off?

Yeah, well, the shroud was attached to the whole cover.

Oh, I get what you mean, yeah.

It was over the whole cover, so you took the whole cover off the side of the motor and the shroud was permanently mounted on to that.

Did the gunners remove and replace their own guns?

I don't think so.

If you were on a flight, though, you'd have seem them struggling in to the ...

No, no, I'm pretty the gun armourers did all that.

I'm sure of that too.

I can't recall ... see ...

Where would the rear gunner go? He comes out after seven, eight, nine hours in the air and he's got to get those four guns out.

No, no. look, that didn't happen. As a matter of fact, when the crew came out on the crew bus to take off, all they came along with is their flying suits and their parachute harness, and their parachutes, and that's all they went aboard with. The gun armourers did all that.

Two gunners I've talked to reckoned they took their own guns out there. They might have done something to them in the gunnery section, they might have fiddled around and cleaned them and whatnot, in the gunnery section. I said, 'Do you mean to say you landed, the crew's got to wait until you get four guns out? - lug them out.

No, that's not true.

It might have been very early in the peace, I think, maybe - the old Wellington xxx or something.

(Wife) xxx - the ground crew would do all that. You just used to go down and leave the plane, didn't you?

Sure.

(Wife) You couldn't take any of your equipment out.

It's funny you know, some people have got a memory - obviously Roy has, and you have

- and some ...

(Wife) Have a vivid imagination.

They can't remember it so they imagine it.

(Wife) Roy's got a photographic memory, he can remember dates ...

He's very good, he's the best I've struck to date.

Yeah, I don't know whether in the early stages on the Wellingtons they might have done that, but certainly on the Lancasters the gunners never, ever, touched the guns that would ...

Some of these fellows, their memory's gone completely, but they feel as though they should know what it is, so they tell you something and swear black and blue ...

(Wife) Well, you'd just get out with your parachute, wouldn't you?

xxx crew [van]. Now, did the dispersal crews play any part in the very extensive Lanc modifications that went on?

No.

Did you ever have to modify on a dispersal?

No. They were all done in the maintenance hangers.

I was surprised to find out the extent of those modifications of those new Lancs - they came from the factories.

Yeah.

Particularly the electrical side of it. Bill Cook - a new Lanc would come in, new Lancs - of course, the greater the losses the more new Lancs, the more modifications.

Yeah.

Now, was moving crews on return common for ground crews?

Oh, look, there was always somebody on duty.

A duty crew - there was always a duty crew.

Yeah.

Harry [Tickle] is supposed to have met George every time she came back.

I'd say that would be bloody sheer nonsense. Harry Tickle was probably in the mess blind drunk.

I'll tell you what, the evidence is building up. I'm not going to say that, but I'm not going

to praise him either because ...

Look, there was one occasion when he let G George take off and so help me Christ, if I'd have been his senior NCO I'd have him up on a court martialled because one of the things that you always look for - when you ran the engine up yourself, I used to have, always have, one of the other engine fitters always watch the breather pipe on the motor - there was a breather pipe came out - because if it started to ... any puff of black smoke came out, it indicated that there was a breakdown in the pistons. The oil had to be getting - they were a dry sump aircraft as you are well aware, they had a pressure head - so that if oil was getting out to the breather, the crank-case breather, it indicated that there was a breakdown, either a crack in the piston or a breakdown in the rings, and you'd immediately have to check up on it and probably change the [band].

On one occasion Harry Tickle was on the adjoining dispersal to me - I was on EEG and he was on G George, and another bloke, George Hayes, on C Charlie - we weren't all in alphabetical order on the dispersal points - and he was standing on the port side of the aircraft, and I could see from my dispersal - and the dispersals weren't very far away, you know, probably thirty, forty metres, or less than that - I could quite clearly see these great puffs of black smoke, this plume of black smoke, coming out of the crank-case breather. And I drew my own fellow's attention, I said, 'That aircraft shouldn't be allowed to take off, there's obviously something chronically wrong with the engine.' And Harry Tickle was standing a lot closer to it because he was standing near the wing tip of the aircraft and I was standing on my dispersal, and I could see it.

And, you know, the aircraft took off and within the hour it was back with that motor feathered, the engine had just packed up. But it was crook before it took off and it should have never been allowed to - I, never in a fit, would have allowed an aircraft of mine, with even just the slightest puff of smoke coming from the crank-case breather - would indicate that something was wrong.

Radically wrong.

And this thing, it was so evident that I could see it quite clearly and drew my own crew's attention to it.

No, look ...

I've copped a lot of criticism from two pilots. One of them who flew George quite a few times - it wasn't Jerry Carter but another bloke who did quite a few - he said that that aircraft never performed to his satisfaction.

I would say that - I've often said this about - without wishing to be unkind to Harry because he's dead and gone - that his idea of [bearing] a proper daily routine service was to go along and give the tyres a bit of a kick and make sure they were well enough inflated.

From what I've heard I can't possibly make a lot of the man because it's a bit too much for the Society, so we'll just go through with xxx, what you can do.

Harry was given a lot more credit than he deserved. If he'd been on any other aircraft ...

Lucky G for George ...

He'd have been looked on as one of the squadron drunks, so help me God.

> That's right. We took G to Berlin on 2 January, we did two raids, 1 January 1944 was a Berlin and that next night was Berlin - well, L for Love was due for 120-hourly inspection so we took George. Well, our pilot, Bob [Howel], was a crackerjack pilot, there is no doubt about that. Now, that thing dropped revs, it spewed smoke out of the port outer, all the way to Berlin and back, and Bob was really put out. Harry was there when we got back and Bob was very unkind. Now, Harry said, 'Oh, you haven't knocked you around, have you?' and Bob told him what to do with his G for George, he was disgusted.

You might recall, you'd see some aircraft with great streaks of oil coming back over the wing.

> Yes, I remember that.

Well, you know, that was never necessary. The principal oil leak was on the hydraulic pump, one of the hydraulic pumps that was right at the front of the engine on the starboard side - it was just this small hydraulic pump. There were big hydraulic pumps to operate the turrets and to operate the undercarriage, but there was this small hydraulic pump just to operated the hydraulics on the engine itself. And it was a [planned], it was very difficult to get at, you had to have a special spanner, and it was only a paper gasket that was there. And sometimes the flanges weren't well enough machined and you used to have to get in, take the thing off, and get in with one of these metal scrapers - you know, put the thing on and take a blueprint, and go to work with a metal scraper, to make sure that your flange matched, that there were no high and low spots. That's where the oil leaks used to come from.

Now, I used to pride myself that no damn aircraft that I was in charge of ever had streaks of oil right back over the mainframe because that's where it used to come from. It was a tedious job.

> An indication of not a hundred per cent service.

Yeah. But mind you, I'd have to say this, that when you took blokes - well, I was a third-year apprentice, automotive apprentice - but there were some blokes there in charge of aircraft that hadn't even had the three-years apprenticeship that I'd had.

> Should have been a clerk or something xxx xxx in the RAAF.

Normally they look, particularly amongst 2Es, they look for blokes with some technical background, and most of the prominent fellows that I knew - you know, the best of them - the best of them - were blokes that had a technical background.

But when you consider that the mechanics that you had that weren't xxx 2E - some mechanics had no background at all, but they had to be relied on to do part of the checks because you couldn't do them all yourself.

But I mention that I got down to Brighton on 8 May, and when I got there I met a lot of the old Squadron crews that were repatriated back from prisoner of war camps. I never struck one of them - you know, I asked for the circumstances of how they came unstuck - I never met one of them that had a report that they failed to return because of a fault in the aircraft.

This is your aircraft?

Well, I know quite a few aircrews, not just mine, but crews that I knew from the whole of the Flight.

That's interesting.

And most of them, of course, said that they were just flying along in level flight and the next thing the aircraft was exploding, they didn't even ...

Didn't know what hit them.

They didn't know what hit them, fighters gliding in from up above them until they come within range.

xxx firing guns which we knew nothing about.

But I never met anybody - and I was there in Brighton for about three weeks, and during that period met a hell of a lot of them were coming back, when the war had finished and they had been liberated and Brighton was their reception centre - they took over all the big hotels on the waterfront there. I didn't strike a bloke that said that they went down because of a mechanical fault.

That's a very valuable statement that, extremely so.

Now, to get back to your nickname and whatnot; did you always have E Edward at Binbrook?

E?

E, yes.

Yes, always.

Always had E Edward?

Until I'd - when I lost thirteen they decided there was hoodoo aircraft and they changed the letter.

What did you get then?

Eh?

What did you pick up? What was after E?

They called one of the other letters in the alphabet, like instead of A1 there was A and there was ...

A2.

A2.

I get you.

But that only happened right in the dying stages of it.

But look, I must tell you this story. Anybody that was allocated E Easy reckoned that it was a sentence of death, but nobody ever mentioned it.

To you?

Nobody ever mentioned it, no. And I had this name 'The Killer' but nobody would have been aware that I was called 'The Killer' long before I came to 460 Squadron from ...

Boxing.

From Boxing, yeah. And you know, even while I was there, I used to spend quite a bit of time in the gym keeping fit.

This went back to what, OTU days?

Yeah, started at Litchfield, yeah. And, of course, when I started to lose a few aircraft - and there was only this bloke, Murray Wilson, one of my mates, and he used to refer to me as 'The Killer'. But after I started to lose a few aircraft it caught on, and finally I doubt wether very many crews on the Squadron knew my Christian name.

I don't recall it ever being referred to, E Easy, as being a jinxed aircraft, during the tough times.

But I remember, there was a bloke on the Squadron by the name of Ken [Crowe]. He was only a young bloke, he came from Murringo, it's up near ...

Yeah, I know Murringo.

You know Murringo, out near Young?

Yeah.

Well, he came from Murringo, just this small rural village. He came along, and he was a real young fellow, but unkempt. You know, his wing was tacked on with about three tacks and sometimes a tack would come undone and a wing would be floating about in the breeze. The first time he came out - they got out of the crew bus to take this aircraft out up on a test flight because, naturally enough, it was a new aircraft (laughs) the previous one had been lost, and Crowey came along and he said, 'Well, I've been allocated to fly this aircraft' - and he swaggered up and down like this - and he said, 'so I'd better get to know you all.' He said, 'My name's Ken Crowe' - and he shook hands with all the other fellows first, you see, until finally he came up and he stood face to face with me, and he looked me straight in the eye, he said, 'And I suppose you're the bloody Killer', and I thought, well, you'll do me, Crowe. And you know, he could fly a Lancaster like it was a Tiger Moth, and he was the most fearless bloke that I've ever struck.

I went over on one of those daylight raids - you know, [to bomb a V1 launching site].

Yeah.

When they were counted as a third of an op, until they lost five on xxx.

[That was the problem] xxx.

There was one of my boyhood schoolmates from out at Bemboka, Ron Hobbs, he went down on that [boat] - you know, the Hobbs' Store out at Bemboka?

Yeah, saw it today, we came past it.

Well, he was the eldest brother in that family, and still his other brother, younger brother, held on to the store. But it went down on that xxx conflict.

But anyway, so then they credited everybody with a full op.

That's right, they soon changed their tune.

But I went across on this daylight thing with this fellow, Ken Crowe, to bomb a V1 launching site.

This is strictly unofficial too, of course.

Oh, yes, strictly unofficial.

You had a parachute though, I take it?

I had a parachute, yes. But because these ramps were only a couple of hundred metres long, and they were only a few feet wide. So we were down to - I don't know what level we were down to, but I wouldn't think we were higher than 5,000 feet anyway, probably lower - could have been down as low as 3,000 feet.

That's right, would be three to five, more likely three.

You could see the target quite clearly. Anyway, we'd had fighter escort, but once we got over there there was about, oh, six-tenths cloud I suppose, and so sometimes you didn't know whose fighters they were dodging in and out amongst the clouds, theirs or ours, half the time.

But we made our run into the target - and this is an indication of the fearlessness of this bloke, Ken Crowe - and the bomb aimer is giving him the instruction, you know, 'Left-left, steady-steady ...' and so on, and we are just getting the target lined up when we ran in to a puff of cloud and lost sight of the target. So Crowe said, 'We'll go round again.' So we went round again.

That wasn't popular that.

I know, it wasn't popular, not down at that height - of course, you didn't have much chance anyway. So we made another run in. And by this stage the ack-ack was starting to get our

measure, there were black puffs appearing around, and the odd clatter on the aircraft as a bit hit it. And anyway, the same thing happened a second time and Crowe said, 'We'll go round again' and every member of the crew said, 'For Christ's sake, Crowe, get rid of the bombs and let's get out of here'. He said, 'We'll go round again' and by God, we went round a third time until he got a clear run on the target.

And then, I remember coming back. These light ships are out off the coast - he'd skim along the water and so help me God, you'd be looking out and the propellers have just got to hit the water if he goes any lower. He's just skimming the surface and he comes up to these light ships, and the last minute he pulls the stick back and goes up over the top.

And then when we came back over the coast, again, he was hedge-hopping. And I remember one occasion when there were farmers out making hay, and they were making it, you know, in the old method, with hay [pulls], with one bloke on the top of the wagon and the other fellow falking it up to him. And Crowe just skipping over the top of the hedges came right up to these fellows and then [gun] the engines and pull the stick back, and laugh like hell.

It's a wonder he didn't get reported.

Well, these fellows were blown of the stack and all.

The hay would go everywhere.

And I remember, of course, I told my crew - my ground crew - I said, 'Righto, don't tell a soul,' I said, 'Don't tell anybody otherwise it's a court-martial offence.'

So anyway, of course, after all the aircraft had taken off - Peg was there as the flight driver. She naturally asked where I was because we were engaged at that stage, I think - we were engaged, yeah, I remember xxx the ring back.

Anyway, Peg, of course, got on to the other blokes and said, 'Where's Roy?' - 'Oh, he's headed off to the mess' - but they obviously looked guilty. So she promptly wheedled out of them that I'd gone on the raid. And when we came back, because of all this mucking about that Crowe had done, scaring the hell out of the crew of light ships and these farmers, every other aircraft was down and all the crews had gone back to the mess, and there was one aircraft missing; it was mine.

I remember as we came over the drome I could see this wonderful truck sitting on the dispersal, and it was Peg. So anyway, we circled the drome, came and landed. By that stage she'd driven the truck over to the Fight office. So I got out of this aircraft - I had to conceal myself from the aircraft while the crew bus picked up the crew, and after the crew buss headed off I got out and walked across with my parachute - I could get a lift with Peg. She just started the engine up, came boring down the road, and if I hadn't jumped out of the way she would have run over me - no more dangerous than France - and virtually offered me the ring back if I ever did it again.

What was your maiden name, Peg?

[Andrews]

And you were at Breeton, you say.

Breeton, yes - drove the transports down to xxx.

And you were a driver all your time?

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

... completed a tour, recommended for a gong.

And did he get it?

No, he didn't. As a matter of fact, the story that Crowe told me was that - I think that all gongs had to be endorsed by Hughie Edwards.

That's right.

He went before Hughie Edwards and Hughie said, 'Your squadron commander has recommended you for a Distinguished Flying Cross', he said, 'But I find, Crowe, that as a result of your conduct while you have been on the Squadron, I find it difficult to endorse the recommendation.' And Crowe said - and this is the type of bloke he was - he said to Hughie Edwards, 'Well, that's the first time, Sir, that I understood that a DFC was a good conduct medal.' And he was one of the very few pilots that did a full tour, during part of the toughest time, that didn't get a Distinguished Flying Cross.

Hughie was capable of that, he did it on another two occasions that I know of, simply on social grounds. That's pathetic that is. So he also didn't get a commission?

Didn't get a commission, no. Well, that's understandable, I suppose.

Yeah, fair enough, but to deny him a gong.

In fact, he finished his tour and he was sent to Sheffield.

What was at Sheffield?

Sheffield was where they had this disciplinary ...

Yeah, that's right.

He did a stretch in Sheffield - my word he did.

Have you heard anything of him since the war?

Oh, yes, we've had him call down here in Bega. As a matter of fact, he was always such a shaggy-looking individual that when - oh, years ago, Peg, wasn't it? when we were in the church house; that would be back in the late '50s, and I hadn't seen him since the war - we'd been out for a drive ...

(Break in interview)

When they were going out, you might recall that leading up to the invasion of Europe they were using - Bomber Command were going out during the day, with air cover over France, and that's when they had this with a third of an op, and it was to bomb marshalling yards, bomb road bridges, bomb anything that could disrupt the communications because they had the Germans second guessing on where the invasion was going to take place, and they wanted to disrupt the communications across the coast to make sure that the German Army couldn't be quickly manoeuvred to meet an invasion force. And so they scrubbed all leave because they wanted maximum serviceability. They were still doing their night bombing, their strategic bombing, but they were also going out doing tactical bombing during the day. And so they had us virtually working round the clock at times, where you snatched a bit of sleep in these huts we built for ourselves on the dispersals.

On one occasion, when they were getting aircraft - there was an operation on, it was a night op - and my aircraft was okay, but there was this fellow, George Hayes, was on a neighbouring dispersal point, they were having trouble with an engine, and I went over because I'd had all this background of experience and I was a fitter 2E. I went over to give a hand to get this engine running, to make sure the aircraft could take off. Now, I missed my dinner in doing so. Now, this was something that you normally didn't do because food was pretty hard to come by, so, no, you didn't miss meals if you could help it. But anyway, got the aircraft right.

And it wasn't long before the crews were due to come out. So I'd missed my dinner so that I thought I'd get on my bike and go to the church-army hut. You had to go past the castle, the headquarters building, to get to the church-army hut, and I just got on my bike - everybody else had gone off to dinner, including our flight truck - got on my bike, rode around, I was going down past the castle and Hughie Edwards and the station adjutant were coming out. They were almost up to the car as I went by, and I heard a call, 'Sergeant'. So by the time I pulled up I was forty or fifty yards down the road, but I'd pulled up and they - and I was about to come back when they got in the car and came rolling down the road to me. So I stood on the pavement beside the road - and it was one of these smaller cars, you know, it was a Hillman or something like that. Hughie was in the passenger's seat and the adjutant was driving, and he said, 'Sergeant, where's your hat?' - I'd just got on my bike and raced in to get a cup of coffee and a bun or something - 'Where's your cap?' - and I said, 'I just came away in a hurry and I forgot about it, Sir'. And he said, 'You are not in the habit of forgetting to put your pants on, are you, Sergeant?' Oh, I had to ask him to repeat himself.

I mentioned I used to generally go off flying with new crews - new aircraft - and I'd gone up with a cold and I'd buggered my ears up, and I had these [wicks] down both ears soaked in [icthy oil and glycerine] - you know, poked down my ears, and then with cotton wool on top of that, and I could hardly hear, so I had to bend down, poke my head in the side and ask him to repeat his questions.

Anyway, when he said, 'You are not in the habit of forgetting your pants, are you Sergeant?' that really nettled me and I just said, straight back - because I'd been working my guts out - and I mentioned the fact that we were entitled to one day off, I hadn't had a day off in six months. They wanted maximum serviceability and they'd withdrawn a lot of the married blokes, the senior fellows had been sent back home; they sent the married blokes back and they replaced them with fellows that came from the Middle East that didn't know anything about Lancaster. And so I felt that I had an obligation to be a bit of a troubleshooter and so I didn't take a day off,

and I hadn't had a day off for six months. We were given a book where we had to go along and have it signified by the engineering officer that we were entitled to a day off on such-and-such a day. I had a blank book, I'd never asked for a day off in six months, and here was this bloke saying, 'You are not in the habit of forgetting to put your pants on, are you, Sergeant?' and I snapped back and said, 'Sir, it's an act of common courtesy to take your cap off when you go in to the mess; I haven't seen anybody taking their pants off as an act of common courtesy.'

And so anyway, he mumbled something about he'd straighten me out and away they went. Now, the next thing I was called in before the Squadron adjutant and he wanted to know the circumstances, and I told him. I said I was certainly bloody impatient, and I was entitled to be, to be pulled up and asked why I didn't have my hat on - and this is almost dark, as you can imagine. Anyway, I gave the explanation and he said, 'Oh, that's all I wanted to find out' - and it was quite a bit of time, a couple of weeks went by and I didn't hear any more. Next thing, I was summoned in - and it was in front of Douglas - I was on four charges for being regimentally undressed, insolence, failing to stand to attention, and conduct for the purpose of good order and discipline.

Now, if I had stood to attention I'd never heard him because I had my ears [poked]. I had to bend over, so I couldn't bend over and be standing at attention at the same time. So I hadn't stood to attention in front of a superior officer, I was regimentally undressed, I was charged for insolence and conduct for the purpose of good order and discipline, and so I was marched in like a bloody common criminal, escort xxx, somebody in front of you, somebody behind you, into Douglas's office, and he read out these charges, and he wanted to know what I had to say for myself. And I just said, 'Look, I didn't join this outfit, the air force, to be a bloody tailor's dummy. I've never held myself up to be the best dressed person in the Squadron, but I've always been at least tidy.' And I explained the circumstances as to why I didn't have my hat on and why I had possibly expressed myself rather impatiently.

Anyway, he said, 'Well, of course, you understand, Sergeant, that we've got to have discipline.' I said, 'We've also go to have serviceability too, Sir. I'll bring to your attention that only a week before an aircraft taking off this [great hatch] in the bomb aimer's compartment blew in.' - it blew out at least - 'It wasn't properly secured. They were ordered to come back in again with a full bomb load and full fuel load because they wanted maximum participation serviceability - endangers the lives of a whole damn crew.' I said, 'And you know that that fellow,' I said, 'that bloke ought to have been court-martialled for not doing his job properly.' I said, 'He hasn't been charged and the whole incident has been forgotten about' - this happened some time ago. I said, 'And here you are reading out all this great damn screed of stuff because I didn't have my cap on.'

Anyway, he started carrying on about discipline and finally he handed out a severe reprimand. So again I was marched out, you know, escorted. I'd almost got out of the hanger and the old adjutant we had at the time - he was an old war Flying Corps bloke.

Yeah, I can picture him; I don't know his name but I've got it on record somewhere.

Well, he called me back. He said, 'The CO would like to speak to you, but if I was in your position xxx xxx,' he said, 'I'd ask for a court-martial.' I said, 'Look, if I asked for a court-martial I'd be being just as trivial ...' and so I went back in, he wanted to speak to me. And you know, he got up from behind his desk, and he came round and he extended his hand. And he said, 'I hope you realise the situation that I am facing, Sergeant.' I said, 'I realise completely the situation your

facing.' I said, 'What you are wanting to do is run xxx xxx.' I said, 'Your record will be judged partly on the basis of the serviceability, and the serviceability comes from people like me.' I said, 'But also your record and any gong you are going to get as CO of this outfit will be a recommendation from the station commander, Group Captain Edwards, who has preferred the charges against me.'

That was Douglas?

This is Douglas, yeah. Edwards is the bloke that put in the charge. Now, Douglas, because of the lapse of time, I think, wanted to bury it, forget about it because I'd been in and given all the explanations as to what had actually occurred. And then a couple of weeks went by before finally I was walked in and informed of the charges.

Now, if you look in that book, 'Strike and Return' you will see these decorations. There were eight mentioned in dispatches; they went to senior members of the ground staff. I was one of those that was recommended, but never ...

It never came through?

Yeah - because I had a severe reprimand on my bloody record.

That recommendation would probably come through from George Champion, would it?

Would have come from George, yeah.

But Edwards would have squashed it?

Well, no, Edwards was gone by that stage, Edwards left in November 1944. But at least I had on my record ...

It was on your record that stumped you, your reprimand.

Yeah - severe reprimand; not just a bloody reprimand, a severe reprimand. And it all came about on the CO, our own CO, Douglas, obviously didn't want to pursue the thing, and I'd been called in and given a whole explanation - and then I felt that the thing had been dropped. Then next thing, several weeks later, calling me in by this stage, informed me of the charges, and I can only assume that it was Hughie Edwards was the bloke that xxx.

I've dug up a few things against him and there are a few things in his autobiography which don't sound too good, which are going in the book too. One of those things is - we always figured ...

(Break in interview)

Bill Cook reckons that he wasn't inclined to get to know aircrew too well because they were going off so quickly. Do you think that might have been general, that some ground crews weren't - of course, Bill wasn't a member of a basic ground crew, he was an electrician, circulating. Do you think there was any inclination on the part of any ground crews not to become too involved as friends with aircrew?

Look, I don't believe xxx ground crews that were attached to particular aircraft - xxx - you tried to get to know them. The most distressing part about it all was because it was obvious that the aircrews realised that their chances of survival were pretty minimal, that they would want to tell you all about their family and their family background, to be able to impart some knowledge about themselves on to somebody that they thought was going to survive anyway.

> And probably they wouldn't do that to crew members. I think that one aircrew didn't want to let his crew mate know that he was apprehensive or worried in any way about surviving.

Yeah.

> But I see now, they could talk to you.

They would talk to you individually. This used to happen and this is the reason why, as I mentioned to you, that you went through a death of a thousand cuts. You tried to be fatalistic about it all, but it was just impossible to do so because you generated some close personal relationship with somebody that had unburdened themselves personally to you.

> That's a good point. Jack Jones says that he used to try, he'd see apprehension there among the crews, just simply through quietness, things like that. He'd try and say something friendly or cheerful to them to buck them up a bit. But that's interesting what you said, yes, they'd talk to you because they wouldn't talk to a crew mate, because I know now that I didn't want to let others know that I was a little bit worried about going out there.
>
> Now, was it true that a lot of girls, WAAFs and civilians, were reluctant to have aircrew boyfriends?

(Wife) I never had much to do with the aircrew.

> But how about some of your mates?

(Wife) Some of them, yes, not many.

> Do you think there was that bit of a feeling that why become very friendly with these fellows, they mightn't be here tomorrow? Do you think that was pretty general, or was it the exceptional attitude on the part of the WAAF?

(Wife) I think it was an exceptional attitude, yes, I don't think many of our transport drivers had.

I think it would be more true to say that most of the WAAF that were there, you know, that developed any ongoing relationships, it was with the ground crews rather than the air crews.

(Wife) Just a few had the ...

> Well, there weren't many married aircrew, were there? Quite a few married ground staff, but there weren't many married aircrew.

Yeah, that's right.

(Wife) I didn't really ...

But that didn't come through to you strongly that ...

(Wife) No.

... WAAFs were saying, well, we are not going to become too serious with these fellows because they mightn't be here tomorrow?

(Wife) Oh, no, I just think they met ... well, the girl I knew knew more ...

It is probably true to say that the aircrew, unless you were directly involved with them - and it was the people that were out in the flights that became directly involved - that they possibly didn't last long enough to form any close liaison. Peg was the flight driver for A Flight, but you remember a few of the aircrew that were long enough there to get through and survive, butt he bulk of them, you wouldn't have had any contact with at all.

(Wife) No, you'd see them one day and the next day they'd gone.

So you would have taken a lot of them on their last trip really.

(Wife) Mm.

Their last ride in a ...

I don't think it would be true to say - look, I wouldn't be an authority on this - I don't think it would be true to say that there was an aversion on the part of the WAAF, girls on the Squadron ...

(Wife) Oh, no, no.

... to avoid association with aircrew ...

(Wife) No.

... because it was considered that they were only, say, a temporary there.

I'd go along with that.

I would think that there wasn't that association because they weren't given the opportunity, and furthermore, they didn't last long enough.

I'd go along with that, for sure. I think what Roy said would be pretty right.

(Wife) Mm.

Did you notice any difference in the behaviour of crews as they waited aboard an aircraft for an op?

Oh, look, I ...

From one crew to another?

Look, you always sense this feeling of apprehension on the part of crews, particularly during the worst stage of the war when the possibility of getting through a tour of ops was pretty low. We used to go for months without seeing a crew finish, and when a crew got through, half the Squadron would go down the local pubs to celebrate the fact that we'd see a crew finish a tour of duty. So it would be true to say that during the worst stage of the war, when our losses were at their maximum, that there was apprehension, and a person would have had to be a fool not to be apprehensive about his chances of coming back, of returning, and you couldn't help but sense that.

You'd sense that among them.

Yes.

Was it all Christian names on the dispersal, even up to flight commander?

Oh, no, I wouldn't say that was so. Were you are dealing with your flight commanders who were invariably squadron leaders ...

Yeah, that's right.

... it wasn't on a personal basis. I think probably in all the ranks up to squadron leader ...

It was?

Yeah, probably was, yeah.

Certainly between the pilots and ground crew it was Christian names.

Yeah.

Did Hughie Edwards - as I say, in his autobiography he is praising the great maintenance and the great work of the ground crews - it is one reason why I like seeing it in print because he does give ground crews a terrific plug. Now, did he show - I shouldn't be asking this - did he show an appreciation of you in tangible ways, of what the ground crew were doing? Did he come out to the dispersal?

Not in any shape or form did he show any appreciation of the job that we were doing.

(Wife) He never came out, did he?

I never, ever saw him. Look, I mention Group Captain [Crummy]. He was a person that was ...

RAF bloke?

Yeah - but you regularly saw him, in the middle of the night, when you were out there and you thought you were on your own, Crummy would pop up out of the dark with a word or two or

encouragement. And probably, as I've mentioned, a toddy of rum to see you through the cold of the night.

I'm glad you've said that of Crummy.

That would just have been completely out of character of Hughie Edwards to do that.

He was too elite.

Could you size up a crew and say, well, these blokes might get through, these blokes wont get through, these blokes will get through?

No, you couldn't.

Because, as you say, it was all luck.

You could assess how confident they were, but you knew that their confidence was probably against the odds. It was, as I mentioned earlier, it was possibly ninety per cent airmanship and skill - at least ten per cent airmanship and skill and ninety per cent luck.

A fellow I talked to the other day - he stayed in the air force - he was a navigator - stayed in the air force, became an air commodore - he said just what you said, it was ninety per cent luck, but he said the crews that might have a better chance of surviving was those who worked like hell on that ten per cent.

Yeah.

(Break in interview)

Did the armourers have the name of being a reckless lot? You used to see them racing around with those trains of bombs behind them.

(Wife) Oh, no, they were very careful.

They had to be careful, didn't they?

(Wife) Yes. No, they couldn't go too fast; I think most of the transports were - their speed was regulated. I know our trucks were regulated so we couldn't go over a certain ...

Probably the tractors were too.

(Wife) Those tractors probably would be too. I mean, you put your foot down but you could never go any faster, no. No, they weren't reckless, no.

Bill Cook mentioned that, he reckons ...

(Wife) Did he? Well, they were our transport drivers and they'd gone to the usual tests and everything. I can't remember anybody - there were no accidents at all, we never had any blow-ups or anything.

Bill Cook was out apparently defusing something one night with an armourer, and Bill said to him, 'God!' he said, 'What if this thing goes up?' and the armourer said, 'Well, we won't be worried, mate'.

I just asked Peg if armourers had the name of being a reckless, wild, lot ...

(Wife) And I said no.

... Peg says not because they couldn't afford to be.

I wouln't have thought so, I wouldn't say so.

(Wife) I would say that they were careful.

I felt that they were - you know, we were working on aircraft while they were bombing them up because aircraft that came back one night while ...

(Wife) Did you mean the drivers or the armourers themselves?

Well, the drivers of the tractors, plus the armourers too.

(Wife) They were all careful, weren't they?

They had to be careful, didn't they?

(Wife) They valued their own lives.

Oh, yeah. While we were working on the engines the airframe blokes were working on the airframes, we were doing our serviceability checks, you know, the aircraft would be being bombed up. I never had any apprehension whatsoever about the bomb armourers being reckless and doing the wrong thing.

(Wife) They wouldn't want to, they valued their own lives.

But getting back to your comment there with skill or luck. I believe that the crews that had the best chance of survival (were) the ones that had good navigators, irrespective of pilot ability or gunner ability. It was like travelling in a convoy. I went across the Atlantic in 128-boat convoy; we were the main troop carrier from Halifax across and we were with the HMS California ...

(Break in interview)

... may not have been as close, yet there was a time when one crew flew one aircraft and they were very close to their ground crew. But we got to the stage in the final stages of the war where we still had the same number of aircraft, and we had about seventy-odd - we had aircrew sleeping everywhere - so that you were never sure that you didn't have one aircrew allocated to one aircraft as you used to do at one time, and so you were never sure what particular crew were going to turn up to fly your aircraft on a particular night.

Things must have been different, they had to be different, relationships were ...

And I believe that at one stage we had round about seventy-odd crews on the station so on every raid we carried out crews were only getting about one flight in every three. Now, you just didn't get that same personal relationship with the people who flew the aircraft.

> The bloke that said that probably had that in mind.

I would think that would be so.

> Was there any feeling of friction at all between what I call the front-line ground crew and other ground staff?

Well, I couldn't say that - oh, I suppose those of us who were out in the flights, you know ...

> We are talking about the blokes out in the cold.

The blokes that were out there, working all the time, fair weather and foul, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week - it was necessary to work seven days a week. We felt, I think, that everybody that was out in the flights felt that they were more out in the front-line of things than the blokes that were back in the hangers in the comfort of cover from the elements.

> I found a bit of feeling between aircrew and, say, admin staff, clerical staff. There were definitely that bit of feeling there. Take old Perc [Rodder] for example, that was never there with the ground crews, what I call the front-line ground crew, and the aircrews that were so close, and never any resentment or anything like that. But I do know cases of resentment towards the clerical staff. I was wondering if there was a pronounced friction between you blokes out in the flights and the people in the [comfortability] of the orderly room.

I don't know that there was any real friction, but there was always the feeling that we were the blokes in the front-line trenches and the blokes in the hangers, they were the blokes on the headquarters staff well back behind the front line.

> Now leave; was it ten days every three months and a forty-eight hour pass every month? Ten days every three months?

Well, if it was it was never experienced by me.

> You never got that leave?

(Wife) We went six months without leave, didn't we, one time?

I mentioned I went six months without a damn day off, and at that stage I was entitled to one in eight, but I didn't take the one in eight.

> One in eight leave, or one in eight stand-down, or what was it? Would you leave the station on that one day in eight, if you could take it?

If you could take it, yeah, provided you had, from the - but this, of course, depended on the discretion of the engineering officer of the Squadron as to what pressure was on the Squadron relative to serviceability. But the rule was that you could take one day off in eight, but you

couldn't take any leave at all, and that lasted for fully eight months I suppose.

Do you recall what leaves you got?

I wouldn't have thought that we got ten days off every quarter.

(Wife) No - I didn't get many leaves, and I went six months for some. What was happening when we went six months without any leave?

Oh, well, that was leading up to the Second Front; they cancelled all leave for all the ground staff ...

(Wife) For six months, yes.

... because the Squadron was operating day and night. It was doing strategic bombing at night and aircraft would come back in the early hours of the morning and you'd have to start working on them then, refuelling them, re-bombing them, and getting them ready for morning attacks across the coast of France. And they just cancelled all leave. As far as I know it went on for round about eight months.

(Wife) Eight months, yes.

So leave was a privilege, not a right, apparently? You got it when they felt inclined to give it to you? You couldn't say, okay, three months, give me ten days thanks; that didn't happen?

No, that didn't happen. As a matter of fact, if you'd like to switch the tape recorder off I'll tell you ...

(Break in interview)

Do you recall anything interesting about the business of some of the notables that came to 460? There was Curtin was there, and Evatt, and the King.

Yes, I remember very well when Doc Evatt came there. We had Churchill there at one stage, but he only spoke to the officers.

Did he? I didn't know he was there.

(Wife) I didn't know he was there.

Yes - I'm sorry, no, the King and Queen there.

Sir Archibald Sinclair, Minister for Air, was there.

Yes.

Duke of Gloucester was there.

Look, Doc Evatt came along - and this is one of the things to Doc Evatt's credit - is that he came

along to the sergeants' mess one night and we complained bitterly about the fact that despite the fact that there were Australian naval units serving over in the UK, and Australian Army units were there right through the war ...

Forestry.

Forestry units were right through the war. They had the benefit of Australian duty-free canteen services. Now, we were looked on, by the Royal Air Force, as serving at home. For at time, when we came across the Atlantic from Halifax, we were diverted up to Iceland and we were virtually occupation people there in transit to the UK. But we got duty-free handout of cigarettes as we walked down to the mess every morning because as far as the Royal Air Force were concerned - but not duty-free, we got a free handout.

Not three and fourpence a carton?

No, no, we got a free handout. But when we got to the UK we were looked on as home service personnel and we got nothing, and if you were a smoker, you had to rely on comfort parcels from home, some Log Cabin ready-rub tobacco and some Tally-ho cigarette papers - I mean, you couldn't buy them outside because they just weren't available. And so it got to the stage if you were anybody who wanted to have a smoke, they'd sneak away in to a corner and roll themselves a racehorse of a cigarette and have about four goes at it, light it up about four times with a couple of puffs each time before the cigarette was expended.

And Doc Evatt turned up in the mess - sergeants' mess - one night, and we complained bitterly about this, that those that were smokers couldn't get smokes unless they got comfort parcels from home. And Doc Evatt said, 'I'll straighten it out for you' and to his credit he did because next thing we were given the offer of - what was it? - four cartons a month, a carton a week - of course, there were ten packets of twenty in each carton - and it was sixpence we paid for each twenty. But that only lasted for a short while while they built up a capital fund, and as soon as they built up a capital fund for this then they reduced it to fourpence. So we used to get eight packets - four cartons, I'm sorry - ten packets in each carton, for thirteen and fourpence.

That's right.

But then there was always the odd person that didn't smoke, and they all drew their ration of 800 cigarettes a month and they'd dole them out, so we all finished up being chain smokers. And from having been a very moderate smoker myself - and everybody used to sneak away in a corner to have a bit of a puff so they didn't have to share the tobacco and cigarettes round with the others. From then on, it didn't matter how big the group was, if you wanted to have a cigarette you'd pull out the packet and hand it around. Twenty cigarettes, the whole packet, was only going to cost you fourpence if you did the whole lot in one hit.

And that was Doc Evatt did that?

Doc Evatt did that and he probably did us - I said he deserves some credit - he probably did us a great disservice because he made us all chain smokers from there on, because when you are out half the night in the snow, and ice, and cold, one of the comforts was to light up a cigarette and suck away at it.

I heard a chest specialist fairly recently giving a talk and he said those free cigarettes to

troops in the war, it was murder, the people responsible should be hung, drawn and quartered. He said it started off so many young people as smoking addicts.

Did you continue smoking after the war?

Yeah. Look, I continued smoking by I realised that it didn't do me any good and probably I was a bit like Mark Twain. Mark Twain is credited with making a hell of a lot of statements, but one of them was that he found that giving up smoking was the easiest thing in the world, he'd done it a hundred times. And probably I was the same type of person; I gave up smoking a hundred times for a week, or a month, or a year, and started again. But when I realised the fact that, with all the weight of medical evidence you didn't have when you were a kid - when you looked at your film idols of Humphrey Bogart, and Clark Gable, and Victor [McCraigram], and Garry Cooper, and all these fellows that were always shown on screen with a cigarette hanging out of their mouth - when the weight of medical evidence became such that it was just no damn good, I gave it away.

Were you ever at Williamtown?

No.

With the Blue Draft.

The Blue Draft?

Part of the Blue Draft was at Williamtown for a time before they went overseas.

Well, that surprises me.

That was there because there was a big blue - there was a Wing Commander [Paget] there, I struck him at bombing and gunnery school, just after Port Pirie, and he was a real B. But there was a mutiny at Williamtown - no, it wasn't Blue Draft, it was 452/458 Squadrons.

The Blue Draft were never at Williamtown.

No, 452/458.

The only incident that happened to the Blue Draft was that when we were - we headed off overseas in June 1941 and there happened to be - I don't know what the race meeting was at Flemington, but a lot of the blokes jumped the fence between the showground and the racecourse and went to the races that afternoon. But for some reason or other the CO there as Ascot Vale, the showground, had called a parade, and there were a heap of absentees, they'd all gone to the races. And the threat was issued that all those members that had been selected for the Blue Draft would be changed to the Yellow Draft and be sent to the deserts instead of the UK (laughs). It never, ever happened at all.

That was 1ED, wasn't it, Ascot Vale, the showground? Wasn't that 1ED?

No, Number 1ES - Number 1 Engineering School.

Where was 1ED then in Victoria?

Well, what did 1ED stand for?

Embarkation Depot.

Oh, well, it was probably that as well because ...

I'm sure I left from what was called the showground.

Look, when I went there it was Number 1ES, that was Number 1 Engineering School, that's where I did my training. Now, when I went on from there to Amberley I was posted from Amberley back - as I mentioned earlier, given ten days to get from Amberley down to the Melbourne Showground. We went all the way down there and then, of course, from there we came back to Sydney to embark on the [Awatee] - that's the way they did things in the air force.

Now the Blue Draft and the 452/458 Squadron blokes, plus some of those who were Yellow Draft, were the only people to go - ground crew - to go to the Middle East - go to UK. You never got any reinforcements from Australia, apart from part of the Yellow Draft?

Yeah, never got any reinforcements. The Blue Draft was scattered over about seventy squadrons initially - as I mentioned, I was just one in one of these squadrons - and we formed the nucleus of all the subsequent bomber squadrons that were formed up over there. We never, ever got any reinforcements came to us from Australia except those that came to us from the Middle East, from the Middle East war, the Yellow Draft fellows.

Did most of those Yellow Draft come to the UK, most of the original Yellow Draft?

No, I think all the married blokes were sent back to Australia just as all the married fellows in the Blue Draft were sent back to Australia.

They were released after D Day, weren't they, the married blokes?

Yeah, yeah, at least ...

Quite a few were home for Christmas '44.

That's right, yes.

Now, the NAAFI. How was the NAAFI in the airmens' mess associated? Now, there was no beer served in the airmens' mess, was there? but there was the NAAFI. The NAAFI was wet, wasn't it?

I don't know.

Where were the dances held?

They were held in the airmens' mess.

Not the NAAFI?

(Wife) No.

No, in the airmens' mess. We had the odd one in the sergeants' mess, but most of the dances were held in the airmens' mess. Any of the dances I went to with you ...

(Wife) Yeah.

... were in the airmens' mess.

(Wife) That's right, upstairs.

Mm?

(Wife) Upstairs - or downstairs?

No, downstairs.

Was there a WAAF NAAFI?

(Wife) Yes, we had one down ... we were off the main ...

Are you sure it was the NAAFI? Wasn't it the church-army hut?

(Wife) No, NAAFI we had, in the WAAF xxx.

Was there?

(Wife) Dismal xxx.

And what services were there? Could you get a beer there?

(Wife) No.

No, it wasn't wet.

(Wife) No.

But where did the airmen get their beer from? That was from the NAAFI, wasn't it? airmens' NAAFI.

(Wife) I can't remember.

I don't know. In the sergeants' mess and the officers' mess it was a wet canteen, but I was never an officer or - never an airman at Binbrook - and at Breeton, certainly, there was no wet canteen anywhere; if you wanted a grog you went in to [Bubworth] or you went to The Seven Sisters, or the 'Fourteen Tits' as they called it.

The 'Lucky Duck'.

(Wife) Well, the only time we went to the airmens' mess was after dinner, at lunch time, and had a cup of coffee or a cup of tea there - we didn't go in, I don't think we went in there at night-time, except when there was a dance on. Towards the end of the war they built another one, a new one - I think that was after you left, wasn't it? - had table tennis tables and things.

Oh, well, I left the day the war finished so they wouldn't have done too much [billing] after that, I wouldn't have thought.

(Wife) Well, they had this new NAAFI.

I left on May 8, that was the day the war finished.

(Wife) I don't think it was built until a few months after you.

Somebody told me that the airmen could get beer at the NAAFI.

Well, I don't know about that, I just know that we had to ...

It's only a small point. Where I'm not sure I don't mention it.

Wet canteen in the sergeants' mess and the officers' mess. I went to dances in the airmens' mess with you, but I can't recall any beer available there.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B

How often could you see a picture?

I'd say it would be very rarely.

(Wife) Would be about one a week, wouldn't it?

Yeah, I think you are right.

Once a week. Well, where did they have that? In the airmens' mess?

No, there was a little cinema, wasn't there?

(Wife) It was just down from the MT stakes on the left-hand side - before that.

I can't remember going ...

I never, ever recall going to a cinema on Binbrook at all.

(Wife) You took me.

What?

You took Peg.

Did I? You've got a better memory than I have, I can't recall going to a cinema there.

COs' parades, you think, were held weekly?

Yeah.

Who had to go to COs' parades?

(Wife) Everybody.

Well, normally everybody paraded.

That includes aircrew too. It there was an ops on, the night before, I think, or that night.

Gee, look, I couldn't swear to that one. All the ground staff were required to turn out to a COs' parade once a week.

(Wife) It was Hughie Edwards that brought that in.

That was regardless of whether ops were on or not, or whether you'd been out all night the previous night.

Look, I don't know. I remember one morning when there was a COs' parade on when, because I'd been on duty all night, I was walking up the road from the sergeants' mess when Chad Martin came walking down. He said, 'Is there any particular reason why you are ex officio from the parade, Sergeant?' and I said, 'Yeah, I've been on duty all night'.

So you would have been normally expected to go?

Yeah. But I can't remember whether aircrew were required to parade though.

I remember being on some, but I don't know how often. But people have told me about this, they were talking about it at the time, but nobody remembers it now, but apparently the band, of which Bill Cook was a member - he used to play the flugelhorn - Bill doesn't remember it, but oh, it was a great gossip round the station. The band was cheesed off with these parades so they'd break from march time in to jazz time when they were all parading round, and the band broke from march time in to jazz time.

Look, I can't remember. I remember this occasion when I was shattered by Chad Martin and when I just gave a few words of explanation as to why I wasn't on the parade because I'd been on duty, on the drome all night. But I don't know whether, in the final stages, whether we even had it one a week. It was left pretty much - particularly those of us that were out on the flights - each particular senior NCO that was in charge of an aircraft had his crew of blokes, and because you knew that the input that each particular individual made, if he happened to go off and he was a day home late, or something like that, you knew he'd made a valuable contribution, you didn't go racing off to slap him on a charge or that sort of thing. And out in the flight areas we pretty well run the show to make sure that we got maximum input from the blokes, but you did it with a little bit of discretion, a little bit of flexibility, you didn't throw the rule book at people

all the time.

> Jack Jones speaks about a wild party, about 3 o'clock one morning in the sergeants' mess, that was broken up by the adjutant who slept above the anteroom in the sergeants' mess - seems a funny place for the adjutant to sleep, the sergeants' mess.

I think that would be - I know Jack Jones very well and I respect him very much, but I would think that this is furphy that he has dreamt up because the only upstairs accommodation in the sergeants' mess was on the southern wing of the mess. I don't think there was any accommodation on the northern wing of the mess at all. And I lived upstairs there when I went to Binbrook initially. We were in a Nissen hut up near the hangers and we had this coal brazier, and I'd have to tell you this: it was so damn cold that the coal brazier used to keep the frost melted on the roof, and the only time I've ever seen this in my life - in a Nissen hut you had a bit of a roof ran out to the window, and so the dew and the frost that was melted by the coal brazier, keeping the roof warm inside, would drip off the individual corrugations and they'd drip to the ground and start forming icicles coming up. And I saw on one occasion those icicles coming up from the ground joined by the stalagmites and stalactites - I forget which is which. It was just like this width of bars of ice. We had it here the other day when we got down to only a couple of degrees of frost, there was a dripping tape out on the fence, and I brought inside a hunk of ice ...

(Wife) It was like a candle, wasn't it?

... about this high from the drip that had gone from the tap and kept on building up during the night. But I saw it go from the eve that ran out over the window that we had in these Nissen huts, just bars of ice.

(Wife) They used to be cold those Nissen huts.

Now, that would have been for the first winter we were there and then we finished up briefly down in the married quarters when that aircraft blew up, and then we finished up the last part of the war in the sergeants' mess, living upstairs. But to say the station adjutant (was sleeping) in the sergeants' mess, I'd say that would be a complete furphy.

> That's why I put it down, to check it out. I couldn't see why the flamin' station adjutant was sleeping in the sergeants' mess. Jacks mind must have wandered, because I questioned him, I queried it, and he still said yes.

No, that wouldn't be right.

> Who waited on the airmen for Christmas dinner? Was it the officers of the sergeants, or both? - airmens' mess, Christmas dinner. Do you recall working on the airmens' for Christmas dinner? I was a sergeant there in Christmas '43 and I can't remember doing it.

I can't remember xxx xxx, no - Christmas dinner.

(Wife) I was back home for Christmas and I just wanted to go home, so I had to go home.

I can't remember there being anything special about Christmas at all. No, I'd have to say that I don't remember ever being, as a sergeant, waiting on airmen in the airmens' mess.

It might have been the officers.

It might have been the officers, but that would surprise me.

Now, did you have a separate Christmas dinner? Did the WAAFS have a separate Christmas dinner?

(Wife) We used to have our own cookhouse down on the WAAF xxx.

So you'd have had your Christmas dinner down there.

(Wife) We used to go up to the airmens' mess after the first - oh, not very long - we weren't down there very long before they closed the WAAFs' mess up.

So you ate in the airmens' mess?

(Wife) xxx.

Fair enough, so you had your Christmas dinner in the airmens' mess. Do either of you recall the V1s flying over the station on Christmas Eve?

Yeah, I remember it well.

Was a hell of a shock. They were launching them from aircraft in the North Sea.

Yeah. Yeah, I remember it well, the clatter and the noise of these things going over.

Do you recall their approximate height?

Well, look, they seemed to be only just a few hundred feet up, the noise was so intense.

One bloke said fifty feet, but they were a bit higher than that.

I remember then going over the airmens' mess - we were down over the slope a bit - but I wouldn't have thought they'd have been more than two or three hundred feet high because of the enormous noise that they made.

This bloke said fifty feet, probably two hundred feet - they'd have to be a couple of hundred feet.

But I remember it well because I'd been in London when they were coming over there, and you'd be drinking in a tavern and you'd hear the clatter of these things, and everything would cease, people would stop talking, they'd stop drinking, and everybody would stop and listen until you heard the noise overhead ...

You were right.

... and then everybody started talking knowing that if the engine cut out at that stage somebody else was going to cop it.

That's for sure, that's what happened.

What would you say was the saddest part of your life at Binbrook? - both of you. Do you recall a particularly sad happening.

Look, the saddest happening that I experienced at Binbrook was when - E Easy was a stand-by aircraft this night. It was a new aircraft, it was delivered to the Squadron to replace one that was lost, and so there was no crew allocated to it because it was only checked over in the morning. And it was test flown, and I went up on the test flight, I went up with the pilot, and everything on the aircraft had been checked except the autopilot. And because it was only a short trip to the Ruhr we were told not to worry about the automatic pilot, but it was bombed up and fuelled up as a reserve aircraft.

And when A Able was doing its final run-up by the crew, hydraulic oil started to come out of the port-outer motor, come out of the cowls. And so the motor was shut down - all the motors were shut down - and I have to confess that I was there at the time. And when we looked at it there was hydraulic oil dripping off one of the - and the hydraulic lines were round about, oh, an inch thick, I suppose, and they came through the fire bulkhead behind the motor, with a big knuckle - and there was oil dripping off one of these knuckles - and I think the hydraulic pump on the starboard-outer motor ...

This is A Able?

Yeah. It fed one of the turrets - probably the mid-upper turret - and because this oil was dripping off those knuckles the line was checked and found that it was lose and it was tightened up. So the starboard-outer motor, with the cowls off, was started up and no oil came out and everybody thought that had fixed the oil leak. So the cowls were put on again and the motors were started up, but before the aircraft taxied out the hydraulic oil started to pour out of this starboard-outer motor again. So these blokes were instructed to get out of that aircraft and get over to E Easy which was the stand-by aircraft.

Now, I'd flown in it that afternoon, I'd gone up with a test pilot, who was a squadron leader, the flight commander, and flown in it after we'd done a full check. And I think the comment that he threw it around in the air and I think the comment that he made was 'very tasty, very sweet' - some flippant remark of that nature.

She'd just recently come to the Squadron?

Yeah, it was a new aircraft delivered then, had been checked over that morning and test-flown immediately after lunch, and then bombed up, and fuelled up for a spare aircraft - stand-by aircraft.

Anyway, when the crew - and it was a crew that had been on Stirlings, got halfway through on Stirlings and was transferred to Lancasters - as they came down the long runway, down past A Flight, before he even lifted from the ground, he was banking over, with his port wheel on the ground and his starboard wheel lifting up, and the aircraft took off the runway in a port bank. And I'd flown in the thing only hours before and everything was perfect.

And he took off, went round - which you never did with a bomb load on - in a climbing turn to port. And he went up, and he got up to about 3,000 feet, I suppose, and he kept on going round,

and round, and round, fortunately in concentric circles, moving a bit away from the drome - and the bank kept on getting steeper.

I assume that the only thing that could have been wrong was that we hadn't checked the automatic pilot because we were told not to bother about it because to get it ready as a stand-by aircraft. But, you know, the control for the automatic pilot was just on the left of the pilot's knee, and I could only assume that in the scramble to get from one aircraft to another that the pilot, with his knee, had engaged the automatic pilot. And the time that it took him to taxi right around the perimeter from A Flight, right around to the western boundary where C Flight was, on the 2,000-yard runway, that the gyros for the automatic pilot had got up, and because we didn't have time and we were told not to bother to trim the automatic pilot, that the automatic pilot was trimmed to ... and guide the aircraft to port.

And this bloke took off in this climbing turn and he kept on going in concentric circles. I assume that the automatic pilot - because the aircraft was a hundred per cent - that he'd knocked it in with his knee.

I got up to the control tower and spoke to him and said, 'Look, disengage your automatic pilot' - and this bloke, at this stage, was running out of strength and all he was doing was blubbering - 'I can't let go, I can't let go' - and the bank kept on getting steeper and steeper until finally he was going round almost in a tight vertical bank and gradually side-slipping.

> He told me his crew had baled out.

Yeah, well, they were too low to bale out, they never got the height to bale out. And finally he went in to the deck with a full bomb load and they were all blown up.

That was the most traumatic experience that I had because it was in an aircraft that I'd flown in that afternoon, gone up with - I think it was the squadron commander - and the aircraft was a hundred per cent. And then, when we checked up on this hydraulic leak this is what happened, that there was a small hydraulic pipe that came through to operate the hot and cold air shudder on the carburettor - you know, to prevent your carburettor from freezing up. The main hydraulic pipe for the turrets was about an inch in diameter, and for the undercarriage, but for these it was only round about, oh, it was about as thick as a pencil. When it came through the bulkhead the clip that was holding it wasn't holding it tight, and over a period of time it had chattered and there was a hole in the pipe. And with the hydraulic pressure in the pipe was squirting it up straight up to this knuckle about two feet higher on the fireproof bulkhead, but this particular hydraulic pump was operated from the starboard-inboard motor, so the leak had developed in the starboard-outboard. So the cowls were taken off - this knuckle had oil dripping from it, it was tightened, the motor was started up - no leak. Soon as all the motors were started up, the oil kept on coming out because this pipe was fed from the starboard-inboard.

That was the worst disaster, where you saw these fellows, and could hear this poor bloke blubbering over the intercom.

> We took off in front of him that night. I remember that well, a pilot called McKenzie. There are a few theories about that. Spike Marsh reckons it was as Roy reckons, the automatic pilot that knocked it in.

(Break in interview)

... you know, on the right-hand side of the pilot. That wheel worked in the reverse direction to what it did on the Stirling.

Yeah, I've heard this one, and instead of being zero trim he was on full trim.

Yeah. And in trying to trim out the port bank he was putting it tighter, trimming it tighter, into a port bank - either that or the automatic pilot had taken over and you couldn't ... you know, he accidentally engaged a lever of the automatic pilot which was adjacent to the pilot's knee in the aircraft.

And it wouldn't have been hard to knock into gear by vibration?

It would only be a matter of pulling the lever out, but by the time we were able to theorise on what the problem was - and you couldn't get to the control tower from the flights, of course, you could only do it from your control tower - and I got around there to give some input because I'd been in the aircraft that afternoon, as to what the problem might have been. Number one, the automatic pilot because it was only a trip to the Ruhr that night, and for that reason it was felt that adjusting the automatic pilot was not necessary.

Had the automatic pilot been adjusted would that have been of any assistance?

Well, if it had been the automatic pilot would have been such that when you put it in it should have flown straight and level, and if there was any slight inaccuracy you could have corrected that with your trim tabs. But if the automatic pilot was engaged to put the aircraft in to a tight left-hand turn, in the time it took him to taxi round the perimeter track, the gyros would have been up at full speed and the automatic pilot would have taken control and there is no way manually you could overcome the automatic pilot. But by the time it got to this particular stage where the number one thing that we felt was that he knocked the automatic pilot in and it could have been that. The other one, that he was spinning the wheel of his trim tab for his aileron the wrong way because they operated in the reverse direction of a Stirling.

I remember that going round.

But all he could say by this stage - he'd exhausted his strength - and all he could say was, 'But I can't let go, I can't let go' and so you couldn't give him any instructions because by that stage he was in a state of panic and physical exhaustion, and so the aircraft slowly kept on side-slipping as it went round in these circles. And fortunately it got far enough away from the drome to go in to open country.

I recall that; I know it upset us to hear this, but we didn't listen long enough because the pilot switched off the RT. Spike Marsh reckons it was [George in]. Bob Wade taking off one night ...

Spike Marsh reckoned that the automatic pilot was engaged?

Yeah. Bob Wade, one night, taking off, slewed off the runway, pulled up, went around and had another try, slewed off again. The rear gunner said, 'Have you got George in, Bob?' - he'd have George in too.

Yeah.

See, he could have taken off, could have been in serious trouble.

Well, this was a brand-new aircraft that had only been delivered and checked that morning. I went up on the test flight with the aircraft and it was a hundred per cent. Then it was bombed up and fuelled up as a stand-by aircraft, and then this other thing happened with A Apple and they were transferred over in a hurry because most of the aircraft - or all had taken off because of the delay - and this bloke was in a panic because he didn't want to get left behind in the bomber stream, and he could have accidentally knocked the George in.

Fair enough - a very sad affair. Well, that's about it.

Could you fill me in; I don't think we recorded what you had to say about Bert [Berman]. Bert Berman - if you tell me about the occasion he brought the aircraft back in a mess.

Well, first of all was at Binbrook when he brought an aircraft back, I think, from ...

Breeton or Binbrook?

At Breeton. He brought a Lancaster back that had been badly shot up - I think the raid was on Stettin. He'd had, amongst the other flack holes that he had, on his port inboard motor, the base was blown out of his oil tank and so the aircraft lost all its oil. And without oil the engine eventually seized up but he wasn't able to ...

Feather it.

... feather the prop because the take-off point from the oil tank always left six or eight gallons of oil there for that particular purpose. He wasn't able to feather the motor so it kept on windmilling without oil until it just snapped the crankshaft and the airscrew kept on going round and round.

He eventually got the aircraft back - he'd lost part of his trim-tab controls, he had the drag of this port inboard motor windmilling, and they made up a harness by cutting up one of the parachutes so that the bomb aimer could lie back in the harness with part of the cords attached to the rudder pedal, and use his weight to assist Berman to keep the aircraft on course. And he eventually brought it back and he landed at Breeton.

I remember it very well. Whenever there was a breeze blowing you had this propeller going round and round because, you know, it had just snapped the crankshaft off and the propeller just wasn't turning the motor at all, it just snapped off in the crankcase - in the gearing mechanism of the propeller. And it was the only aircraft that we left behind when we moved from Breeton down to Binbrook, it was handed over to the manufacturers crew to carry out the repairs that were so extensive. And he got an immediate award of a DFM for getting the aircraft back.

Then subsequently, on another raid - and that was the one that you saw the photograph of with the bloke standing up in the middle of the elevators at the back. He brought this one back and it was so badly damaged that it was the only occasion in the history of the Squadron, that I can recall, that an aircraft was flown back, and landed on all wheels - it wasn't a crash landing, it

wasn't a belly landing, he landed on all wheels - it was so extensively damaged that they decided to put it in category AC which is the category of damage which was considered to be beyond repair. And so they made a Christmas tree out of the aircraft just by stripping it of all the bits and pieces.

> That was a common term, was it, when you cannibalised an aircraft, to take parts of it as a Christmas tree?

Yeah.

> And then on this op, after he had been away on leave, you were going to go with him on that op, were you?

Yeah. Well, as I mentioned, I was going to go on this raid to Turin, I think it was - Turin, [Spesia], one of the long hauls to Italy anyway. And when we were all ready to go they cancelled the operation. And so he went off on leave and when he came back - we'd already had two of the Hamburg raids - and he came back in time for the third one. And our losses were minimal on the first two raids because of the introduction of Operation Window. And on the third raid, again there were only a handful of aircraft that failed to return from the xxx xxx and [Terminus] was one of them. And I was already to go, I had my parachute and I'd previously tapped in to the oxygen, I had the oxygen mask and every bit. And because he'd had these two horrendous experiences of bringing back aircraft, first of all, one that we left behind at Breeton, for which he got a DFM for getting it back; and the second one, well, it was considered to be so badly damaged that it was beyond repair, and, as I mentioned, made a Christmas tree or cannibalised, I think.

I think he must have had a premonition because it was only just as we were about to board the aircraft for take-off that he came up to me and he said, 'Look, I've disappointed you before.' He said, 'I wonder if you'd wait until I get my hand in after leave, but I'll certainly take you before I finish my tour.'

> You'd have both known the target then, of course - of he'd have known. Did you know the target also?

The target was Hamburg.

> You were going to Hamburg quite willingly when he said that?

Yeah. And, of course, our losses were light because of the introduction of Operation Window. I looked on it, and I would have thought that he'd have looked on it, as a bit of a pushover.

> So it was some premonition, as you say.

Yeah, so obviously he must have had some premonition that his number was up.

> I don't think I taped your arrival back after going to France on the ski thing. You went across there with Crowe.

Crowe, yeah.

Right, went round three times.

Yeah.

And you came back over the waves, over the hedges.

Yeah.

And you were late home, and you come back and there's this truck out at the dispersal.

Everybody had gone and all the aircraft were back and parked, and as we came across over the drome there was this one solitary vehicle parked beside E Easy's dispersal waiting for somebody to come home. And that's when I nearly got run down, of course.

Nearly got your ring back too.

Yeah.

Well, that's fine thanks, Roy. Thanks, Peg. You've filled in a lot of things I was doubtful about, things that I knew nothing about and things that I wanted to be backed up or denied. Well, you've done that on a few things. Anything that's left up in the air, well, I'll say nothing about that.

Well, if there's anything that arises ...

I'll give you a ring.

Any doubts or queries that you have, just get on the blower.

Yeah, I'll give you a ring, I'll do that. And you've got some lovely photographs there, but as I say, that's the last thing. It will be about the middle of next year, I would say, so I will probably come down and have a yarn with you, and might pick a few of those out and borrow them off you.

(Incidental conversation)

... with nuts almost burnt on to the stubs. The nuts would warm up a bit.

And so hard to get off?

So hard to get off because of the friction of getting them off. And when you put them down on the ice on the stand they'd melt a bit of ice and they freeze on, and they'd just freeze there. In order to get them off you'd have to tap them gently with a spanner in order to get them off the ice to put them back on. Or, if you were working - you couldn't work with gloves, you couldn't work with gloves because you just didn't have the sensitive enough feel to be able to work with gloves, and your hands would have to be absolutely frozen. And, you know, if you dropped a spanner that you'd been working with, because of the numbness of your hands, if you dropped it and it fell down on to the concrete pavement below - which was also covered in ice and frost - you'd get down the ladder but you'd also have to take something with you to hit the spanner with because it would have frozen to the ice. The end result was that your hands used to just get

frozen. You'd go back in to the Flight office where we had this corrugated iron Nissen hut, but with a coal brazier there, and I've seen grown men, and I've done it myself, just cry with the pain of your hands thawing out. And as soon as they thawed out sufficiently to have a bit of feel in them, you'd be back in to the fray again.

> Those stubs, were they hard to get out? Once you established a stub had to come out, was it very difficult to get that out?

As long as you get the nuts off. And once we got the proper tools to do it, which we got from America. With the old box spanners that were supplied to us by the Royal Air Force, it was hell, but once we got good, thin, chrome vanadium socket spanners to get them off, it wasn't that difficult.

> What was the hierarchy of control over you? There was George Champion, was it, engineering officer? Was there anybody between George and you?

Oh, well, there was the flight sergeant. There was a sergeant in charge of each individual aircraft, but then in charge of the Flight you had a flight sergeant, and the bloke we had in A Flight was a chap by the name of Dave [Shire], and Dave was a top-line bloke. And then the bloke over Dave used to be a warrant officer who had his office in the hanger, a bloke by the name of Ron Cox; and then Ron Cox was answerable to George Champion for the overall ...

> Where did Bert Newton come in to the picture?

Well, Bert Newton came along after George Champion left.

> So he took George's job?

George Champion came back home with all the married people, and at that stage Bert Newton was George Champion's understudy and he was promoted up.

> He was WO, was he?

No, he would have been a flying officer and the establishment for an engineering officer is flight lieutenant.

> He came to the Squadron to understudy George?

Yeah - George was 2IC, and then when George was sent - well, I daresay you didn't have an engineering officer and deputy engineering officer, you just had an engineering officer. Bert Newton came along some time before George Champion was sent back home, so when George Champion came back to Australia with all the married blokes he moved up to engineering officer.

> Right. Now, just a quick look at this; your support of technical education here in the area. Now, you were motivated to look in to that because you felt that the young people in the area weren't getting a fair go with technical education.

Well, I knew from my own personal experience as an apprentice how difficult it was to be able to succeed in an apprenticeship by correspondence and just to learn practically on the day-to-day

job without the theoretical backup. And so when I got involved myself with fairly sizeable service operations on commercial refrigeration, air conditioning, and all household white goods, and also radio and TV, I was training apprentices myself. There was no backup support for them here and I used to have some of them enrol in the School of External Studies at Sydney Technical College, and some of them enrolled at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Finally, because the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology was superior, I felt, to the School of External Studies at Sydney Tech, we eventually finished up enrolling all our students in ...

RMIT.

... RMIT. But this became - it was a costly operation for the employer, and when I looked at all other trades, they were in the same situation. The builders weren't training the people that they ought to have been training, the plumbers weren't doing so - pluming courses were at Newcastle, the nearest to Bega - and so, at that stage, through the Chamber of Commerce - and I was president of the Chamber of Commerce in the early 60s, and I started beating a drum at that stage for a better deal for the young people of the community, particularly in a gowning area, to make sure that the area was properly provided with tradesmen that were coming through the ranks all the time.

And so I made representations, initially as president of the Chamber of Commerce, but I had a little bit more clout as the mayor of the town, and I was also on the Region Advisory Council for this Region 8 area of New South Wales, and I made a point of getting on to the Educational Subcommittee. And I got the Region Advisory Council to accept the fact that the most disadvantaged area in Region 8 was Bega area, and it should be this south-east corner, and it should be given top priority for capital funding from the Commonwealth Government for technical college facilities.

And eventually, as a result of that, we got a bloke by the name of Bill Robertson, who was the New South Wales Director General of Technical Education, came down to Bega for an on-the-spot assessment. When he came I made sure all local government bodies were represented at that meeting, all the main employer groups were represented at that meeting. We had a prepared submission to table and hand to him, but we had a few picked spokesmen to highlight the disabilities of the various industries that were represented. As a result of that the then Director General, Bill Robertson, put Bega on a priority list for commonwealth funding.

And finally, once you get on a priority list, of course, doesn't mean you get a technical college the next year, you just keep working up the priorities and you keep on advancing. As technical colleges are completed you advanced about - you know, we started about Priority Number 50, and we kept on advancing eight to ten each year as other technical colleges were completed, until finally we got quite a few million dollars allocated to built - it's a very fine technical college. I think it's the most modern, and the best landscaped, and the most attractive college campus in the whole of the Illawarra region. It's a lot smaller than Wollongong which caters for round about 15,000 students; well, we cater for about 1,500 here.

What building was named after you?

The principal technical block. You know, they've got a number of blocks; one for administration; one for commercial courses - for secretarial courses, typing and that sort of thing; and another one for computer studies, and the library and various services; they've got another one for rural studies; and they've got another one for automotive ...

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

09/00