ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

TITLE: JIM HEUGIL - 460 SQUADRON RAAF

INTERVIEWEE: JIM HEUGIL

INTERVIEWER: LAURIE FIELD

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

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

You were talking about Ron and G for George.

Well, G for George had been taken off the active list and was being kept at a hard standing as an emergency plane. Now, you know the G for George I'm talking about?

Yeah, I do. We did one op in it, we went to Berlin one night in G for George. I flew with a bloke called Bob Howel - do you remember Bob Howel at all?

The name is familiar. Anyway, his aircraft had gone on the blink, and my aircraft had been lost, so they said, 'You take over G for George for a while.' And Ron came along that night - it was his twenty-first birthday that night, or the next, you know, past twelve o'clock - and he'd done six or seven trips and we reckoned the odds were very much against him. Now, well, we all used to say we'll take a bet on that - 'I bet he doesn't come back, he's been going too long.' And he said to us - I remember speaking out through the cockpit - 'I'll see you jokers tomorrow down at the Duke of ...'

Maquis of Granby.

'... Maquis of Granby and we'll have a little birthday drink.' Well, of course, as it was our custom in the ground crew, we always waited for the aircraft to come back, sometimes three or four in the morning, or five, you know.

What, all of you, all of the ground crew, or only one or two of you maybe?

Well, sometimes there might be two of us out of that particular aircraft's ground crew. But then again, in this occasion, all the boys - my team ...

How many was that, in your team?

I think that time I think I had five. It used to vary a bit, you know; you had to allow for xxx. There was some RAF fellows amongst them, quite a few of them.

And we waited, and of course he was a little bit late, and we started to think, oh, wonder if he's made it. Then he rolled up to the tarmac.

You reckoned after seven raids there was a good chance he wouldn't make it?

Oh, well, I think they took Ron off Berlin raids, you know, because he'd done so many.

That's right.

That was dicing a little bit too long, often. But, you know, we were up all hours of the night. We had to be there to see the aircraft off in case there was fog, and being the sergeant in charge of the aircraft, and Hughie Edwards - were you in 460?

Yeah, I did a tour in 460, I was there in Ron's time, I went there in November '43 and finished my tour in April '44. We did eleven Berlins.

That Berlin trip used to get a few casualties.

Yeah, it was terrible.

Of course, there was what do you call it had xxx aircraft - Harry Tickle. Harry went on the [factory] there and gave them a little talk on the good work they were doing. Then, of course, they got a new aircraft. G for George had been refitted with engines and different parts in the fuselage, but she was inclined to flap her wings a bit, you know, under a big load. I think she xxx up on the board then, xxx when he took it. She was finding it difficult to get the ceiling. What were you, a pilot?

No, I was a wireless operator.

Wireless operator.

Yeah.

Well, those different aircraft varied. There were some that came from Canada with a Packard Merlin in them. They seemed to be very good, they could xxx and get another four or five hundred feet in their ceiling.

That's the Mark IIIs

It all depends ...

They were the Mark IIIs, weren't they? The Mark III Lanc had the Packard motor.

Yes, that's right, yes. And they did vary, there's no doubt about it, in different crews, but then you'd get one crew would become attached to an aircraft, particularly after they'd done about fifteen trips, and they didn't want to fly anything else because they had that feeling that it was a lucky aircraft.

Of course, we used to put in ours, and then there'd be a stand-down, of course. At Binbrook we used to go into ...

Grimsby?

... Lincoln or Grimsby, mostly into Grimsby, and we'd meet with our various aircrews and you'd only finish up not knowing which way we'd come back home (laughs).

Were you RAF or Australian Air Force, Jim?

I was in the Royal Australian Air Force. I joined up in 1939; my number was 5517. I was in under the - well, under that permanent scheme for a month or so. Of course, we did the usual square bashing and you had to be good in those days - you know all the different things you pass. And our training - we did metallurgy until they diced it, but there was a Professor Edwards that was in charge of that and I rather liked it, being a fitter and turner by trade. But the others said, 'Oh, that's bull, we don't need it', but I don't know, I thought it was very handy in a lot of instances.

You would have found it, during the war it would have been handy.

xxx because I did a course at the factory at Preston on Lancasters, I was on first, I was on hand guns with 455. They were first in 5 Group Bomber Command, then they were playing Coastal Command.

At [Swinderby].

Swinderby - and they had several satellites dromes.

They went on to Beaufighters, didn't they?

Yes. They xxx xxx dropping - we were at Lucas then, in Scotland - and the Hampden was alright but it wasn't as good as the Beaufighter that they eventually had. I'd left then, I left after the Russians - remember that?

Yes.

They went to Russia, to Murmansk. Actually I was going on that trip and they took me off to go to 460. The bloke who took my place, a corporal - see, one ground crew went to [Neeturkra]. Anyway, they were shot up and they crashed in Switzerland - in Sweden. So I was lucky in that respect. He was a friend of mine too, Don Nelson, a quiet kind of a bloke. I was annoyed because I wanted to go to Russia.

They were using those Hampdens as torpedo bombers, weren't they?

Yes, that's right.

There must have been some losses on that, Jim - losses, casualties.

Well, there were, yes. The biggest fault with them, they didn't recover quick enough after [they'd dropped the] torpedoes, you see, and when they got the Beaufighters they were not good. Then they put a lot of dihedral on the tail - I don't know whether you ever saw that.

Yeah, I saw that.

Quite a lot.

And that helped.

When they dropped the torpedo they automatically came up a bit,you see. I've been with them on one or two training flights, and you get choppy waves and the props would pick up some of the tops, you know. I don't know, I didn't feel very comfortable about it, to tell you the truth, but they were so young that these fellows - you know, the average age, you know what they were.

Yes.

And we used to go across St Andrews Golf Course - we were at Crail, that navy base, HMS [Jackal] - and they got permission for low flying over St Andrews Golf Course. I'll tell you, those boys really took advantage of it. You'd see a tree coming up and think, this is it, and they'd

pull it up and away they'd go. And then they decided to station us there for a few weeks instead of ...

What was the name of this place - Crowal, did you say?

Crail - C-R-A-I-L - a naval air base, fleet air arm base.

Was that when they were at Lucas?

That was when they were at Lucas, they had to go over there to learn about the Whitehead torpedo and torpedo dropping.

They went to Crail to do that?

Yes, because, you see, it was a Swordfish station - those Swordfish - oh, no wonder they lost them. A young sublieutenant, he said, 'Oh, come and [take it] for a run,' he said, 'you can have a go at flying it.' I said, 'I haven't much of a clue on that.' He said, 'Oh, anyone can fly it.' Of course, there was slow and we dropped the torpedo - you could shoot them down with a shanghai really, no wonder, yeah. You had to be young and silly to fly them.

You were posted from 464 to 460, were you?

I went from 455 to 460, then I was on the [con unit]. Well, see, I went to ... they had Wellingtons at the time. Did you ever hear of - or you might have met him - Colonel Knox?

Yes, I know Colonel Knox.

Oh, well, the colonel was there and ...

This is the OTU you are talking about, not Litchfield OTU, you weren't there, at Litchfield?

Where?

Litchfield OTU, were you there?

Yeah, I went there, that was a mistake, they thought I was flying crew. I said, 'I don't mind flying,' I said, 'I want flying crew pay and the pension that goes with it' because, you see, if you get knocked down - because I had a wife and two children - and if you are authorised, that covered you. I know we were working on a Lysander there - they didn't know what to do with me, I'd been lost, and these old OTU aircraft, there were some with Rolls Royce engines in - I'm talking about Wimpeys - and they were mostly [PD14s], but they were oil stained - and you know they were canvas on a geodesic structure - they used to flap like that, flying, or running a lap. They had those xxx xxx raised they'd put these into it, and they said never, never have been on that. One crashed on the end of the runway - I was in the xxx xxx at the time - well, I'd see the particular aircraft out of xxx gunnery flight often - it crashed at the end and blew up, of course, killed the lot, and all the glasses and bottles on the side smashed, came down, from that. I don't know what went wrong there, she probably didn't have the lifting power with the load that she had, that was what it was.

So if you'd have flown as aircrew, what would you have been flying as?

Flight engineer.

Flight engineer, fair enough.

See, a lot of our fellows wanted to transfer - ground crew - wanted to transfer to aircrew, and they gave us a lecture. They said we've spent so many thousands on training you, you are doing a better job keeping the aircraft in the air, and we don't want to lose you because we've got no replacements here, whereas aircrew, we've got thousands of Empire Air, you see. Well, that's the way they put it, but eventually they lifted that ban and they allowed a lot of the boys - well, not a lot - the first ten or twelve flight engineers - did you know Bluey Barlow?

Yeah, I knew Bluey Barlow - I know Don Delaney.

Don Delaney - Don, I've met him of recent years. Well, they were amongst the first ones, but out of twelve they lost about eight in the first three trips.

I think only four survived, only four left out of that twelve.

Four, that's absolutely right too. Have you met Don Delaney of late?

Yeah, I saw Don about a month ago.

Oh, did you? Is he alright?

He's alright, he's had a stroke, I think, but he's alright.

He had a nervous breakdown a few years ago.

And he had a stroke a few years ago - a couple of years ago.

He was flying as a flight engineer with Qantas, I think it was, and a friend of mine in Sydney, [Oak Etchels], who was the inspector of licences - engineer xxx - and Don come to him and he said - I was talking to him - he said, 'I was a bit afraid of [Reid] granting Don's licence because of his appearance - his medical appearance. But apparently he got out of that and was alright.

He had a stroke, poor fellow, but it doesn't show up, he looks alright, he sounds alright. No, you would have been over qualified for a flight engineer, over qualified because the flight engineers that came through, doing the job they had to - our bloke was a London copper, knew nothing about xxx at all. So those flight engineers that came through the Empire Air Training Scheme, they didn't have any engineering background at all, a lot of them.

Well, you see, that's why the authorities didn't want us to go.

No, fair enough.

Because I was a specialist on hydraulics, I'd been to the Dowty School of Hydraulics and I've got a certificate there somewhere.

What, in England?

Yes, at Chelmsford. Actually, I did two courses there and then I was at the factory, the air frame factory, and I became a bit of an expert. So I went from Litchfield to [Bottersford] for the formation of 467 Squadron. We only had about one or two aircraft, but they were coming in fairly quickly - not as bad as when we first arrived in England where two aircraft, two Hampdens on the Squadron, everyone wanted a bomber, pushing it - 'Give us a go, let's have a go' - because it was all done physically then; it was only later on they had hoists xxx, and they all wanted to chalk on it. The Hampdens, you know, they had their heating system was a muffler round the exhaust and it heated a boiler - the boiler was on the rear of the main spar. Now, I've been in there when there's icicles hanging from the ...

From the spar?

... from the tank, yeah. So the heater system was a lot to be desired. We used to have dinner, we used to kind of nurse a crew along, particularly if we got on well with them, we used to go on leave with them, if we could, and have a drinks up. Of course, we used to be very grieved when we lost them.

Yeah, I was going to ask you that. You'd have lost a few crews in your time, wouldn't you?

I did, particularly - flight commander - I think I lost two - and there's a group of them in the War Museum at Canberra ...

Not Ricky [Jarmon's] crew?

Eh?

Ricky Jarmon?

That's right.

Squadron leader.

He went on my aircraft.

Did he?

And because we were very upset because he was so capable and solid, you know. We thought - of course, that was his second tour, wasn't it?

Yeah.

And he was a flight commander too.

That's right, he was. There was only one got out of that crew, the rear gunner.

There was a survivor, was there?

Yes, a bloke called Tom Lynch, the rear gunner. I talked to him in Sydney a couple of months ago.

Oh, did you?

He was the only one out and he was unconscious, terribly knocked around. He was unconscious for six weeks, woke up in a German Air Force hospital at Frankfurt, after six weeks, and his memory of being shot down and everything is gone. Six weeks he can't recall a thing - a lone survivor.

One survivor, I didn't know there was a survivor.

Tom Lynch.

You should keep tabs on him, fellows like that.

You say you'd have had a lot of crews; in your time you'd have had a lot of crews.

Yeah. And some of them, you know - I remember one crew with only one to go. They said it ought to be easy tonight. They got the chop. He'd done twenty-nine.

Many a time they wouldn't have come home to roost, would they? The chicken wouldn't have come home to roost many a time for you. I suppose you never got used to that, did you? Did you ever get hardened to it?

Well, I suppose you did in a way, but different ways where you used to talk about them and, you know, wonder if they were POWs and all that kind of thing.

One of the most arrogant of pilots - and we couldn't get through to him - was Kingsford-Smith's nephew. Did you know him?

[Rollo].

Rollo. I don't know whether ...

Same old story - carry on.

... whether I was mistaken.

No, you are not mistaken.

But he was - he wasn't our usual form of aircrew at all. We lost interest, we couldn't get through to him at all. I don't think he got on very well with his crew either, I'm not sure.

He didn't, no. I haven't struck anybody yet that's said a good word about him.

I'm afraid I couldn't. In 467, when I was with them for a while - I had to go and help start that off because of my superior knowledge - and then the boys kept coming in from other areas. I got hosted out of that because of the engineer officer, we didn't see eye-to-eye, he was a string-bag

engineer officer - you know, he used to [watch his things]. And we were always short of parts and oil, and hydraulic oil. Now, Dowty emphasised, you must have clean oil because some had rubber valves and some were ... a kind of a plastic anyway - and we'd seen, you know, bisected, what happened - it was a very good course that Dowty course.

How do you spell Dowty?

D-O-W-T-Y.

That would have been a RAF station, was it?

No, they had their own place at Chelmsford, it was an old mansion.

A civilian place, was it?

Civilian training. It had things like pressing a button and a skylight opening. I remember an old grape vine there, they reckon it was 150 years old, growing through the place. And the old commandant, who was in charge of discipline, he was an old Ghurkha major, and he used to walk round with a [cookrin]. He had us digging trenches - mind you, we did get the odd raid, but had us digging trenches, things like that. He used to get round with his red tunic on too, and the [cookrin] in his belt. He was made for the service, you know, he'd been in India for donkey's years.

Now, that wasn't a service place at all, it was civilian?

That was a Dowty place.

That was civilian?

Civilian, yes.

Specialising in hydraulics?

In hydraulics, yes, and you really got the core of it. I'm transgressing a bit.

This engineer officer - and we were short - and the warrant officer, the bloke who was from Sydney - do you come from Sydney?

I've lived in Sydney, yeah - Canberra now.

Canberra, are you?

Yeah.

Well, he had a boat place - Palm Beach - Tom Smith his name was, and Tom was - we'd come from 455, he went with me - he was a warrant officer then. And this engineer officer wanted to mix engine oil with hydraulic oil. I said, 'You can't do that' - 'I can't see why not' - I said, 'You would be a murderer' xxx xxx - I said, 'They'll go to use their guns and they will be frozen up because of the liquid content in engine oil - there is a certain amount. You see, hydraulic oil is entirely free of any moisture and it's practically - although there is nothing non-compressible -

but was as close as possible. So that meant that any services hydraulic, instead of getting that spongy movement, you got a hard movement straight away. I tried to tell him this but he would not grasp it - and of course, there was one or two little other things we fell out with. And he said, 'You'd better get back to 460' so the next minute I'm posted.

It was a good thing for 460 anyhow.

Oh, yes. Breeton was the first place I went. They had that pub there, you know, the Seven Sisters; they called it the Fourteen Tits.

Paddy - we lost Paddy Boyle.

Yes, sad, sad, I knew Paddy.

Paddy was a sergeant then - Peter Isaacson, Colonel Knox - Patterson came later - Patter son - when he got the Lancs - Patterson was the mid-upper - Patterson.

Oh, Patterson Haden.

Haden. Pat Haden and the colonel, they never got any ... they were never given a commission. They reckon they might have been good airmen but they'd never made officers and gentlemen.

Spike Marsh told me that himself. They went back on a second tour with Spike Marsh, and Spike said he's have loved to have given them a commission but he said he just couldn't do it.

(Laughs) Yeah. Hughie used to come over to the sergeants' mess quite a lot.

Did he?

Because he was a great maintenance man. When I say that, he used to say without good maintenance we can't keep up our record. And if there was an aircraft out he'd go personally along and see what was holding it up. So naturally we got to know him quite well. Like when that cookie went up. Hughie reckons that blokes on foot were beating him (laughs) - in the car - I know, I know.

Well, I experienced something like that. Do you know those concrete pens they had for German submarines that rest ...

Yes, yes, I do.

Well, they had a different kind of bomb which was pear shaped, for penetrating concrete.

Well, we'd had one out one night - well, they'd had them out. The load had been altered like they normally do, you know, [went about and altered it]. I'm talking as though I am there. And petrol changed, bomb loads changed, and we used to do a lot of this, changing loads.

And this bomber come out and filled it up with some incendiaries - well, they didn't know they did, there wasn't going to be incendiaries on this particular occasion with this bomb. Anyway, it was taken off and put back in. I don't know whether we got the same one, but we got one back.

Now, the crew had said to me, 'Try and get us out first' - you know how we used to bring them [Howard Stanlies] and one after the other used to take off.

Yes.

On - not the [Howard Stanlies], the lead in - up to the end of the runway anyway.

The funnel?

Yeah. Used to get them all lined up, you'd see them going one after the other. Of course, I got there first and they scrubbed the ops, so naturally I was last back. Sometimes I used to taxi them back because I had permission to do that, you see, I would taxi them. There was just sufficient fuel to allow you to taxi them.

Anyway, I brought it back to the [factor], turned it round - and they used to put the covers on - I used to always like the covers over the plastic because the weather did affect them, you know. And a voice said, 'Are you putting the covers on?' I said, 'Yes, we are.'

So we put the covers on and I left two blokes - it was our turn to do the patrol. They used to do it on bikes, we all had bikes those days. I just got to the other side of the drome and there was this blinding flash and explosion. I thought, God! Jerry's caught up with us, he's going to splatter the runway. There was no more and we stopped the truck, waited - hadn't got far away - and these two boys came round - I could see it was over there and I thought well, they've got knocked off. They said, 'A for Apple's gone.' I said, 'What happened?' They said, 'It's disappeared, it's blown up.' And I said, 'Oh, God! It's only done twelve hours.' I said, 'I'm counting on ...'

So we went back and oh, there's a hole in the hard standing and petrol had blown around, and it burnt. I found the tail wheel the next day, down the paddock, so they must have had a fair boot in those bombs.

We tried to work it out with the armourers, what must have happened, and they reckoned that it must have got the nose hit because that delayed action that they used to have on some of them we a phial of acid, and when it was hit it used to burn one little disk of some ...

It used to create a little disk.

And that used to go until it let the spring go, then off it went. So it must have been working all the time. And we were talking about it later, you know, thought, God! he'd have been up, you know there was a circle all together. What would have happened with that going up, it would have knocked half a dozen down at least.

Was that the night that Chad Martin was there and the other aircraft got lit up too? This is a different time, is it?

Oh, that was a different time, that was while we were cooking.

Oh, I didn't know about that one that you told me of. When was that, roughly, would you say that happened? Was that at Breeton?

No, it wasn't; I've got a feeling it might have been 467.

467?

Mm. I'm not quite so sure about that.

I think it might have been 467.

Yeah.

Fair enough.

We had a crew there on J Johnny 2, on 467, and his name was Wilson - Pluto Wilson - cocky little bloke. He had a good crew and his rear gunner was an Irishman. They were going on this raid that night and you know, they used to carry Window [these slicks] and propaganda stuff. And when they were loading them the string broke and it rushed on one of the propellers, sent them right underneath all the wires. And I said, 'You can't go like that.' Pluto said, 'Oh, you are too bloody fussy.' I said, 'Well, we are going to take them out before you go.' So he got his boys and packed them in the bag, took them off. I said, 'If you get on fire and your hydraulics get burning,' I said, 'it will be like a blowlamp.' He said, 'Christ! you're a cheer-up.' I said, 'Well, reduce the odds.' He said, 'Alright, I'll do it for you.'

And sure enough, they did, and they got a hole as big as that in the floor of the aircraft. Paddy got hit in the ankle - I don't know whether he lost his leg or not, he went to hospital headquarters somewhere. I think one of the other blokes got hit too, I think the mid-upper, but it was slightly. But Pluto said to me, 'Are you psychic or something?'

Yeah, could have caused a lot of trouble with stuff all over the place.

Yes, well ...

That would burn pretty easily, wouldn't it, that stuff?

Oh, yes, particularly blown up - they would have been blown up particularly if the hydraulic liner would have severed or anything like that. Anyway, they survived it.

Weather conditions, Jim; you must have found that weather terribly hard to work in.

Oh. There's a book here of 455, I'll just show you what one, see if I can find it. The snow and the cold, you know, you couldn't use spanners and things like that.

That's right, because you couldn't use gloves; you might use mittens or something like that.

Yes.

Even in the hangers it would have been cold, wouldn't it?

Oh, yes. They had those steam heaters in the office. You see, those are the conditions that we

worked in - this was at Skellingthorpe, a satellite drome of Swinderby - it was a xxx.

Midwinter?

Yeah. It seemed to last so long too.

What's that? The story of 455 Squadron, tell me more - J H W Lawson.

Mickey Martin came to us - you know that's where he got his grounding.

Did he?

A bloke named [Lindale] - the wine people here - he was the CO, and Mickey Martin knew ...

Yeah, I know Mickey Martin - know of him.

He came as a navigator because he'd failed on his pilots' course, but [Lindberg], they were short of pilots and so he gave him a chance. I don't know whether anyone knows much about this, but Mickey, he failed it, he was just xxx him getting off. You know, Isaacson was a troubled bloke on the take-off.

Was he?

And he landed - they reckon he used to land them from ten feet up. Some of them used to bounce down but then, that was quite a common occurrence with some of them because ...

But no, those conditions must have been terrible, working conditions for you.

What made me remember Mickey very well was his flamboyant attitude. He had a revolver in one flying boot and a knife in the other.

Wouldn't have gone too well if he was shot down in enemy territory because they'd have probably shot him as an excuse.

That's right.

[Those shoes he had.]

Now, you'd have been a member of the Blue Draft, wouldn't you? The Blue Draft.

I went over with 452, but we were - with Blue Draft, they were with us. I don't know whether you've ever heard of the mutiny at Halifax.

No, no.

Well, we were at Halifax and there were about thirty of us were given a birth on an [R] merchant cruiser. (Aside: I've got it here somewhere, probably picked it up with xxx telling anyone.)

Anyway, this R merchant cruiser, it was an old boat - you know, [in the heads], with dividing

partitions for us to - well, you could put your foot through them. We had seventy-two ships in the convoy when we left Halifax in Canada, went down and picked up - they picked up quite a few there and went up and picked - the convoy consisted of seventy-two ships and, of course, they always put their speed to the lowest - that was about five or six knots - and we were bound for Reykjavik - and we went through the Belle Isle Straits. We were living in the R merchant cruiser. She had eight six-inch guns and a bigger one on the stern, and I said to the [gunlayer], 'Have you ever fired this?' and he said, 'No, I hope to God we don't. He said, 'The arse will fall off her if we do.' (Laughs)

Anyway, we are charging along and a fog came down - we'd seen several icebergs in the afternoon, off the coast of Labrador - we went through the Belle Isle Straits - and came down, we couldn't see that far, and this crash, and we heal over - oh, we've been torpedoed. The skipper had told us all that, he said, 'Now, we've got all the holds are full of empty forty-gallon drums.' He said, 'We'll take six xxx torpedoed ...' - he was a gong hunter. His brother had got a VC and he wanted one. We were afraid we'd meet up with the Bismark, or what was it? I forget the other one.

The [Sharnhorst]?

Yeah, but there was another one, a lighter cruiser.

I know the one you mean, yeah, I know.

We thought, well, we are dead ducks if we meet up with them with this bloke. And he said, 'It's forty-two below freezing,' he says, 'you wont last, so stick to the ship.' Of course, we stayed kind of beached on this, about eighty tons of ice fell from the top, and it would be like a pale amethyst, transparent nearly, but this pale - it must have been a glacier that was a million years old, you know. Of course, we being in the air force, the navy said, 'You break that up and throw it over the side' see, junior service, they came the senior service on us. And I remember looking at this stuff and thinking, that must have been a million years old.

But anyway, the convoy passed on, there were few corvettes with it, and we had to return to Halifax. The dropped us there and they went down to Boston for ship repairs. But, you know, they shut the bulkheads off when there is anything like that happen.

Anyway, we got back to Halifax and we found out we were about to sail on the Strathnaver. Well, that was alright, kept all our bags, sea bags and everything were on, taken up on board. And we found out that we were going into a place that had been vacated by a thousand Italian prisoners of war, that were in the ship, they'd moved them amidships - this was aft - and we weren't over keen on this - we were in hammocks, you know. We just objected, you see, we said, oh, we are not going.

So at that time the [Gobels] - was the name ... he was an Air Vice-Marshal Gobels - belonging to the Australian Air Force - not xxx.

No, Gobels, he wasn't a ... not Williams?

No, it was something like that.

Something like Gobels? I'll work it out, I've got a list.

And Dickie Williams came afterwards. But he said, 'You know,' he said, 'I have the authority to have you all shot for mutiny.'

He was there at the time, was he?

He was at Ottawa, flew out from Ottawa, he was the air attached - not attached, but the air ...

Something like the air attache.

Air attache.

Air attache - Ottawa.

From the Empire School.

What draft was this, Jim, that you were with? What group of blokes were you with?

This was Blue Draft.

Blue Draft, yeah.

And 452.

And 452.

Yeah. We've seen Blue Draft, so what ... we were a little bit [fearful]. Well, why should we have to take the prisoners of war's place. All we asked was if we could sleep on the deck, and they said, 'No, we can't trust you, you light cigarettes.' Well, I don't know, it's possible xxx. Well, we said, 'What about sleeping on the floor in the dining room?' [Well, they let us] but that came after a day or two at sea, when we went back on again. And, you know, we had five big ships - Empress of Canada xxx - five big - full of troops. There was a battle ship, Malaya - the battle ship Malaya was in the centre, she'd just come from being repaired in Boston, and four torpedo boats and a couple - three - corvettes - frigates. And, of course, some submarines tried and they threw these ash cans over. And it was like a giant hammer on the hull of the ship, you know, these going off xxx. There must be hundreds of submarines there - they claim they got a couple of them, they probably did.

Well, we timed it, at getting out the companion way onto the deck; we could do it in twelve seconds, we couldn't beat that. And it was that narrow, you know, no-one could get past you; if you fell down they'd walk on the top of you. And we were in these hammocks, and as the boys ran out, of course, the shell would tip you out and you joined in the rush, whether you wanted to or not (laughs).

That was the Strathnaver?

Strathnaver, yes, the old Strathnaver.

And did you start off in those bunks where the Ities were? Did you start off in their section?

No, where the hammocks were the Ities had been - we had their hammocks, you see.

Oh, yeah, you had their hammocks.

Yeah.

And then what, you were allowed to sleep on the mess decks?

We were allowed to sleep on the mess deck when we got permission for that. We were pretty crowded in there.

Yeah. This air vice-marshal bloke, he said to you go aboard otherwise I can have you shot, did he?

Yes. And I suppose in a number of air force or kings regulations rules it was so.

That's right.

They wouldn't listen to us, you see, they wouldn't listen, they wouldn't ...

Now, you had a very good argument to put up, they only had to listen to you.

Oh,yes.

Did you have anything to do with those quarters? Did you actually see those quarters and see that they were a bit dirty?

What?

The Italian quarters, the Italian hammocks, were they a bit grubby and dirty, or was it just the idea of sleeping in hammocks that the Ities had slept in?

Well, the hammocks were ... you know, they had been used, you could say they had been shop soiled (laughs). I don't think that worried us so much as all being jammed up. You had that claustrophobic feeling. I didn't mind that feeling because I used to work underground on the goldfields here, so I was accustomed to that, but a lot of the boys, they just couldn't take it.

Did you have much to do with English families over there? When you were on leave did you get involved with any particular English family and go there a lot?

Yes, there was some of them. Actually, there was a rather funny incident. There was a place, an estate, down the south of England and a couple of our boys - you've read Peter's book, haven't you?

Yeah.

There was Johnny Jones and ...

I met Jack, talked to Jack Jones, yeah.

And what do you call it? Anyway, I met them on a reunion in Sydney about seven years ago. They accepted this, you know. It was a brigadier general, retired brigadier general, family, and they went down there, not with the idea of staying so much, but just to see what it was like.

So they determined that they would disagree with the brigadier on everything he said. So he's say, 'Oh, well, you'd better go on your way.' Well, he loved it and they stayed a full [holiday] and he'd get xxx out and take them round. And he said he'd never enjoyed company so much as that because people never argued with him.

No.

He was a village squire and all that and he wanted them to come back, to go back again.

How did you find your pay? Did your pay do all you wanted to do with it, or did you find you were a bit short of money at times?

Well, now, when we first went there - and the scheme I went [overseas] - we had to agree to the same rate of pay as the RAF. Later they brought it back the Australian way.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

(NOTE: Sound quality of this side of tape is very bad.)

What your did you come out?

1922.

And what year were you born?

1904. I'm in my eighty-fourth year, I'm an octogenarian.

My god, you are going well too, no doubt about you.

Yeah, well, as I say, I missed out on the ... these are four or five blokes, some of them went to 460 too - that was [Darkie Taylor], that bloke got a [DEM], he was on the - [Uranian] was the name of the ship - Uranian - that's in Russia that is. They left the xxx so they gave them to Uncle Joe. Somebody said, 'Bloody good luck to him too.' (Laughs) They weren't a bad little aircraft.

I remember flying up from [Wiggsley] in Lincolnshire up to Lucas with a pilot. We called him Crasher McAulay. He was that concerned with looking for fighters, jumping them you see, throwing the hood back and looking up. He didn't see that when we were going nearly over a convoy, a Russian convoy, and he didn't give the signal for the say - you know, FF534 ... no.

IFF.

IFF - and he didn't give that and they opened up on us. You could see these black balls and

smoke (laughs). Two of us - ground crew - and they got one of the crew, wireless operator.

I remember our bearing was across the coast of [Scarborough] and then we went up the North Sea. We are doddering along and an aircraft was in front of us, it was a Mosquito, and whether he had the right of way or not, I don't know, but he just slipped in and in, you see. The only thing is that those Mosquitos used to come from Sweden and they had spies and all kinds of people - it was a special flight.

Yeah, they thought it would be Swedish Courier Service.

That's right, they did.

They used to xxx ...

Bunks in the bomb bay.

That's right, yeah.

Well, I remember one coming in - this was an important person with a lot of spying information, I think. The bloke circled and he went straight into the hill, killed the lot. One particular bloke they wanted - he got this through the other, through our ground crew members and that. That's something that never got public at all. That's right, they did call it that.

How did you find the Lancaster as an aircraft? What sort of an aircraft was the Lancaster?

It was absolutely A-1, it was better than the ...

Halifax?

Halifax. Well, I was in the [convert] unit for a little while, you know, doing conversions from others into xxx aircraft. We lost a couple of Halifaxes. They were inclined - the earlier Hallie - was inclined to go into a tail spin if it did certain things. And, of course, xxx xxx and it lost a couple of crews - and we had a couple of Manchesters, two or three Manchesters. They were deadly.

Underpowered to hell.

Well, they had two - their problem was, they had two beautiful engines, twenty-four cylinders, [X-type] you see, and if you lost one engine you lost two, that was the point, and then you got all that drag. You had to balance it up, xxx and everything.

And I know, we lost a crew and about five or six ground staff - I think there was only one Australian ground staff in there - but they all wanted to come. They were going to a neighbouring station to pick up their laundry. I've got a feeling he tried to shoot the place up - we never heard that they just went and killed the lot. There was one of my young RAF boys, he wanted to go and I said, 'You go back and get a parachute or you don't go.' He said, 'But ...' - I said, 'Go!' and he went. But when he came back they'd gone and oh, he was real upset. Half an hour later I saw him. I said, 'Have you heard about ...' - I forget the number - he said, 'Yes,' he said, 'wasn't I lucky?' I said, 'Well, that's it, you were, that's how things happen.' Not that the

parachute would have done him any good because they were too low.

That's right.

But I used to look after some of these blokes.

They needed looking after some of them, I'd reckon.

You know the struts on the Lancaster were air and oil, an [oleoleic] (oleic?), mixed. Now, if you mix oxygen with oil you've got an explosion, and I used to tell these boys, Yellow cylinder; blue cylinder; grey cylinders; and for air is the grey sort. Now, I was riding my bike round, I'd been round to another [headquarters] and here's this xxx hooked up to oxygen. I said, 'Look, just wait till I get out the way, will you?' He said, 'Why?' I said, 'That's going to blow up.' He left me standing so I had to uncouple it, you see, and all the time I thought, I hope he's not turned it on - he hadn't turned it on fortunately. Had it happened and it had bust and split the xxx skin as a banana, like that. You were constantly nursing them.

Yeah, yeah, I can see that. So what did you have in a ground crew? Now, your permanent crew, just attached to that aircraft; how many did you have there all the time? Now, your armourer wouldn't have been full-time, would he?

No, the armourer didn't belong to my crew, he had his own section.

Who belonged to your crew?

There was the engine fitters and air frame, and two or air frame and ... I think there was three, three on engines - and I used to assist them on the engines at times, although I was air frame.

That five would have included you, would it? You would have been among that five?

I think so, yes, I think so.

Now, your electrician or electrical fitter, he wouldn't have been attached to you.

No, he came from his own section, but I had to overlook him and get him to sign the EE77. The only blokes who had nothing to do with me, they were peculiar people - radar. They used to set up these things and they had that far-away look in their eye, and you couldn't get any sense out of them, and they wouldn't tell you anything. They were under secrecy but they took it to extremes. I said, 'All I want you to do is sign the EE77 to say that it's correct' because I had to get that signed by wireless and everybody so I could present it in the office that the aircraft was signed up and ready to go.

You had to see that everybody signed that?

Yes.

Yes, that's right. How about refuelling and bombing?

We used to do - we had a refuelling team, but we used to stand by and our fellows used to put the hose in, and [cocks] used to tell how much. And oxygen blokes, well, they were instrument

blokes used to come out and check the oxygen to see that they were full. But I had to see that everything was done ...

Yeah, that's right.

... as the sergeant for the aircraft.

So outside your crew you had the armourers, instrument fellows, electricians, radar?

Yes. A little, you know, experience when you look back. When a bloke - when [Curley Hart], he was an armourer - and it was too slow for him. But one day he's fiddling around and a short circuit, and a chandelier [bomb] fell - it fell close to me. And I thought, oh, crikey, that's alright. Then I saw smoke. I said, 'Curley, this bomb is going to go off, you'd better come down and just have a look.' He put his head out and he raced down and it burst into flame, then it shot like a torpedo, see, went into the tyre. We had one of these portable fire extinguishers and covered everything with foam, and Curley's scratching around, he pulled a parachute out and stuck it in his overalls. I said, 'What are you doing with that?' He said, 'I'll get a root for that.'

(Hysterical laughter)

He was a real character this bloke. He said, 'Ah, there's nothing doing here, they wont let me in the aircrew.' He went up to Newcastle, he found people up there he'd made friends with. Then he got to know this widow with a pub and he was going to serve behind the bar, you see xxx xxx. And he signed up as a merchant seaman - he went AWOL, you know, and he did about four or five trips across the Atlantic. And, of course, they found where he was and they charged him with desertion. There was a good xxx council, absolutely marvellous fellow from Perth, Bob Holmes. He said, 'You can't charge a man with desertion, he's been in the war zone all the time, taking an active part.' So they charged him with AWOL, I think he got three months in the glasshouse.

Ah, there were some characters amongst those blokes, I'll tell you.

Yes, I'll bet. Now, apart from Rollo Kingsford-Smith, the part you played was always respected by the aircrew, they realised how important you were ...

Yes.

... they respected you?

Some of the newer lads, coming in towards when we left - I was overseas three and a half years - towards the end some of those Empire Air boys were young, inexperienced, and they didn't have that same accord with us as the earlier blokes who'd battled along on Wimpeys and Whitleys, and things like that, you know, who came into the ...

They'd come through too quickly, got it a bit too easy.

I think so, yes, I think that's what it was. But mind you, they weren't all that - some of them were quite cluey. I mean, I'd be orderly sergeant to have to take my turn at that. They'd switch on - never pull blinds down - you'd be going round there at night trying to impress on them that we were still a target for Jerry because when I first went there Jerry [wrecker] planes used to come

over at mid-day and they just did as they liked. And we were warned not to walk about, to stop, if we saw a Jerry plane.

At Swinderby the boys had got a white stone and made a kangaroo with the words - I've got it here somewhere - doggerel Latin ... Anyway, the translation is, Never let the bastards grind you down - 'Nil carborundum ...'

Nil desperandum carborundum.

Yes, that was it.

That was round the kangaroo, was it?

That was round it, you see, and, of course, the boys never believed in going through gates, they cut across paddocks. And we were all called in and they said, 'We know ...' - it was a woman, she was an observer of Intelligence and all that, and she'd been out and seen this. She said it was a landmark for Jerry. And at that time we used to have some timber and canvas aircraft, and every now and again all [hands from the cook] would go out and shift them, and shift [hedges] until north and south were put up east and west to camouflage the place. But through all this you could see the trap, and she, [being overzealous], she said, 'I know you Australians are used to the bush and go where you like, but you are not going to do it here. Now, I'll tell you why.' She was quite good. She said, 'Now, from the air this is a photograph' and it was shown on the screen. 'You could see that no matter how we camouflaged it this path is still visible and it's got to be ploughed out. And you are not to go there again. For that reason you are putting the rest of your mates in danger from being bombed.' So 'nil carborundum' had to be pulled down.

And that was at Swinderby, do you think?

Swinderby, yes.

Fair enough. Just to get your life in perspective again now. You came out as a Dreadnought boy; you did a trade, did you?

Well, they wanted us for farm boys - I'd been a fitter and turner, I was seventeen and a half. Conditions in England had broken down.

So you did your trade in England, did you?

My trade, yes, until I was seventeen - well, sixteen really, something like that.

You had finished your training in England?

No, I never finished it. The firm I went with, the boss was killed in an accident, and just different people took it over and they broke out apprenticeships, so we all went away.

So you come out on the Dreadnought as a farm boy. What do you do when you get here?

I went to a farm called Scheyville - they are going to build a big prison there in Sydney there now, that's the new site ...

Oh, yes.

It was an old ex-POW camp from World War I and we just simply rented the huts. It wasn't that much different for us, I don't think, but we learned dairying, and ploughing, and things like that - a three-month's course. Then they send you out to farms. There, if you were lucky, got with a good bloke, often a soldier settler, but some soldier settlers weren't good blokes (like) I got though.

Anyway, while I'm there I got anthrax and you are lucky to survive from that, and I went into Cootamundra Hospital. When I came out they burnt all my clothes and all that kind of thing. I think my compensation amounted to about three pound ten. But I got a job on a chaff cutter and that was a nice family, they were very good. While I was in the hospital I met one of the nurses and she invited me to their home - she had quite a big family - and that was my home in New South Wales whenever I was in the country. I still ...

Where was that, Cootamundra?

Cootamundra, yes, a place called Brawlin just outside, on the way to Gundagai. Of course, I learned xxx xxx and used to go to Gundagai in the woolshed. I was through there about three years ago and I met one or two, you know. It's a hell of a job to keep sober when you meet them.

You still find it hard to keep sober, do you?

Oh, yes.

I know the area well, I came from Forbes, not far from you.

Oh, yes.

Forbes, I was born there.

You were born there?

Yes. Still go back there occasionally.

Yes, okay, so what happens after that, after the anthrax?

Well, then - after when?

After you had the anthrax, came out of hospital.

Oh, I went with this chaff cutting team, an old steam engine, we used to tow - a Portsmouth it was. Then I went to Nichols, that was the family, and went on to shearing shed to another Nichols who owned the sheds at Gundagai. I used to go back every year when I was in the bush.

Then one of the boys and I, we went up to Hillston in a new soldier settlement, Merriwagga which was being cleared then - we cleared a lot of land - and fencing, rabbiting, trapping - used to catch a hundred a day and go into Hillston and trade them with a xxx of fir buyers. They used to be hard, but we used to do all we could do - xxx tail off it. Like, we'd get kittens and put them inside the big one, get more weight. We'd buy our tucker for a while - rabbit and kangaroo was

our main diet, and damper. We used to bring the odd bottle of whisky and [peer backwards] when we went in to sell the skins.

That's a story itself, that is, Jim.

Yes, it is.

Okay, carry on.

And then, when things got really tough over there in 1929, you know, when Lang closed - well, Lang didn't do it, but the State Bank was closed. [Otto and Emair] came out here and put the stopper on a lot of things - Lang was the premier then. Well, they closed the State Savings Bank. Well, I didn't have much in it - oh, a few shillings - but I got it out of the bank and had it for years, [otherwise] I'll rip it up. Since then I've thought, what a bloody fool, it would have been a memento.

Yes, tremendous.

Yeah.

The bank that went bust.

Yes. That was when Lang wanted a moratorium.

That's right.

And Otto and Emair - look, money must have had a tremendous power, the Bank of England.

Ah, must have, because he dictated - see, Lang wanted to withhold the interest on the British investors loans, you see.

He wanted to declare a twelve month moratorium.

But [Neviar] said no, you pay the interest to the English stockholders.

Yes.

Yeah, that's right.

I worked in Sydney, I worked at [Mark Foyes] woollen mills - I don't know whether you'd remember, Target Woollen Mills at Botany.

Ah, the mills, yes.

xxx xxx - they've long since gone. And having a bit of knowledge of wool and I'd read a couple - I thought I'd like to follow it right through. I got this job there erecting the machinery, and then it stayed on - carding machinery. Then, of course, they dumped the night shift and I had to go.

At that time I used to fancy myself trying to do a bit of short story writing. I got one or two written, you know, in [Pars] and [Swiss Weekly], and the Bulletin. At one time I even got a

cartoon in the Daily News.

A cartoon?

Yes.

You sketched a bit?

That's my field, I'm no good at any other artistic work because I've got that feeling of exaggeration. And this was portraying the forthcoming elections, and it was a snail, closed up, then the election booth. And I drew the snail with its head out and Bruce's head on it - I got it fairly good - and I put, blah, blah, blah, after the election, back to a snail's pace, and they gave me ten bob for that. Anyway, at that time the basic wage was about three pound fifteen; ten bob was worthwhile.

I was staying at the People's Palace and several of the boys there, and some of the xxx boys had a place there and a camp over near when Luna Park was. I slept in the Domain - and newspapers are warm, I'll tell you that.

Are they?

And, you know, still with that bit of a newspaper story complex, wandering round those bushes there - oleanders and things, you know - went to go for a piss - and I walked through and I came across a dead woman - an old woman, elderly, pretty elderly - and her hands were tied like that with a stocking. And so I thought, now here's something. I dashed off to the news office to tell them, I thought, well, at least they'll give me the price of a pie; they nearly knocked me down getting out, the camera men, and their reporters. Well, I walked back there and they were taking photographs of this woman. And there was this one particular photographer - he scrubbed me off - he's like this, and there was a policeman there and he kicked him up the behind - I mean, they could do that in those days. They daren't do it today.

Oh, no, police brutality.

I thought, well, good, give him another for me (laughs). What it turned out, an old crone, a widow, they'd done that as a kind of a religious symbol. She hadn't been murdered, she died from too much metho, that kind of thing.

And somebody had done that for her?

Yeah, one of her mates. The police told me she xxx, so what looked like a murder, of course, became ...

And did you tell the police or did you go ...

No, I didn't tell the police.

... straight to ... thought you might get a price of a pie.

I got the newspaper off her as quick as I could, you see, thinking, well, I'll get a pie out of it if nothing else.

So where did you go from there?

I went back to the bush again and working round. I had worked - I was at Granville for a while and I had a bee shop there - I had a small interest in it and I did the woodwork - it comes pretty handy, woodwork - tools generally, you know. Anyway, that was no good for me, it was too close to Rose Hill, not that I would xxx xxx. Then I found I could make more money running bets for the bookmaker at Granville - do you know Granville?

Yes.

You wouldn't know it at that time, I suppose.

No, no.

There was a bookmaker named Ben Muller, an SP bookie, he was a shrewdie that fellow. And he said, 'If you get caught I'll pay your fine.' Well, they pay your fine twice, and then the third time they used to put you in for a month [for running bets]. So when you used up two lots you had to get out of it - [get up the road and have a bet].

So you were a runner for an SP man, were you?

Yes.

Round the pubs?

Yeah, round the pubs, in the shops and that kind of thing. They used to give me - I think it was two bob in the pound.

Wasn't bad.

Yes, it was alright. Of course, all good things come to an end. They had plain-clothes blokes out on the lookout for SP bookmakers.

Then I xxx xxx, my mate and I, we decided to come home to the west. We came by boat - it was ten pounds from Sydney to Fremantle, third class, on the [Karoola] - that was the [McGilvray-McKecan] Line, Karoola, Katoomba, and I think later there was a Dunedin. Dunedin xxx - you know, four or five little cabins.

We got here, there was this group of us, about eight, we took the train to the [melee] country and from there we were going to disperse. Well, the mate who came with me, he had money, and he said, 'I'm not going xxx if I'm going back home,' he said, 'I'll lend you the money.' I said, 'No, I'm going to stay for a while.' So went and got on the train - I met some funny blokes on the tracks too.

I'll bet you did.

Well, I took up with a bloke - he was in the cabin, that's right, his name was [Bucker], he was a remittence man, and his brother was thirty-nine steps bloke - you know, was it John Buchanan?

Thirty-nine steps?

Bucker - Bucker.

Thirty-nine steps, yeah.

John Bucker, that was his name, not Buchanan - Bucker. I'm think I'm sure of that.

Yeah, John Bucker.

Yeah. And he used to send regular money. He came here - he had a couple of xxx. He pops this - he had evening dress and all that kind of stuff, you know - pop that into that money [he was on the track]. Then he come round and pick his remittence up and did the life, and off on the track again.

Well, he told me his life is very - he'd gone to school at [Halleyborough] - I don't know whether you've heard of that.

Yeah, I know it.

And then on the Sandhurst, and he was in the Dragoons, you know, the Hussars - the Blues as they called them. Of course, he was going round like that. He left me when his mother came [in June] and I continued on walking.

Was he any relation to John Buchan, do you think.

He was his brother, I think.

Brother, oh.

He told me they don't want me in England, see, they don't like me hanging round the place. He had another relative in Canada who used to send him money.

And what did you do out here then? You are on the track for a while.

Then I was walking, I'd been up there and wandering all round - went down to Bunbury in winter time. I thought, well, I'll have to get out of this so I walked and then I thumbed a ride just out of Pinjarra. A fellow pulled up and he xxx. He was a saddler and he said, 'Well, I'm going into Perth,' he said, 'I'll give you a lift.' And by the way, he was a Pommy too, he'd been shot through the knee at Jerusalem. As he went through the gates of Jerusalem in World War I a bullet had gone through his knee and he walked with a stiff leg. He said, 'I've just got to stop here and see one of my old mates who was a Light Horseman.' And he said, 'Just wait in the car,' he said, 'I wont be long.' Then he said, 'Come in and have a cup of tea.' Of course, I was always ready for that, some fresh tucker, or scones or something. This bloke's name was [Chalaman]. 'Well,' he said, 'I've got a bit of a contract here if you'd like to take it.' He said, 'Fifteen bob an acre, chopping black boys down and all that, and burning them.' The price was good to me. He said, 'You can sleep in the shed and have your meals up at the house.' This was good because winter time and I'd at least a roof over my head.

While I was there I used to do odd jobs around the place and do a bit of building. My building

was pretty good but I was slow - I put verandahs on, things like that. And I was there for - then I went up into forestry from there, on the sustenance road, you know, allowed to earn fifteen shillings a week. That was all contract work. And I had done prospecting in New South there, a family used to go round panning a bit round Gundagai and that. So I got interested in that, and then this government here - [Colie], I think - brought in a scheme that assisted prospecting. The conditions were that you prospected - it was like ... what's the term for it? ... you [attacked] a bloke and you got half of what he found.

Grubstaking.

Grubstaking, that's the word. And the government [returns] grubstaking. So four of us - we had an old Rugby runabout - we got down in this and I took out a prospector's licence - I've still got it - and we went to Norseman, well, that area, you know - xxx xxx. Oh, we tried several and then we got onto an old show, two hundred feet deep and turned with the drive, and took samples, and got a [fire] assay, and it went [thirty-one ways]. I said there's something wrong, nobody would abandon this - it was hard to get, it was all reefed like that. You'd have to take removal under xxx, but anyway, we took out about five tons - there was a fair bit in the sand.

Anyway, we got about ten ounces or something - ten or twelve ounces. At that time gold was £4-16 an ounce. For five of us that's not bad. But when we put in, to put through the mint, we got a notice back 'Under your agreement the Government takes half' so they took half of our first crushing and they continued to do so. I said, 'Well, they are not going to continue to do so with me.' And the other boys xxx fed up and went back to Perth - another got a job as a carpenter and that left me sitting on it, and I got [a tunnel] option to Western Mining - they sent a bloke out and they said, 'Too small for us.' Of course, I couldn't afford to keep there. And I went in to get some tucker on tick - John's store - and he said to me, 'You owe so much.' I said, 'Yes, I'll get a job on the mine.' He said, 'What are you like on road digging.' I said, 'I've never done it.' He said, 'Well, now's your chance to learn, and I'll give you a pound a day and you can help pay off your capital.' So I took that up for a while.

Then I went on - I used to - you know, in the meantime I'd gone xxx at the mine and get a job. There was a turning job going and the engineer said, 'Only for a fortnight.' I said, 'That's alright for me.' This other friend, mate who'd been a carpenter, he'd rented a block and built a bit of a shack, so I camped with him. So when I'd finished the turning job I got a job underground, trucking on [the undergravel]. And then I worked on the other mine for ...

This is Norseman you are talking about?

Norseman, yeah. Then I left Norseman and went on the motor xxx, to a mine called [Triton - Reids] - I got married there, I met the school teacher there, at North xxx, and kept in touch and xxx.

You read sometimes about filthy conditions (laughs) - nothing compared to xxx - oh, shockers.

I was talking to a friend of mine, he'd just got the Order of Australia Medal - OAM - for artist's work at Bunbury - and he and my wife lived with them, finally, but she'd lived at several - two or three - places round there, and one of them was a shocker - you know, a verandah with wheat bags and the woman was a baby farmer - a vegetable. The story came out the truth and she got six month's gaol or something.

Then she went to a farm with - his name was [McKiver] and he and his wife spoke Gaelic most of the time, and they adopted a little girl and they were very good to her. But this child spoke with a Scottish [raw] accent, she could speak Gaelic better than she could speak English. And the, of course, my wife went to this friend of mine's house and they've become friends ever since, and that's fifty-odd - I don't know how many years now.

No your wife was a teacher out there?

Yeah, she was a teacher at the [Peal] Estate, on the [roof] see. Eventually she went up to Geraldton. The I - this partner finished xxx [breeding] over at the mine and finished it off and furnished it, and she came up there to live. We stayed there - it was a one-mine town. If you should fall out with the boss you may as well shift. (Inaudible) the boss. So I could see the writing on the wall when I saw that.

We went to Adelaide and we were there for a while, I had a go at a timber mill down at Millicent, that's down Mt Gambier way. And then went back to Adelaide - this is getting '39, late '39, you see - then the war broke out so I joined up in October '39, on my birthday - I was thirty-five and they said anyone, thirty-five and over, step out, you are too old. But I didn't, I stayed. And, of course, I had some fiddling to do to make my age thirty-four. And we did a mechanical test and that kind of thing, and had the technical college. I passed that. So then I was sent on the Melbourne to Laverton, we did the square bashing there over Christmas - a very hot summer.

I remember the rifles. They'd been broken out of their cases, they'd been in there since the end of World War I, and were full of grease, and you'd clean them out, what you could. In the heat the remaining grease is run down all over it, and you'd go like this and ...

There was a sewage farm not far from there - Weatherby.

Werribee, yeah.

Werribee. And the [fire] - God! - and the drill instructors were LSEs and the permanent and they were looking to get promotions, and they really used to pound us. They'd say - one bloke - he'd say, 'You'll be able to blow the flies from the back of your hand before we've finished with you' and they were in your eyes, up your nose, until we got an old sergeant - Sergeant [Gardener]. Am I ...?

No, you are right, I've just ten minutes to go on this tape. Carry on.

And when we got this old sergeant he was [marks] would go on the back, he said, 'Right, we'll have a smoke.' And he'd say, 'You,' he said, 'you be the cockatoo' so anyone approaching you'd give them a sign or a hoy if like. We still passed out alright, but he was a real old timer, that bloke. He'd been in the Royal Australian Flying Corps - Australian Flying ...

AFC.

And who did we have in charge of the ERS - Engine Repair Section? which was where we were sent to first - [Moira and Noah], remember when they flew an [Avro Avian] out and they crashed on the beach at Darwin when the air races were on.

Yeah, I remember the air races, I just can't remember that one.

Well, they were in that, they crashed there. He joined up again, he was a flight lieu. He was a [very good] fellow but the bloke in charge of the ARS [moved us on].

Now, where did you do most of your trade training - Laverton?

Laverton?

All of it there?

Yes. We went to the showgrounds for some of it and the shops there. I was at the showground - we got on that tram - I don't know where the xxx is, it's extraordinary they found the lot. We all crowded on, the boys - wouldn't pay - they'd say, 'Book it to Bob Menzies.' The conductor got down, he said, 'I'm not going any further', the driver said, 'I'm not', and they stood there arguing and shouting xxx. One of our blokes had been a tram driver. He drove and we'd stop and stops. I remember helping an old lady on and the boys said, 'No charge tonight, Bob Menzies is paying' and left the tram outside our quarters and we dispersed.

This would be 1940, would it?

Yes, 1940. And the bloke in charge of us, Wing Commander Knox-Knight - they used to call him Box Kite of course. Well, I remember Sunday parade - we didn't know xxx Sunday - he tried to do it, the commanding officer, then he broke down. He said, 'You are a lot of bloody rats,' he said, 'but don't worry,' he said, 'I've paid your fares.' I remember that distinctly.

Now, where were you stationed them, still at Laverton?

At Laverton, yes - in Silver City.

Silver City.

Silver City, yes.

Well, that would be right. Okay, so you volunteer, you go overseas with the Blue Draft, 452.

We went under this xxx. It was called the Expeditionary Force first because I think it was the Australian Expeditionary Force. I mean, at that time things weren't looking so bad.

No, that's right. I've looked that up. Now, what courses did you do in England? You did this one at Dowty which was an hydraulics course.

I did two at Dowty.

What else did you do?

Then I went to the Hampden, that's the Handly Page factory.

Where was that?

Somewhere near Preston in Lancashire, and so was the Avro ... same as the Lancaster factory. That was the Handly Page.

Handly Page, yeah, alright.

And Avro was the other one.

Yeah, okay. So you do a course on Handly Page.

Yes.

And then what?

And one on Lancasters - later that was, you know.

On Lancasters, later on.

When Lancs started to come in.

Yes, fair enough.

Because they wanted us to know all about it before they lit up from A to Z, putting the wings on and installing engines. They used to do, oh, two or three a day. In the morning they'd come, we'd park the fuselage, the fuselage body, then [tail] was put on, then the wings were put on, the engines were installed, and it kept moving up the chain. Then the props were put on, and then it would go outside and be run up, fuelled and all that - run up - and then the test pilot used to take it for a flip, and then it was ready to go to one of the stations - to one of the ...

Now, where was that factory? Where was that that you did ...

That was near Preston.

Near Preston too.

In Lancashire.

Lancashire, that's right, fair enough. And did you do any other special courses over there?

Oh, the gunnery courses, of course.

Anything else to do with engines or aeroplanes?

I did a small one on engines but they used to send to the Rolls Royce factory for a short course.

So you did some of those courses at Rolls Royce.

Actually, being an airframe man I wasn't really supposed to go, but at one time I was practically a Fitter 1, that was everything. Then they'd light them up. But I did gunnery with a Browning,

you know, moving aircraft target. I've got a little list somewhere.

No, it doesn't matter. Before you went over you had a wife and two children?

That's right, yes.

So you had those to worry about too.

xxx.

Now, what happens when you come back? What did you do for a living when you came back?

When I came back, December '44, we came back via America, had my fortieth birthday in New York - xxx. Life begins at forty, they say, and I had a go at starting it.

(Laughs)

And I was up there till the end of the war, but we didn't know about the atom bomb, of course. They had Liberators and we were xxx there was a maintenance place xxx. But it's the same old story, you can never get parts. So the warrant officer and myself, and the engineer, we were given an aircraft to provoke them to go round Australia on different places - Tocumwal was a base for Libs - it was flying parts. Of course, it's the old story.

Then we found out that on the Darling Downs there's a place called Oakey, or Oak Cliff - Oakey, I think - it's still there, they use it xxx. So we looked through there and we found what things we wanted and we said to the bloke, 'How many have you got of those on your book?' and he said, 'Oh, I've got one.' He said, 'There are three there.' I said, 'Well, you've got two now.' And I got a lot of parts like that.

And then we were short of what they called xxx - it was a big book - it was a big graphic - you'd call it a picture book - of all parts with numbers, what they are made of and everything like that. And they had two. So I took one - wartime xxx - xxx okay, there we are, xxx doing with that.

Anyway, our squadron leader, he said, 'What the hell are you doing with that?' I said, 'Well, we are down one,' I said, 'and they wont miss it.' He said, 'Take it back,' he said, 'you'll have me cashiered.' So I had to take it back.

(Laughs)

Oh, gees, parts used to drive you nuts. If they had a crash, you know, the first thing we'd do it strip it.

Cannibalise that one.

Yeah.

Right, fair enough. What was that unit's proper number and name? You said RSE, did you?

Yeah, 17 RSU.

RSU?

17 Repair and Service Unit. We'd got anything that had crashed we'd pick it up and xxx.

And you were a sergeant there too?

I was a flight sergeant.

Flight sergeant.

Yes.

Right, you take your discharge and what did you do in civvy life?

Well, for a while jobs were difficult ...

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE TWO - END OF INTERVIEW

06/01