ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

ACCESSION NUMBER: S01300

TITLE: STAN HODGE - 460 SQUADRON RAAF

INTERVIEWEE: STAN HODGE

INTERVIEWER: LAURIE FIELD

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

RECORDING DATE:

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

This droving [bark], that's good. Where were you born?

Born in Victoria - or, about that much old - you know, six months - I arrived at Dalby in Childers - two mile from Childers. There was a sugar mill there. My father come up and he got the job - from Victoria - as a rigger, a [pull leak stack down]. They asked him were his wire ropes good enough, and he said, 'Well, just hang on a minute' and he crawled up and sat in the [bosun's] chair on the top and give the orders from there to be lower down. I reckon he wanted the job as a rigger at the [Isis] Mill - he got it. And that's where we stayed till the war and I went away.

What did you do before you went to the war?

I was a [gyp cain] at thirteen, I left school at thirteen and I was a [lab boy] - that's carrying juices around the mills on shift work, and in between I'm chipping cain and droving. And then, about sixteen, I served my time - started serving my time - and in those days there was no going right through your apprenticeship, they could close you down for six months, so I used to go do a bit of droving and all that sort of stuff.

What was your apprenticeship?

Fitter and turner. And then after the war I come back and I finished, finished my trade.

How did you come to join up?

Like everybody else.

Everybody was doing it so you joined in, that's right.

My brother-in-law and I - [Lorna's] brother - we were kids together, went off round together. Well, there's four of us; there was Alec Trevor, [Collie Robinson], and Windy Hays, and Jimmy King. We all used to knock round together - horse riding, we used to chase kangaroos, shoot. Jimmy King is dead, he died of cancer; Alec Trevor, my brother-in-law - Jimmy didn't get near a horse so he didn't pass, he joined the police force. Windy Hays - we used to call him Windy, used to ride like Windy in Hopalong Cassidy. He disappeared in a Kittyhawk in the north. Alec was a wireless op, he dropped dead about eighteen months ago of a heart attack, and Collie Robinson and I are still alive.

Where did you train - air force?

Sandgate, Maryborough and Evans Head.

And then straight overseas - which way did you go?

I went to Melbourne, then to Sydney, then back to Sydney, and we left Brisbane. You know, just like a xxx, couple of - a few - weeks. I went down to Melbourne - that's where [my home was]

- went there long, I don't know why, at Clemington ... (mumbles).

So when did you leave for overseas, roughly? What month, what year?

I'll tell you not roughly, be April, be May - I'd say it would be May 1943.

May '43 you left for overseas?

May or June - May.

Yes. And you were on the Squadron in November '43?

No, I was there in ...

October?

... August or September. I've got a pretty good ...

No, no, I can find out, thanks, she's right. I've got everything here - no, I've got it.

(Break in interview)

I didn't do full OTU, there was no ... something happened with my crew, with the rear gunner - another story - and they wanted a rear gunner - and I always wanted to be a rear gunner, I was frightened to be up top, everybody could see you.

In other words, you originally were a mid upper in that crew?

No, no, it was nothing to do with it. I was only there a matter of small time and all the crews got filled up, and I was out, and this crew wanted a rear gunner and I said, 'Yeah, I'll go with them', they said, 'No, you mightn't'. They said, 'They mightn't take you.' And that was how come. And I didn't stay in Brighton that long, I got talking to another crew and the sergeant was yak, yak, yak, xxx xxx, and I tried to explain that it wasn't in that mob. I thought I'd have to get my gear out of my room. All me mates, they were behind me. Most of them went to India - xxx '43 - November '43 - bloody kids xxx play with this, did they? I think it was August, I'm not sure - blank, blank, blank ... - Manheim - tell a lie. Manheim, September.

September you started your tour.

September '23 ('43?).

With Peter Crosby?

Yes, Peter Crosby. I've always thought it was Hanover - Hanover was second.

So you got over there in May '43 and you are on ops in

September?

Mm.

By gees, that was quick.

No, I didn't get there in May. I would have left here in May.

Left here in May - God! You go up there June-July, on ops in September, that was sure quick.

Blank, blank - [there it is]. And I'd been in Melbourne on my twentieth birthday - and my birthday was in April - bloody kids haven't played with it. My kids were in ... what did I say? Manheim. Yea, ops 1, Manheim on 23 September, and I left here, I was in Melbourne in April - on 3 April - I'm not sure how long after we left - there's a diary somewhere - I always kept a diary - kept a diary through prison camp too.

We crossed America, but we came back to Sydney, we spent about five or six days at Bradfield Park. We came to Brisbane under armed bloody guards on a boat, twenty-four hours at sea. But I would say it would be in May that I left here. And I don't know - May - twenty-three days to get to America - spent two or three weeks in America.

Did you go to Camp xxx [Taunton]?

Taunton, yeah. We were in at Taunton. And then we got on [Lezzie] and went across.

I did the same thing only a few months earlier.

I was at Brighton - and I was [positively] at Brighton a week, ten days. xxx [chap] and I knew a bloke, and went over, and yak, yak - him and the sergeants - you couldn't talk to some of them - an Aussie too - you couldn't talk to him. I tried to explain. All I could do was do as he told me. Everybody said, 'They are my mates - Collie [Camberlin] - you're not in that mob' - what can I do? And that's how I was sent to Litchfield.

And then my crew were ready to leave Litchfield - you know, that close to leaving Litchfield it didn't matter to go on to circuits and bumps on Hallies. They sent me on a weeks' leave - I stayed with them - oh, I was there once five months - there it is. I must have been - oh, I was there nine - seven - I went on to, it must have been Litchfield in August 8 - 27 August [the eighth?] - I was with circuits and bumps with Flight Sergeant Giles. And then I got with Crosby on 29 August on circuits and landing. So from leaving here - well, I was in Melbourne in April - and then in four months I do all my circuits and landings.

At Litchfield or on Hallies?

At Litchfield.

Well, you must have moved quickly from then to do circuits

and bumps on Hallies and Lancs.

I didn't fly in Hallies, I went to ... I went to [460]. I went into Lancasters - that would be 460 Squadron - Flight Sergeant Giles - see, rear gunner - circuits and landing - no, pranged. I went to a gunnery school after that, that was in Australia.

Well, that must have been Litchfield, but it doesn't say here where I went to 460.

It must have been when you started to get ready in your book you were 460 for sure.

They mightn't have booked us - they didn't because I done that ten-day gunnery course. Did you do a ten-day gunnery course on 460?

At Selby Down in Wales?

I done it on 460.

Did you?

Mm. I done it - I did six days leave - I did circuits and landing - while they done these circuits and landings I came back and done that with them. I done gunnery course at 460.

You were on a Lanc finishing school here for sure - 1667 Conversion Unit.

That's [Foldingworth]. They done the Halifax course just before that. I never flew in a Hallie, but they went on Hallies before they went on Lancs on circuits and bumps.

Wait a minute, some of these pages might be pulled out.

Yeah, it looks like it.

Litchfield's gone - bloody kids, you see. Well, Litchfield's gone - Litchfield and 460's gone.

The main thing is, here you are, you are still on conversion - you are with Crosby now of course.

I never knew bloody Litchfield was pulled out of that.

There you are on 460, that was your first op.

No, here - air training - air training - no, that's with Crosby. Well, I done a bloody ...

No, there's some parts of your thing missing for sure. That's your first op.

Yes, [Hanover].

23 September - my birthday.

Is it? Many happy returns. Bloody Litchfield's gone.

What op did you go down on - what number op?

Danzig - twenty-three, I think.

Your twenty-third.

I think the crew had twenty-seven or nine, I'm not sure - yeah, twenty-two.

Twenty-second.

And I think they had twenty-seven - something like that - I was - or twenty-nine - they were that close to finishing it didn't matter and they were going finish me. But see, I'd been in hospital when I had that crook leg - although [it caught up some] - but it was twenty-second.

That was Danzig, that mine laying?

Mine laying.

They lost half the force that night.

Yes - bloody stupid.

Lost half the force.

See, they took us across there, right up north, and the - I don't know whey they didn't bring us xxx low-level - well, four, five hundred feet behind us.

Brought us out the same way, that's interesting. There was moonlight.

Bloody bright.

There was half the losses of the senior crews of a couple of 1 Group, I think.

Well, they had to be senior crew, they all had to be over twenty ops.

That's right.

I think it was one of the most expensive raids they ever done - like Nuremberg included - Nuremberg had bigger losses because they had more numbers.

No, I think that would be the heaviest percentage loss of the war - I've got to go pretty deeply in to that one. I always understood it was twenty-five out of fifty.

Yeah, at least half were losses - when I came back I was under a bloke called [Gentles] - Squadron Leader Gentles. He was - I forget how I knew him - and he wanted me to join the permanent air force.

In Australia?

No, this was England.

England, oh.

And like a fool I - xxx - I tried to join when I come back but they made no provisions for POWs - because we'd been playing up too.

You were shot down over Denmark?

Yeah.

Did you see much of the fighters?

Mm.

One?

No, there were two 190s and an FR-217 - or three - three of xxx xxx, I just forget now - but there was that 217 got us. No matter where we'd turn or where we twisted, he just done the same as the mid upper gunner; he just lined his guns. If we turned in to him, he'd turn away - and I'd guess they were twenty, thirty-five mills - he was just sitting there - plomp! plomp! - and we tried to dive under him - the 190s.

Three of you lined up.

We're like xxx in the Moon - we are there - there's the Moon, we're here, and there's the fighters, and there's the 190 - 217. And I'd say they've got most of us that night - I don't know, but with moveable gun turrets.

Yeah, that's right. And nobody knew anything about that till after the war.

Oh, well, they knew, they knew the Dornier and that - the 88 - they used to go up as night fighters, but this night with the Moon. See, you couldn't evade them.

No, I'm sorry, I misunderstood when you said moveable gun turrets. I'm talking about forty-five degree angle ones which they only found out after the war.

Oh, yeah - they used to fly underneath.

Yeah, you never knew a thing about it.

Mm. They thought those fighters were coming up like that.

They weren't.

No, it was ... yeah.

And you and Ted [Sufferan] got out?

Mm. See, well, I found out after the war from his brother - his brother was in the navy and he got a letter from an American doctor. And Ted reckons xxx he got blown out, and he was smashed to pieces, and the doctor said, in the letter, if they'd have kept him in Denmark he could have lived, but they took him down to Germany - whether there was xxx I don't know, but according to the letter the way he was, well, he was probably better off ...

Better off dead, yeah. They probably would have tried so hard to save him down in Germany.

Oh, the Jerry doctors - no, I wouldn't say that about the Jerry doctors.

Wouldn't you?

Now, I hurt my back - I landed and I hurt my back - and I could never get on rehab, wouldn't come to it. They said I'd have to get proof. This Jerry doctor looked me all over, and he felt me back and all that, it was like you've got any doctor, even today, they can't find it. But I lay in the forest for days with it - oh, I would have hid.

In Denmark?

Yeah. He told me - this doctor - he said, 'Look, the only thing you want for your back is complete rest; and,' he said, 'where you are going you'll get it.' And he was telling no lies. But that's all they could do, but I've no proof, where could I find proof.

If I'd have been in hospital - well, in hospital - but where was your records. I was in England in hospital and it's not on my records. When I come out of Germany - I come straight from Germany, I put - oh, it's in the diary - I don't know how many days in the field army hospital on the Rhine - we had a smash - well, the truck driver did - there was eight of us - and we had twenty-five in the back - I was in the front with him, I was vomiting. Of course, the British Army had fed us plenty of cigarettes, chocolate, new-name bully beef - shovelling down actually. I was sick and they put me in the front with the driver - like, he was the ammunition man - or carrying supplies - and he'd been driving days and days, he was fagged out - we hit this bloody great tree - we'd been strafed earlier. Anyhow, we hit this bloody great tree, he got killed, and I don't know how many out of the twenty-five - there was eight or something, or eighteen, I'm not sure, killed in the back - blocked the road off, xxx bloody great autobahns, we blocked that off with the truck - we didn't, but they did. We then xxx xxx. I was in the German hospital there about twenty-four hours and then bloody on the Rhine hospital - xxx coming from the front. And we were just stacking them up as they died - bloody xxx - look - shirt on, pair of army strides, and the xxx xxx. You'd put a cigarette in your mouth and they'd come and light it - there was only one on duty - and they'd help stack the blokes up on [Corwood] - the dead.

You don't recall what hospital this was? Did it have a name?

I don't know, it was just a field army hospital on the Rhine.

(Break in interview)

After I tore those pages out I was never going to put xxx names. But see, if I'd have had that xxx - I was frightened - and there was a - common sense, cut them all out and start again.

xxx after forty-four years mate.

Time rolls round, doesn't it?

Have you heard of Bob [Howell].

Yes, I saw Bob last week. Bob made a fortune, he flew with Cathay Pacific, became a director of flying operations, was on the board of Cathay Pacific, and he's sitting on a million-and-a-half-bucks house down on the Nerang River.

Yeah?

Yeah. Bob made a mint of money - I don't know how he made it, whether it was all legal or not, but he's made it.

Bob would be xxx, even a xxx xxx.

That's right, he would. So I saw Bob - go down and have a barbecue with him when I go back to Brisbane.

Is he healthy?

He's healthy but he doesn't seem to get a lot out of life. He married - he remarried, he married a Chinese air hostess - lovely girl she is - and he's got three sons by her. Two of those are at university and one's coming up, so he's had a second family. He had four by his first wife.

xxx that broken xxx.

(Break in interview)

... down over Denmark, and you came down in the forest and you hid for several days?

Mm.

Did you use your emergency rations at all? Do you remember using those?

No. My rations, I never carried, they were always in the turret. And when I come back - I used to leave them there - and

I'd give them to the [parents] or one of the WAAF - and I never used them.

> They were a thing in the plastic folder, used to stick inside your battle dress - had morphine in it and some energy tablets and a few other things. Do you remember that.

No. All I carried was this money and maps.

> Money and maps.

And my other stuff used to sit in the turret - the orange juice and my chocolate - I never carried morphine.

> For some reason you obviously - it was in a hard plastic case, you used to carry it just inside your battle dress.

It could have been, but I never - I carried the money, the money and the maps. You know, they give you all this bloody money, they gave us French money and German money - different monies. That night I think we had three different monies. I still had that when they picked me up, that money, and I put it in a toilet.

But anyhow, the rations, no, I never had that morphine and that, no. I probably bloody left it there.

> You probably left it, probably back in your locker or something like that.

The only thing I used to put in there was that money and the maps.

> What shape were you when you got down on the ground?

It buggered me, I hurt my back, and then I just went and hid like a bloody mongrel dog. And the next afternoon - no, two or three afternoons - I met a little girl, she was about fourteen or something - I can bloody near tell your age now - anyhow, whatever it was - but she was only little, whipper-snapper of a kid. I had my battle xxx with me, whatever they call it, and I had that, and she took that and tried to put her coat on me, and she took me to some people. And this woman was a Mrs [Henrickson], she could speak English, she had taught English in England - I mean, she was a bit - what do you call it? - a bit rusty on it - and they kept me there till after dark and then they put me on the road to where ... I told a lie, I told them I wanted to go to [Arhoose], I think - you had to trust people - I didn't, I knew I had to trust them but I didn't - I'm not sure, [Arhoose or Hawsens] - I told them I was going to - but I wanted to get to the end of the island I was going across to Sweden. They explained that to us, you could go across there - xxx I xxx could get across there because I was always on the water. And I was only about three miles from there when they picked me up - from xxx - probably would have got bloody drowned, just as well I suppose.

But I worked it out that [Arhoose] was seven mile, I think - after this years - it's seven mile, I think, the longest channel. I reckon if I'd have went to where I told them I was going - this bloody sheila was there waiting for me I found out.

After the war I got a letter - I come from [Childers] but my people moved to [Bernard] Heads xxx xxx ago - and I got this letter. I told this Mrs Henrickson xxx xxx tell him your name, and that's about all you can tell - belong to the RAAF - I'm Stan Hodge and I belong to the RAAF. After the war I got a letter, 'Stan Hodge, RAAF, C/- BBC London' - that went through RAF, RAF, Childers, and to Bernard Heads. Gees, I'd wished I had kept that envelope.

Well, from then on - I didn't correspond, Lorna started, she kept writing - and Lorna's mother was a Dane - and I came down - or just about the same place as her mother went to school - her mother came from Copenhagen, she went to school on the mainland. And we all started this corresponding, and then Mrs Henrickson dies and this [Early Crawl - Crowal] he took over looking after all this xxx - they put a monument up and xxx for all my crew. The names are all my ...

A monument just for your crew?

Yeah, but I think they've made it into a sort of cemetery now, but they put a stone there for my crew, all the names were on it. I haven't seen it - Lorna's seen it and two of my girls have seen it. For two years running I've been going to go - I hate xxx - this is the worst part of my bloody life, living out at bloody Forbes - I've had my session on it.

About - say, roughly twelve months ago - [Early Crewel], he came out here and he stayed here for a week.

Do you recall how you spell that?

Oh, it's here somewhere. Anyhow, he stayed here - Lorna had been there in Denmark - Lorna, her mother and her sister - they took her mother back to go back to her homeland where she died - and my two girls had been there. And when Early left here we never heard from him - and Crosby's never - no-one heard from him, and it went on, oh, for a long, long time - like, Lorna kept writing to him. I never heard until, oh, that [Whitmarsh]. Someone had said - had a write-up in the paper about ...

Art Whitmarsh?

Yeah. And I got a bit bloody annoyed with them how they are giving him all the credit - like, he's doing a good job - but I wrote a letter - very seldom I do these things, but I did, I wrote this letter, and I explained to him that it wasn't Early that done it all. I explained how Early took over but it was Mrs [Christiensen] - a Mrs [Henrickson] was the start of it all, she was the originator of it. And never heard from him - never heard from Arty again - but after that we got a letter from xxx.

Also, in the meantime, Miss - girl - because she must have only been there on holidays - and she come from Copenhagen, and she'd only got my address, and she started writing to us - she's not a little filly any more, she's a bloody grandmother. But she writes and she writes in Danish. I don't know why, I've tried to explain to her in letters - see, I got her writing in English, but I get my letters typed to her. But her grand-daughters must speak English - I think her daughters do. So why doesn't she write and then write it in English? But by the time we get round to Danish people to get it translated ...

The letter's old.

You seem to lose interest. And I'm not going to tell her, you know. But now, I drop her a line and I've explained Australia, I've said the house is here when they want to come out and all that. One day I will go back. See, I can go back and I can go to a pub in England - pub or a tavern - and drink at a tavern and go round to - because they have the tavern - and go to the bungalow and stay.

You made a connection over there, did you?

Cousin.

Your cousin.

Yeah - (whispers). Anyhow, Lorna has stayed there, the three girls have stayed there, but I ...

Where's that, London?

They were at Ilford when I was there, they were just outside London, but I don't know just where they are at the present. But the three daughters, they've got pubs.

This is one thing I've got to do when I want to do.

(Break in interview)

... health generally, apart from ...

Oh, about usual. I've got no xxx [they've taken that out]. I've had three ulcer operations. But I live and enjoy my life, I don't bloody sympathise with myself.

That's deadly if you start that.

And I do what I want to do.

You're looking well, lad.

When I had this open heart the doctor said, 'Look, I want you to go home and lead as normal a life as you can'. He said, 'If you can lead a normal life, just like you did before you came in,' he said, 'that will make my day.' 'What will I do?' I said. 'Do what you want to do.' I said, 'Can I have a drink?'

He said, 'Do you like it?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'So do I.' And he said, 'If you want to drink, drink.' I said, 'How much?' He said, 'xxx.' I said, 'I never make a fool of myself.' He said, 'Okay, just do all, go on your own way.'

I'm under the same instructions, use your common sense, do what you want to do.

If you get tired - I am - that's one thing I can't do, I just can't relax. I can go to bed. When that sun goes down below that horizon there, I can go to bed and go to sleep.

That's great.

Before that sun's up I'm out of bed, I'm always out, from dairy farms - always up at daylight and I'm still the same - but I sleep.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

So, you're a great fisherman, keen fisherman, that's your life virtually, just fishing?

Fishing and bowls.

Fishing and bowls is your recreation.

Now, the Germans picked you up; where did you go when you were picked up?

I went to this little prison and then down to Frankfurt - Frankfurt on [Maine] - there's two Frankfurts - and then from there to [Hydracrew].

Where?

Hydracrew in East Prussia.

East Prussia? What number was that?

Stalag 3 or Stalag 6 - [Whipfrosagen] - we went to [Sagen] - one's 3 and one's 6. Sagen, that's where they shot all those officers. That was the officers' camp.

Supposed to be on a bloody ... some of these blokes used to draw all these bloody things and put them in your book, they must have been mad - no, wouldn't be in that bloody thing. I don't know if it was 3 or 6.

You've named the place, haven't you? Where was it?

Hydracrew - it was either 3 or 6 - Sagen is - there was Sagen and ... [Fauldingbost] was 355 - that might be the pages I tore out - I started again - Hydracrew - haven't got the number.

I can find that out.

But it was ... there was one officers' camp xxx - I think Sagen was 3 - no, I don't - Sagen was 3 or Sagen was 6 - we were 3 or 6, but it was Hydracrew whichever one it was.

I'll find that out. And how did you find conditions there?

Well, they were the best camps, that was a permanent camp and, oh, this German officer that went around with a little woman - but he was fair - oh, gees, he had some nice decorations from the First World War, oh, the good Iron Cross - xxx xxx - not with the oak leaves, he had the one before the oak leaves. I think the oak leaves is the highest, or the diamond was the highest. Whatever it is, he had the second highest one. He was fair but it was a good camp - they put it as a permanent camp, they well organised it, I don't know how many years, and everything was organised, organised under the - well, you could say bloody near run by the RAF. It was a good camp, then when we went to a different camp, as it got - we got kicked out of there and went to Poland. Well, things got different all the way when we Poland - [Fauldingbost], well, it got worse.

We left there - I wasn't there long - but it was a good camp, it was, you know - being locked up is another bloody life - but it was, everything, the rations, with the Red Cross and what they supplied, it was a good camp as far as ... Well, actually, xxx xxx complain, we were overcrowded and that, but as far as being a prison it was pretty xxx. You couldn't expect bloody tennis courts and swimming pools. No, we were prisoners.

In other words, you survived, you weren't all that cold - I suppose you would have been cold.

It was cold, but then we got colder as we went to Poland and then back in to Germany.

What was the name of the Polish base again?

[Thrron.]

How do you spell it?

Well ...

Roughly.

... they called it [Thurin] and I called it Thrron - T-H-R-R-O-N. The Poles called it Thurin, but we called it Thrron - I think it was 355 - no, it was [Fauldingbost].

It was an army came and when I went in there I thought I was walking into a bloody what-it's-name? - an Australian Army camp - they were in full uniform, slouch hats and all, they were the mob that were picked up at Benghazi on the Benghazi retreat.

[Fauldingbost] was 355. Now, somewhere along here ... there was a 358 and 357, so I'm not sure which one it was.

Yeah, you were at Thrron, fair enough. And that was, of course, simply in Poland, it was a German POW camp?

Mm.

Staffed by Germans, yeah. Things were a bit worse there?

Yeah. Well, it said - Thrron - T-H-R-R-O-N - 'After spending about three weeks at Thrron I am ready to move on again', so I moved on to 3 - I had only done three weeks in this army camp - I went back in to Germany. See, the Ruskies had come in and that's what they done. We could hear the Russian guns, or the German guns, in the distance. I think it was the siege of Warsaw - we could hear them - remember the siege of Warsaw. I think it was the guns - probably the German guns, they would be closer to us, whichever it was. I've got an idea that's what it was. Then they moved us back in to Germany.

Where to in Germany?

[Fauldingbost]

Faulding ...?

Bost. I think we ... see, I think ... I'm mixed up with ... I don't know if we ever called it ... I think it was 355 in Poland, or 357, and we went to Fauldingbost and we called it the same camp. There was two big camps there, we were down on a bit of a flat, and there was a French camp on top - we called it the French Camp because there were a lot of French there - I don't know how we xxx xxx - but I think the army, or the American Army, they come on the forced march, and they all stopped there. And I've got an idea a lot of army come in to our camp as we were marching out of Fauldingbost - we marched for weeks there - afterwards. I've got an idea they came in as we marched out. I think it might have been the Yanks marched in and we walked out, then the - oh, the British, they were heading across xxx and that's how ...

The British separated you?

Yeah - 25th Field British Army let by a bloody little colonel xxx - a Canadian. But I said to him when they came up - never seen a bloody sight like that, you could see xxx xxx, bloody great Comet tanks, bloody great guns, and the bloody xxx - we'd got away from the march xxx - xxx xxx bit of a bloody ridge and all these bloody tanks turned round and went back, with their guns xxx - oh, Christ, the bloody Poms, turing their backs.

We had got a couple of British prisoners - they were in a little barbed wire cage - and this Pommy bloke and I, we went round and had a talk to them, asked them xxx xxx - we said, 'Come with us' - we said, 'Come out here' - and we said, 'Look at it, they've turned their bloody backs, these bloody Poms.' He said, 'You bloody wait.' He said, 'They can't depress their guns.' And you could see the bloody guns come right down - whoosh! - and we started scratching the bloody gravel, the ones were coming over. They came in, line abreast, in the village.

Oh, the cruel bastards.

xxx the Nazis and the Russians - oh, they've got nothing - these bloody Poms come in line abreast in these tanks, straight through the village (laughs).

Ripped everything apart?

Straight through, there was nothing could - forty-six tons they were those Comets, and there's nothing - bloody trash, they just went straight through it - because that's where they were fighting, and that's war, and the blokes went straight through and cleared it. Then afterwards you should have seen the bloody light stuff coming through, light armoured tanks and all this, and then the motorised bloody troops, bloody great tramp of them, all back-to-back, all phasing out, automatic bloody weapons (laughs). They just went through it.

There's not an army in the world could have stopped that advance, at that moment. They probably could have stopped it, say, in another hundred miles. And irrespective of what army, xxx the British Army - if it had have been the German, the Russian, that advance could not be stopped. All they done was - it was just ...

I was back in England on Anzac Day - the war ended in May - that would have been about, oh, four or five days, a week, on the Rhine, and a week before that - so we hadn't been - say, in March, the ground was drying out, and all those bloody tanks, they went up the autobahn and they just spread out and fanned like that, and then the rest of xxx - a phenomenal concentration - and what did they have up top? - bloody planes.

When they run out of steam, yes, and you can see why the Germans, when they come across France and that - I watched - they could see - nothing could stop the Germans and nothing could stop that British advance - nothing could stop the Russian advance when they started. But when they got to the end of the communications, yes.

Fair enough. Now, what were you doing when all this is happening? You and your mates, where were you?

We were in this bloody little bit of a wood overlooking it, just on a little bit of a ridge. And after it was all over we had a bit of a look at each other (laughs) didn't know what to do so we goes down and the bloody - the big tanks had gone - this light stuff was there, a few armoured vehicles, and [along came a captain, one of me mates] - oh, bloody tanks, the little things that throw them back - 'We saw you speak bloody good English' - I was [in New Zealand] listening - 'You look out you Pommy bastards, why should we ...' (laughs) - my heart - you talk about bloody heart attacks, you've never had one. I knew that was the end.

While we were there - there were about twenty of us - bloody machine-guns were like this from ever direction - xxx bloody

ragged stuff. And one bloke from one of these tanks said, 'Oh, we've got Australian prisoners of war' (laughs). We found that he'd been in the desert and he'd been with the Australians. If they hadn't been I reckon they would have just went boomp!

Anyhow, when this bloody little car come along and this little fat bloke got out, xxx said, 'Listen, mate, they went that way' and he said, 'Hey, mate, do you know who I am' - I think I've got his address there - he said, 'I'm Lieutenant Colonel, the 25 British Army' - and he was a Canadian. And I asked him for his autograph and I've got an idea it's in here somewhere. That's how xxx, and he said he was leading them.

> There must have been some losses of POWs that way, by the liberating armies. They must have made blues.

Oh, well ... Well, we got strafed on the Rhine; oh, I forget how many were killed. We thought they were Spits but they were Tempests - we found that afterwards. Tempests come after the Spit, didn't it?

> That's right.

We didn't know they were Tempests.

I met a bloke after when I was working with [Milica] - I've got this guys address somewhere - I went to - I worked with [Milica] - and this bloody bloke - Pommy bloke, Scotsman - he's dead - he and Grant - he got talking one day and I could hear him telling these blokes - oh, some of them were discussing the war. You know, they'd been in the war on different fronts, and he was talking about this bloody place - Moorebank.

(Break in interview)

> ... back to England by Anzac Day. What happened to you back there?

I went straight in to hospital, that [flamin'] hospital, and then I was in hospital there - called the Hampton - which is not in the records - xxx head injuries xxx and that, and I stayed there - I just looked, it's one of these addresses here.

They contradicted me in repat, they reckon I wasn't it hospital. I just seen that address just then - Dorothy Dickson, she was a Melbourne girl - not a bloody girl, a bloody old woman - and I couldn't find it again.

You know I couldn't find that for a million dollars. I just read that - here it is - 'Dorothy Dickson, RAF Hospital, Cosford, Staffordshire.' Now, I was in hospital at Wolverhampton. Now, that's the address she put on it, but Wolverhampton, I always thought, was the hospital - see, 'Sister'. I never thought of it, but I always said Wolverhampton - and there's the address - Melbourne, Australia - 'Cheerio, Hodge, God bless, safe home' - and they were the sister in the ... the [charge] sister in the ward.

Well, I always said Wolverhampton - wait a minute, that might be xxx. I went in to Wolverhampton Station to go to London, so knowing England - say this is Bundaberg. If you go to the Bundaberg Station you can go to a bloody city over there, couldn't you? And I always called the hospital Wolverhampton.

I'd say you'd be right too.

And it's at Cosford, but it's not in my records. See, I was in the RAF at one stage - I don't know how. Did you ever get any cheques from the RAF?

Not that I know of - no, pretty sure I didn't.

I got - oh, I got a good few. The biggest on, I think, was twenty-three pound.

When you were a POW?

No, since I've been married. I got one cheque to my daughter, Lynette Marie Hodge, from the RAF. If I wanted to find out what it was about I could write to the Department of [Fares].

It would be something to do with dependents of POWs or something, it would be some ...

I was a single man - not one of me mates, no-one got one. I've asked everybody - Les Tate I've asked - everybody - Staffy - but at one stage I was only getting RAF pay, not RAAF pay, and I think - xxx entangled in that Litchfield thing xxx - and that's what I reckon. My records are in the RAF and whatever. But I've got all these cheques, and if I wanted to know - I said, 'No, I'll do it - go and cash it' - but twenty-three pound - Lynette was only about that high - that's my eldest daughter - she's forty-odd - and I said, 'I'll cash it or put it in the bank' - but where they came from ...

It's a mystery, for sure. I can see that happening, there were so many of us over there knocking around RAF units, I can see it happening.

I was on 460 Squadron but I got these checks from the RAF. Now, I think it must have been - you know, the navy's got a - oh, they captured ships and they get this money, and I don't know if the RAF must have a scheme - I don't know. But if this money came - it was from the RAF - xxx xxx over twenty - well, if my girls live that long - and I've asked Les Tate, I've asked Staffy, I've asked all, all the ones I knew - the [big boofy] and everything - Alec Christiensen - no-one else ever got anything, only me.

That's odd, that's really strange.

At one stage I was RAF and that's why they contradict me - I've never, you know, took these things down and they say I was never in hospital - I never give that address a thought - and they said I was never in hospital in England - after the war. I came out in a bloody ambulance xxx - we xxx across Holland -

them buggers are mad, all these poor buggers were wounded and that, and I was in it - I xxx xxx - and they are firing at us. And I thought, the stupid buggers, why don't they go further south - but they were so bad - they were on drips and all this, and there were a bloody old DC3 flying them across to England. Don't know how well - I wasn't worried about the wounded, I was only worrying about this bloke.

That's right. And how long were you at Wolverhampton?

I don't know - ten days - four - something like that.

And then what, down to Brighton?

Down to Brighton. No, when I leave I went to a farm then, down to a farm in Somerset. I went there - do you know those bloody farms you could write to?

Yeah.

I wrote to one of those - I wanted to get away from the grog and the xxx - and I went down there and xxx xxx. I was in two hospitals, one not far from this farm in Somerset. I rang them up, told them - I found out we weren't far away, they were xxx me there - and I was only there about twenty-four hours and they - they come and see us, this old spinster xxx - she'd be about thirty-four or thirty-five (laughs) - old spinster xxx - and her mother was still xxx - they come and see me. They said, 'Look, we're going to leave.' I said, 'I'd like to come to your place but,' I said, 'I can't, I've got to go through channels.' They said, 'When you arrive at the station, or when you arrive, send us a telegram before you arrive there and you'll come straight there.' I said, 'What about notifying them?' 'You will notify no-one,' they said. And I went and spent, oh, two or three weeks there. I told them, they said, 'What are you going to do on leave?' I said, 'I want to go to that place.' And they said, 'What's it like?' - I made a couple of phone calls - xxx that bad. There was no rationing in England, no rationing at all.

What, not out at the farm?

Oh, there was milk, there was eggs, you bloody name it. I've got a bloke over there, had an extra pig - xxx xxx. I mean, xxx in every country - there was eggs there. The first thing they said, 'Look, if you get hungry that's your own fault, there's the pantry. Now, if you are hungry and you don't go and get something out, we can't ... We'll feed you three meals a day.' But they used to give me a cup of tea in bed in the morning.

Where was that, Somerset?

[Ditchet].

Ditchet in Somerset?

Yeah. And my two daughters tried to find them and they couldn't. Well, see, I'd say Betty would be, she'd be the

younger out of the three - Gerald, he was married - Gerald and John - and by the time they got there - see, xxx girls were in their twenties, the two, when I went over, and then I suppose, Len would be, I'd say, thirty-five, something like that. I never thought of age - I know she was an old woman, but when you look back now, an old person was thirty-five - it was a manor farm. They had about sixty cows locked up at night on straw and that - and they couldn't trace them, they couldn't trace them - but the old lady, she was pretty old, didn't believe in drinking, but the ...

(Break in interview)

They didn't drink but they had their cider and all that, and they always had a bottle of beer for me.

Lovely.

But gee, nice people. Gees, I fattened up quick.

You would have been pretty lean I suppose.

I was six stone four. There was xxx flatter country on pushbikes - all the land-owner girls, they had pushbikes xxx - fishing for trout, shot bloody rabbits.

You deserved it, mate. Right, what did you think about your ops? Did you have any particular ops you remember above others?

I hated the bloody lot, I was frightened on every one of them, like everybody else, we were ...

Of course we were.

If anybody wasn't frightened, he was a liar, or he was mad.

That's right. I knew a couple who were.

We were all brave men when we got back.

My word, heroes. I knew a couple of blokes, they weren't liars, they were mad, really mad.

You had to be mad or you wanted to commit suicide. I mean to say ...

Now, that rear gunner's job was a very lonely job, wasn't it? Very lonely, very cold.

It was cold - cold was a killer.

Cold was a killer. And did you have any trouble with your oxygen supply? Did you have to run you hand up and down that little flexible tube?

Only once - my mike froze up - and there was Les, he brought her back - you was a wireless, wasn't you?

Yeah.

Used to bring them back to the rear gunner if he wanted xxx - or mike xxx - could squeeze it and break the ice, but then it would - foam I think there was, you know the ... you know, the two plates, they'd freeze up inside, but you could get rid of that breathing thing - you know the breathing, used to freeze? And he brought me back once, real bloody typical bloody wireless op, with the strap button done up and all that. I just grabbed it and went to put it on [the end] and everything's inside (laughs) because by the time I got it done up ... I could hear them saying - this is my interpretation - bail out, bail out - this is my interpretation - and I'm going - I don't know where I'd been in the meantime. In the end he said, 'I'm going down as fast as I can, I'm going down as fast as I can, I'm down to 9,000 feet' and that's what brought me round, I could hear this, you know, xxx 'bail out'. And I couldn't bail out, I had no energy, I just couldn't move. And the next thing it was ... and I said, 'What's the trouble?' and he said, 'Rear gunner, what the hell's wrong with you? Put your oxygen on.' And I said, 'I'm trying to,' I said, 'It's all tangled up.'

By that time apparently Mick, just as soon as he got the other one back, he must have dried it out, or started drying it, and he was down, I plonked it off, I got the xxx - it means that oxygen on 35,000 feet - he said, 'Breath it up' - you could feel the kite start - see, we were on the way home - you could feel the kite going up. And how they got it up - the bloody next - the bloody tube fell apart down there - I hadn't - I said, 'Oxygen xxx' - I got that - he went goop! - I said, 'She's right'. I'll tell you, it's about the only night I wasn't bloody cold. Oh, God! we had some funny trips.

That night the bloody skipper - did you read that report of his? He landed the thing in the light of a very pistol.

Who, Crosby?

No - I don't know where it is - I got it from his father - I seen that in England - he written up in England, then it went to the South Australian papers. Well, the only man in the world who landed a four-engine bomber by the light of a very pistol.

From his own aircraft? It was fired from his own aircraft? Where were you, for heaven sake?

That was Cosford. I was in hospital at [Caston] - [Catpos], just north of [Hub] - yeah, [Catpos] - that's Cosford - that's out at - Catpos it was. Well, we are just whereabouts on it, but I was taken to the Catpos hospital - yeah, north of Hull - north of Hull. And we are coming back from ... it's in here - and we struck head winds, we struck a bit of bad xxx. When we flew two minutes one way we were flying in to a headwind, and when we flew two minutes the other way we are flying with it. The navigator said, 'Look, you are directly above the Squadron, that's all I can do. We will miss out.' We could broadcast but couldn't receive. The first time I've ever heard Mayday called,

and we called, and called it, and yak, yak. No answer.

Did you know Jesse Hamilton, xxx xxx?

No.

She stayed on that bloody phone - well, you know, radio - all night.

She was WAAF?

She was a WAAF, yeah. And he was, you know, married. And she stayed on there till xxx complete xxx - he just never stopped repeating 'Mayday - Mayday ...' he just kept, you know, like a cassette playing, never stopped. And all the ones that went silent - I was reported missing, killed in action. And this bloody great searchlight come on us. But now, I could - bomb aimer, Ted - er, Bill - he said, 'Look, there's bloody whitecaps down there' - he always stayed in a [node], he never came back - he always stayed in a bloody node. And he said, 'There's whitecaps down there', and they said, 'You are bloody mad, you want some oxygen.' And, of course, I had the sights xxx xxx, and it was in fog and all this bloody rubbish. And I'm looking down - of course, if he gets these bloody whitecaps, surely I can see them. xxx xxx xxx - a few little gaps - it was more of this phenomenon - it was horrible bloody weather, must have been atrocious. I said, 'There's bloody waves down there, my bloody guns are in them.' He said, 'What?' - I said, 'You'd better climb' - and we are coming back to England, must have been going two minutes, that's our xxx xxx. I said, 'You'd better climb,' I said, 'It's white down there, xxx xxx' - and see, I was using me sights - you know how your sights are projected out xxx xxx. And then they started climbing and I heard him say, 'What height are we?' - who answered - one altimeter was 1,000 and one was 600. We said we climbed to 2,000 and then we are going to bail out - we are out of fuel - I heard Mick say we have about five minutes left. And Ted said - he was trying the pistols, I don't know why - what's his name - Les - he must have been listening to the radio, I don't know why.

Anyhow, I heard Ted say, 'Look, we've got one more very pistol' - they've tried all the xxx xxx - he said, 'I'll fire this last cartridge.' And being a xxx he couldn't almost bloody banked it a bit, which way - his wing was in the bloody grass - what could he do - just dropped xxx - he knew nothing - just dropped it where it was. And we come in over the edge of the cliff.

Oh, up north of Hull - and I was almost xxx myself - and he just dropped it, we ploughed in, we finally - Christ! I don't know what - and I got a broken ankle out of that - knocked silly, I hit my head - but that was the extent of the damage.

I can remember - I tried to cut my way out - I got silly, I grabbed the axe - I reckon that was torn off - then I wouldn't let it go. And Bing was xxx, he just leaned over through the hole in the turret and dragged me xxx and held me. Well, the rest opened the door and got the bloody - they had to cut the

door off; they had to get the axe off me and cut door and get me out. And I thought, as soon as they flashed torches, that's when I remember seeing fire - I was frightened of bloody fire.

Oh, no, they took me xxx xxx searchlight mob - they put a bloody great searchlight on us, then they came over. But I remember being home - we, as 460 Squadron - they said they never heard of it (laughs). We thought it was the Squadron and they never bloody heard of it (laughs).

Anyhow, I was in hospital and he xxx back in a Beaufighter for me.

And this was Catpos?

Yeah, Catpos Hospital.

When was that, early in your tour?

I think it would be the second tour - second one - I'm not sure.

I've got the records hear from November.

No, it was the third - it was the second - Hanover - pranged, six days in hospital, 27 September.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B - END OF INTERVIEW

04/01