

Interview

with

MR. BILL MORRIS

and

Pupils of Lady Hawkins' School, Kington

Bill Morris was a air gunner in the 460 Squadron based at RAF Binbrook. He was born in Monmouth in 1924 and lived in village in the Lower Wye Valley called Llandogo. He left school at 15 and joined the RAF at 16 as an apprentice in admin and accounts. At 18 volunteered to join aircrew, and became an air gunner. He trained in South Wales in an Anson aircraft, and after 6 weeks he qualified as an air gunner, then went on to his operational training unit, where he joined up with a squadron of Australians. He trained on Wellingtons and Halifaxes for about 8 weeks, and went to RAF Binbrook in Lincolnshire. He did 32 operational trips mainly over Germany. After the war he stayed in the air force, then became a security officer on a diamond mine in Tangenika, now Tanzania, in East Africa, eventually ending up in Hereford where he worked at the city council.

Training in an Anson; Marinet aircraft; drogues; training with squadron of Australians in a Wellington, then a Halifax; RAF Binbrook; 460 Squadron; bombing trips and log book; V2 bombs; being coned by search lights; 'Cooks tour' of Germany after the war to see bomb damage; VE day; bacon and eggs before and after flying; meeting his wife, what they did in spare time; rituals before take off; freezing conditions when flying; squadron reunions in Australia; medals; merits of different gunning positions in the plane; reasons why he joined the airforce; career after the war; Anson aircraft; objects he collected during the war e.g. sunglasses.

[Recording starts at 0:03]

MR. MORRIS: I was born in 1924, which is quite a time ago now. I was born near Monmouth, not in Hereford. I went to school in Monmouth. I left school at 15, just past 15, yes. I joined the RAF at the age of 16 as an apprentice. There wasn't much employment in those days; I hadn't a great future; I hadn't a great education but I was reasonable. I went in as an apprentice in the RAF as admin and accounts. When I became 18 then (I was there for two years) I decided to become aircrew; I was a volunteer. You had to volunteer to become aircrew during the War; you weren't drafted into it like other occupations. There was a long delay at the time for becoming a pilot or a navigator; the only shortage in aircrew at the time were air-gunners, so I thought, well, I would become an air-gunner. I expect most of you ... Do you know anything about aircraft at all? Anyone know? Anyway, I then went to a training board and passed. The main thing they wanted was that you were fit; you had to be absolutely top-class fit, excellent eyesight and dedicated to flying.

I trained in an Anson aircraft, which was a twin engine, very, very old aircraft at the time, known as 'Faithful Annie' because they'd flown so many times and was always considered by the pilots to be very safe. I did 23 flights at the air-gunner training school. We were mostly flying in these Ansons and four gunners got into the plane; there was a gun turret on the top and we were firing at drogues, which are – what shall I call them? – like elongated balloons which were being towed by a Martinet aircraft, and we were firing at those and they could then tell from ... the bullets were painted with different colours and they were examined later to see how many hits you had recorded. Lots of other things went on such as clay pigeon shooting; that was to get your eyes adjusted to the movement in the sky. Do you know what clay pigeon shooting is?

[02:44]

SEVERAL VOICES: Yes.

MR. MORRIS: Yes, I expect you do. So I did 23 flights and the total flying hours was 19 hours, that was all, because we were up firing, back down, up firing, back down. If you were last on this plane you had the job of winding up the undercarriage. It took four gunners at a time on the flights and the hardest job was to wind up ... Someone had to wind up the undercarriage, which was a manual operation and it was really hard work. I think it happened to me once actually. Then I went to a gunnery school, an air gunnery school which was down in South Wales on the estuary of the Severn and after six weeks' training I became a fully-fledged operational air gunner. You got three stripes; you became a sergeant and the air gunners' brevie, which was one of the flying brothers. Following that, you went to an operational training unit where you picked up the rest of your crew. You were all put in a big room and left together to decide who you wanted to fly with. There were pilots, bomb aimers, navigators,

etc., and you would more or less look round and say, oh, I like the look of you, I don't mind flying with you; I'll take my chance with you, and it went on. Anyway, I ended up with an Australian crew who hadn't been in the UK long and they'd come over, most of them, on the Queen Mary. They had come from Australia via the Pacific Ocean, through the Panama Canal, into the United States and then over on the Queen Mary to this country, and I got a ... You know, I quite liked the Australians and I thought, well, they're all right for me; they were a bit happy-go-lucky types.

[04:43]

So we then were training on Wellington Aircraft, which is again a two-engined aircraft, doing various things, practising with fighters, Spitfires and Hurricanes which ... They came in to attack you and you had to do the various manoeuvres and you had cameras to try and see how many hits you would have recorded. This went on for about two months and just before the end of this training we were sent on a raid to Paris, just outside Paris, dropping leaflets – not bombs but leaflets; this was a practice for the main thing really and the flight was to a place called Chatroux(?) [*Sartrouville?*] just outside Paris, it was the main area, and it was four/nearly five hours' flying, and in a Wellington, which was a very old aircraft at the time and it hadn't got much height.

After that I went to what they call a heavy conversion unit which was training you to fly, or the pilots mainly plus all the rest of the crew, on the four-engined heavy bombers, which was the Halifax bomber it went on then. That went on for about eight weeks. Following that you were posted to a proper squadron and you were then on fully operational aircrew. I happened to go with the Australian crew (five of them were Australian and two English, myself and another one) and we went to an RAF station in Lincolnshire called Binbrook, RAF Binbrook and the squadron was 460 Squadron, which was an ... All the pilots were Australian and most of the crews, but there were a certain number of English linked in with them. I went on from there, I did 32 operational trips mainly over Germany. I think the longest was to Frankfurt in the south of Germany, which was nearly eight hours. We did have one famous aircraft at Binbrook which was called "G" George. That plane, it did 90 operations over Germany and it was knocked to pieces at different times but it was always repaired and went back. It's a famous aircraft and it's now in the Melbourne museum, which is the main museum for the Australian war crew.

[07:29]

I did bring various things along, including my log-book, which is ... I've had it repaired as it got a bit tatty actually. That's a kind of a... I'll just look at one page here, what we were doing at Binbrook. This was October '44, various targets were S for Stuttgart, seven hours fifteen; Essen, five hours twenty; Essen again ... Essen, by the way, is in the Ruhr, part of Germany which has the big industrial areas. Essen again five hours. Then Cologne, which was a five-hour trip. That's a very big city which had lots of industrial and railway terminuses and things like that. Again to Cologne, six hours; again to Cologne five hours twenty. These were nearly all night trips. And then to Wanne-

Eickel, which was another industrial area, four thirty. And then to Dortmund, which was about a six-hour trip. Those were the kinds of things we were doing.

Q. Can I just ask: you keep the log-book.

A. You kept the log-book, yes.

Q. Did every crew ----

A. Every person kept their own log-book and it was signed at the end of the month by the officer commanding.

Q. And it's your record.

A. It's your record, yes.

Q. Of what you did.

A. Of what you did, yes.

Q. How often did you go ... So how many days, sort of, if you went to Essen, how ...

A. It all depended. There were two days between that, that was all. Some days it followed the following day; it just depended on weather conditions and what the higher command thought they wanted to do and things like that; you were entirely at their mercy when you went and when you came back.

Sometimes you went a week or so, especially in the winter-time when there was several weeks without doing any trips at all. Any questions?

[09:56]

Q. What jobs did you have before you joined the War?

A. Well, I more or less came straight from school and went in the Air-force.

Q. Sorry, I forgot. Where did you live before the War?

A. I lived in a little village in Lower Wye Valley called Llandogo; it's seven miles from Monmouth, between Monmouth and Chepstow. I went to school in Monmouth. Incidentally, I used to ... In those days there was very little traffic on the road, as you probably know, and from the age of 11 to 15 I cycled every day to Monmouth and back to school, which is eight miles each way; that's probably what got me fit. I also lived up the hill there so I had a walk up a hill as well. Anything else?

Q. What kind of inspired you to, like, work in the air?

A. Well, there was a war on and everyone wanted ... I suppose, the air-force, to be honest was the glamorous ... People thought it was a bit glamorous to be in the air-force. The Battle of Britain had been fought and won and everyone felt the only answer then was to ... The only way we could get at Germany at all was by bombing because there was no chance with the army invading for years and it was just a fact and the country had been bombed a lot, like London and Bristol and all these places had suffered heavy raids and many people had been killed so everyone thought the only thing was to go to build the bombers and in other words pay back the Germans. And I was young, 18 and, as you can imagine, you wanted to do these things in those days. I've got a photograph here of the famous aircraft of the squadron which was "G" George which they then flew in 1944 back to Australia. As I say, it's

now in the Australian museum there, and that was taken just before it flew; it's a Lancaster bomber.
I'll just pass that round.

[12:23]

Q. So the men in front, are they the ...

A. Actually they were the ground crew who looked after it; they took that one.

Q. Was it an Australian ground crew?

A. Yes; mostly, yes, Australians involved in them. **That's** taken from ... That was a raid on a ... Taken looking down on a French site where they had the V2s. You've heard of the V2, have you, the flying bombs, that were pilotless and were launched from France and, you know, were mostly aimed at London, and one of our jobs was to try to wipe out as many of those as we could, and that was taken from the air, and there is another one similar and you can see the actual explosions on the ground there.

Q. So part of your job was obviously the raid and then did you have ... Whose job was it to take photos as evidence that you'd hit what you were supposed to hit?

A. Oh, yes, the bombing holds took the photographs. We had a bombing man. On Lancasters there was a crew of seven: a pilot, the navigator, the bombing man, the flight engineer who sat by the pilot and looked after the engines; then there was the wireless op and then there were two gunners, one in the mid-upper and on top of the plane and one as a rear gunner. One of my crew; that was taken just before we went on a raid to Frankfurt. I'm the extreme right and my pilot is the extreme left. He was 21 years old.

Q. What was he called?

A. Howard Hendrick of Dutch descent, I think, originally.

Q. What were your scariest moments in the War?

[14:31]

A. The scariest? They were all pretty scary but, the scariest ... We once got coned by search lights over the target. They had many search lights and there was one master beam, which are about 50 search lights linked together and we happened to get coned in that and if you were coned in that, everything, all the AK-AK guns and everything were vectored on to you and any fighter aircraft up in the sky and we got coned by this and it was a terrific job to get out of it. You had to dive away from it and just keep diving, what they call a corkscrew, first right and then left and pull up, or try to pull out of it. Anyway, eventually we did but it was very lucky because usually if you got caught in the main beams every other beam went on to you and you were like a fairy on a Christmas tree and you were blinded by the intense light and, unfortunately, as we went in a fighter plane attacked us and we ... Anyway, what happened, I don't know, but we had some bullet holes; but we got away anyway and got back. That was one of the scariest.

Q. Did you then carry on and get the target or did you then just get out and head back?

A. Actually we were right over the target when it happened, with the bomb doors open, you know, the big bomb doors had opened and that restricted your speed so the pilot screamed “drop the so and so bombs” and we were away.

That was when I was 18 when I first started flying. I’ve changed a bit, haven’t I? There’s a few pictures there taken ... These were taken ... When the War ended they did what they call a Cook’s tour, which was a ... Cooks were the name of the travel agents at the time and on Lancasters you could go on a flight and go over various parts of Germany at low level which had been bombed to see the effects. That was Emden and the large building there somewhere is a U-boat pen where they had U-boats, you know, submarines. There’s two there of Cologne, with the big cathedral; and the amazing thing, the cathedral was undamaged despite all the destruction around the city. Have you been Germany, anyone? Cologne is quite a nice city now. It was a terrific shambles it was.

[17:31]

Q. What was your funniest memory of the War?

A. My funniest?

Q. Yes.

A. Oh, I don’t know; I had lots of funny incidents; it’s a job to say. I didn’t expect that question. I’ll have a think about that one.

Q. What was it actually like to fly in the plane itself?

A. Well, I never actually flew the plane. I did after the War; I stayed in the air-force and I did fly. I never became a pilot, but I did fly a Lincoln bomber for a time, which was really a bigger Lancaster again. It was fairly easy really. The worst part was the taking off and the landing, of course, when you had ten tonnes of bombs underneath and things like that and it was dark and you never knew when you were going to be attacked, because sometimes the fighters followed you back to England and you thought you were safe and just going to land and you were shot down by one of the German fighters.

Q. What did you do on VE-Day?

A. VE-Day, oh, what do you think? I don’t know if I should tell you.

Q. Go on!

A. I got drunk, and everyone else did, I think.

Q. Were you on a base?

A. Yes; it was such a relief. I don’t think everybody got drunk but everybody had lots of drinks, lots of fun, you know and things like that, it was a great time.

Q. Did you have kind of, in the days running up to it, like an indication that it was coming, that it was just a matter of time?

A. Yes, yes; we thought it would probably come beforehand, probably, because the squadron I was on, we bombed around D-Day; in June ’44 we were bombing the gunning placements and that and then we

bombed some of the German army headquarters following the German gunning placements and, you know, we thought it was all going to be over in a short time, but it seemed to last out a long time.

[20:02]

Q. Could you describe your experience in one word?

A. Ecstatic. Thrilling -- looking back; it wasn't at the time. If anyone told you they weren't scared, they're telling lies.

Q. What was the food like?

A. If you were air-crew in the RAF you had certain privileges and one, which now seems very insignificant, was the fact that before you went on a flight, on a raid, you had eggs and bacon and when you came back you had eggs and bacon. And that was practically unknown during the War, you know; I think the ration was about one egg a week and food was very short; there was no bacon. That was a privilege you had. You used to joke before, when the crews went into the mess for their main meal -- there used to be a standard joke -- saying to somebody, "If you don't come back tonight, can I have your eggs and bacon?"

Q. Did you have a war-time sweetheart?

A. Yes, several. I met my wife actually just before the War ended; she was in the Women's Auxillary Airforce, the WAAF. She was a sergeant in the WAAF and we were married in 1946. Unfortunately she is in a nursing home now; she is not well. So we would have been married nearly 60 years now.

Q. Did she work where you were based?

A. Yes.

Q. What did you do off duty?

A. Off duty, well obviously we went to the nearest town, which was Lincoln or Grimsby, or weekends to London, and generally have a good time, or try to. I will leave it all to your discretion.

[22:27]

Q. Did you ever have any rituals within the crew as in like not changing your socks and stuff like that?

A. This, again ... Do you think I should?

Q. Yes, go for it.

A. The two gunners -- and on the Lancaster you had a small tail wheel, you know, and before every flight the two air gunners -- used to relieve themselves, in other words, have a wee against the tail wheel, and that was looked on (most of the crews did that) as kind of a ritual. Why, I don't know, but it was one of those things. I also carried a very small teddy bear that my sister had given me; I always took that with me and I always wore a silk red scarf with white spots on. That was given to me by a girlfriend. Anyway, it seemed to work. Because when you went on a raid you had to completely empty your pockets; you weren't allowed to take any identification in case you were shot down; you had no ... You couldn't take any letters or ... What you took was ... You were given a pack of money, French and German money at the time, or Dutch, which wasn't to be opened unless you were shot down. If

you were shot down and you got in the hands of the resistance, that was to help you, you know, find the resistance and to get away again, which ... And I also took photographs. You had photographs taken (I've got a couple here); that was the other thing you carried with you, was photographs. You would put a jacket on and you were made to look like a civilian and they used it – ah, there's two there, yes – yes, to forge documents, that type of thing. They used to say, "Try to look like a Frenchman!" because the underground could make the documents you needed but the photographs was a different thing, because photography wasn't allowed on an air-force station during the War really.

[24:58]

Q. What were the worst conditions you flew in?

A. Some of the worst were when the weather was bad, on top of the other things. The plane used to ice up sometimes and, of course, there was extreme cold. We used to fly normally at 20 000 feet, which is about four miles up. I mean, it's nothing; aircraft these days fly at 30 000/35 000 mostly now. Have you been flying anyone?

Q. I have.

A. Where have you been to?

Q. It's not ... What's it called ... One close to ... [inaudible – 25:39]

A. You haven't been abroad on holiday on an airline?

Q. Yes, that ... Oh, I thought you meant like a plane, flying ourselves.

A. No, no. They are pressurized, aren't they, aircraft these days, as you'll all know; it's just like sitting on the ground really, isn't it. But in those days you had to wear oxygen. Once you'd got to 10 000 feet you had to go onto oxygen and you'd breathe oxygen the whole time; there was a mask over your face, and periodically the temperature used to drop to something like about minus 40 centigrade was the coldest sometimes. It was anything between minus 20 and minus 40 and you had to keep pinching the tube on the oxygen which was connected up because ice would form in there from your breath so that was one of the things. Of course, you couldn't take gloves or anything off because you'd immediately lose the skin on the metal parts. But, I mean, you just didn't do it. We did have ... The gunners had heated suits, electrically heated suits, which did keep it out to a certain extent. What else can I say.

[27:02]

Q. Where were you based during the War?

A. I was based in Lincolnshire. Nearly all the bombers were based in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk, all on the east coast, which cut the travelling time down to Germany. You had to get over there to Holland and Germany and back in, say, five or six hours a time. So it cut out a lot of the travelling. And the country is fairly flat around there for building. There were literally hundreds of bomber bases there.

Q. What were the conditions like in the base?

A. I was very fortunate, probably because I was with the Australians, we had a base which had been purpose built; it was houses. It was built just when the War started. But some of the ... [At] the next squadron to us, which was a kind of a satellite squadron, there was mud, a place called Ludford Magna and they used to call it Mudford! The mud was terrific. Everywhere was mud, you know, from the number of people, the rain, the conditions there. It was shocking. And they had Nissen huts; they lived in Nissen huts, the majority of people lived in Nissen huts. As I say, we were fortunate and had houses.

Q. I noticed the badges and things on the blazer; would you mind telling us what they were all about?

A. Yes. Well, the blazer badge is a squadron badge, which is a kangaroo and a boomerang, and the motto was 'strike and return,' which is very apt, isn't it, a kangaroo and a boomerang? And The Royal Australian Airforce. Although, I was in the RAF, of course; I wasn't in the Australian Airforce, but it said 'strike and return'.

Q. Why did you decide to join with the Australians instead of Britain?

A. They were strange people to me and I liked them and I chatted to them and they were quite ... very friendly.

Q. Did you stay together as a crew throughout the War?

[29:20]

A. You normally did but I did lose my first Australian pilot. Of all things, we were playing cricket and he busted his wrist and he got taken off flying and he was quite a lot older than the rest of us. Then I got a young pilot who had come there. I finished off with this one here. So it's had its benefits, I suppose, over the years because after I left the squadron I went to an RAF squadron just when the War ended and I never ... You were entirely separated and I never made contact for many years then. When I was in my ... How long ago was it now? Twenty years ago, I suppose, I made contact with my War-time pilot and I've now been to Australia four times and travelled all round Australia and been to squadron reunions and ... Because they have reunions in Australia in all the big cities. So we've been to Sydney, you know, Melbourne, Perth, all the big cities. And it's great and he's still alive, my War-time pilot, and he's now 84 – 83/84. He lives on an orange farm in South Australia on the banks of the River Murray. I had a great time there. The river runs past it; we were fishing every day apart from when we went picking oranges. So I did have some benefits going with the Australians.

Q. Do you have a picture in your book of the Lancaster so you can show us where you position was, if you see what I mean, where you sat?

[31:13]

A. **That's** the ... The picture on the outside. This was the speech, which was given by my war-time pilot, Howard Hendrick when I was there and he's got a picture of the Lancaster on the outside which has become detached and there's a picture of his crew in the back and a picture of where we were at Binbrook. And I was the rear gunner for most of the flights, which is ... You can't see the rear turret

there actually; it's right at the back. And I also flew in the mid-upper turret, which ... Do you want to have a look at that?

Q. Who was your closest friend in the War?

A. Well, my greatest friend, unfortunately, lost his life. I went to school with a friend of mine who I had grown up with in the village and he also joined the RAF and unfortunately he was shot down and killed, again on Lancasters. He was on the next squadron to me, yes. There's another photograph of the Lancaster in flight. **That's** a picture of the squadron, a squadron photograph taken in 1943 on the Lancaster which gives you some idea of the size of the Lancaster. You can see everyone standing on the wings.

Q. Did you win any awards in the War?

A. No, I didn't win any awards; I got the usual medals which were the Air Cadet(?), The 1939-45 Star, the Air Crew Europe and The France-Germany and The War Medal. That's the squadron badge again. You can pass that round; it shows it in small detail.

[33:13]

Q. Did you ever change the crew that you flew with?

A. I did several trips with other crews, yes. If anyone was ill or injured or something you were very often drafted in to make the number up, which is not always a happy situation but it always seemed to work.

That's a copy of ... I forget who actually did this, one of the artists. It's of 460 squadron, planes coming back from a raid. You can see the Lancaster there.

Q. How many would go out on a raid at one time?

A. Sometimes over a thousand, sometimes just a couple of hundred. It depends on the target. A big raid, like Cologne and that, there were a thousand, roughly round a thousand, with Halifaxes and Lancasters. I did ... I've got a few other things here. Here's a model of the Lancaster. There's the two I normally flew as rear gunner, but I also flew as mid-upper gunner. Have a look at that.

Q. Were you ever almost shot down or actually shot down?

A. No; I was never shot down, no.

Q. Which did you prefer? Did you prefer the rear gunner or the other one?

[34:57]

A. Actually the mid-upper gunner was the best because you could see around you better. If you were a rear gunner you could only see behind you and down and ... But, of course, then later in the War the Germans devised a new type of tactic for attacking bombers: they flew underneath the bombers, the fighters, and they had an upward-firing gun which blasted up into the bomb bays or into the tanks, and of course you couldn't look underneath, you had no vision underneath so we used to, you know, kind of do a **that** kind of angle to let the two gunners look and see if they could see anything and then that way, so that you were looking as far as you could. But when they got right underneath and up close usually before they fired their cannon up into the ... And of course, once they got hit, the whole lot

exploded, see. And when you'd got to corkscrew, as I was telling you. You were going along and if a fighter was coming in **this** way and you saw him you had to dive **that** way, **that** way, now into the attack, so as he couldn't get round you; and then you corkscrewed about in the sky. But ...

Q. Why did you decide to be a gunner instead of a pilot?

A. Because there was a two-year waiting list at the time and the training was going to be about a ... A year's waiting list and the training is about two years for a pilot and with my age, I was just 18, I thought, well, the War will be ended before I get flying, so I didn't. This was a quick way into the air.

Q. How did you decide on the air-force instead of the navy or the army?

[36:48]

A. Well, I've never fancied the sea; I even get seasick now. There was a problem with air sickness with some people too; lots of people get air sick, or did in those days, unfortunately. I was air sick once or twice, but nothing too bad, but lots of people were taken off the courses because of air sickness. But I never fancied the navy because, oh, dear, I don't like the sea; and the army, no. People were thinking it was going to be in trenches, you know, like they were in the First World War slaughter, and you were detached in a plane, I suppose. You were doing terrible damage and that, but, looking back, you know, thousands were killed in Germany, civilians and that, but you were detached from it; you never actually saw it like you would in the army.

Q. Did you need any specialist training to be a gunner?

A. You did the full training, yes. It was specialist in so much as ... One of the chief things was recognising aircraft. You had to make sure you knew a Spitfire from a Messerschmitt and a Fokker Wolf from a Hurricane and that type of thing. You didn't want to shoot your own aircraft down.

Q. What did you do after the War?

A. I stayed in the air-force for quite a number of years. I did come out of the air-force then and I went to work in east Africa in Tangenika (Tanzania as it is now) as a security officer on a diamond mine and I was there for four years. I was a bit ... I suppose I was unsettled after the air-force and wanted something different. It was quite an interesting time and I eventually ended up at Hereford working in the city council in the town hall where I came in, what, 45 years ago now. So I've been here 45 years.

[39:00]

Q. Have you thought of your funniest memory yet?

A. No, I'm still thinking on that one.

Q. Could you show us some of the ... is it the Anson, because I can't picture that in my head at all.

A. Right. First of all, there's the Wellington and the Halifax. The Wellington is the one with the two engines. You won't see any of them now, of course; there's no Wellingtons flying and no Halifaxes. There is one Lancaster still flying. There's two actually: one in Canada and one in the UK. At all the air-shows you see it. I was up in London last week at the 60th anniversary on Horseguards Parade and the Lancaster came over afterwards and dropped a million poppies [39:59 – inaudible].

Q. There's a Lancaster at Lincoln that you can sit in; it doesn't fly.

A. It flies, yes.

Q. There's one somewhere. I only know this because my husband wants to go. It will go along the runway.

A. Yes; that's again in Lincolnshire. There are two people called the Panton brothers and they lost their elder brother during the War; he was a navigator who was killed and they bought this Lancaster, which the engines still rev up and you can get a taxi ride round the airfield on it, and it taxis that far that it lifts the tail plane up. But it's not able to take off; it's not airworthy. I can't think of the name of it. My memory has gone now. [*'Just Jane' at Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre*]

Q. You've done very well.

A. **There's** an Anson there.

Q. So they are training.

[40:59]

A. Yes, they were training aircraft, yes. That's a flight of them. They were mostly used by Coastal Command and they used them for training. There's a picture ... Here's an Anson again; there's the gun turret and four gunners getting in. That's the Martinet that used to tow the drogues that we shot at. There's a picture of a Lancaster bomb load. Does anyone want to have a look?

Q. Can I ask was the Lancaster bigger than the Halifax and the Wellington or ...?

A. It was a lot bigger than the Wellington and slightly bigger than the Halifax. I think the wingspan was 120 feet on a Lancaster, yes. Of course, I still work in feet, which none of you do, I suppose.

I had to think of all the things I could bring along to show you. **That's** – things you used to carry – a map of (it's silk) Italy which if you went ... We did go to one or two, or bomber command did, Italian targets, flying from England to ... Genoa was one, and amongst the things you were issued was a map of Italy on, it looks to me, like a silk scarf so as if you got shot down you had some idea where you were and where you could progress to. So they are quite rare, those, to find these days. Here's a pair of sunglasses. I've got very little left, actually, out of my equipment but here's a pair of sunglasses that they issued you with in those days, 1941, or '42. I just thought I'd bring the medals along to show you. That's the general one, the Air Crew Europe. There's a band there for France and Germany which followed; those are two other service medals. What else have I got, anything. You always carried a whistle on your battle dress in case you were shot down in the sea or crashed in the sea, to attract attention [*blew the whistle*], and you used to have it on your lapel; you always carried that. I've still got that one. Those two tatty things are what you always wore. If you were in the forces during the War you always wore identity discs in case of accidents or anything and you had your name and that engraved and your blood group on them. And I've always kept those.

[44:52]

Q. What are they made of?

- A. I'm not sure, but they're pretty well fireproof. They would identify you if you had a ...
- Q. They are plasticky cardboard.
- A. Pretty hard. They have in Hereford and the surrounding area an Aircrew Association. There's a national one but they have a branch in Hereford which actually I started; now it's just coming up to ten years. We've left it a bit late but I think this book is available in the library. It would be; I know we had it registered; it's got its number and that. It's quite an interesting book. It gives you all details of various members and their experiences.
- Q. These are all local.
- A. Yes; they're all local people, yes. Funnily enough, very few of them were Herefordians at the time; they are now. There's one, a Mr. Smith here, who was in Hereford, lived all his life here; he was a prisoner of war and his story is in there. It's got quite interesting stories, you know. I wrote one called "I Believe in Angels" about four pages long. I don't really believe in angels but ... No, we were returning from a raid and the ... When you returned from a raid you were interrogated by the intelligence folks and the commanding officer – everything, what happened during the raid – and before that, when you went into the room you were always given a glass of rum, or coffee laced with rum, by the padre who was the local ... who was the station ... Do you know what padre is, do you? Yes, padre, a religious man, and he was saying, I was talking to him and he always had a word with you and I said, "Oh, I was ..." I'll read this book:

"We landed at Binbrook after seven-and-a-half hours' flying. At de-briefing we were served with the usual hot coffee laced with 50% rum by the station padre who said to me, 'Are you all right, lad?' to which I replied that the rum and coffee tasted even better than usual because we had never been so close before to getting the chop." – we used to call it, if you were killed, the chop – "He replied, 'Don't worry, your guardian angel was looking after you.' Funny enough, these were the words my mother had used when I first volunteered for aircrew. Maybe there is some truth in it."
[unchecked quotation]

So we don't know. Any more questions? It's all a long time ago.

- Q. I think we're all questioned out and you must be shattered.

[The interview ended at 48:42]