

ANZAC Project Centenary Interview on 20 August 2015 at the home of Mr Jack Phillips

AA Jack 93, joined the Militia Australian Army Reserve and transferred across to the Royal Australian Air Force when he was 21 years. He was a Warrant Officer and Air Gunner and flew in planes including the Sterling and the B17 Flying Fortress during World War II. He was based in East Anglia, England. He took part in 25 missions including D Day carrying special equipment rather than bombs and was under instruction to jam everything. He is going to talk about his experience on D Day.

JP There was none. That was our quietest operation on record. We went from over Dieppe in France 100 miles and back and back and back and we only saw one contrail of a fighter. We learnt when we got back to base he attacked the wingco from our squadron and the wingco shot him down. That was the only fighter that we saw. Other than that we saw nothing, that was D Day. We had special duties. We didn't carry bombs; we jammed everything they could do. Even if they had toast, we would have jammed that too. We were dropping tinsel which was like a second front. We actually spearheaded the invasion. We were coming this way and they were going that way. They didn't know what we were doing, which was good for our crew.

AA So that was your experience of D Day.

JP Yes, except when we got back to base, you couldn't sleep because the sound of bombers going out and dragging the gliders for landings. I personally thought that when D Day took off, I reckon England rose that far with the weight. That was my impression. There was a hell of a lot of equipment and arms taking off.

AA At the start of that day, what did you expect would happen?

JP All we got on the log book was special op was ordered. We didn't know until we got back that it was D Day. It was 6 hours 25. I queried that time. We had to go to the east Rouer, Gelsenkirchen. As far as we knew it was just a normal day. We got up, got dressed and had our breakfast and there was a note from the skipper. There's a war on and you're in it. That's what we got from him. We had to draw our parachutes and our escape rations and go to our aircraft and do a check on the equipment. We might take off for a 20 minute test flight. Then we would be told our target where we were going. After that, we would just wait for the time for take-off. We would all go out to the aircraft and sit there waiting in case they cancelled it, because the weather wasn't good.

5 mins

D Day – we were at 27,000 feet at minus 55 degrees. That's all I can say about D Day. We took off, we still didn't carry bombs, we had special equipment on. We weren't allowed to talk among the crew because if we got shot down and the Germans interrogated us we might spill the beans and they didn't know about it. We got over Gelsenkirchen and another aircraft we thought was forming on us. We didn't fly formation. So we told the skipper. He told us we would move away and see what happened. We moved away and he followed us. He said we'll go again and if he follows give him a blast he doesn't know we're there. With that he dropped his wing. What we didn't know was that there was a fighter coming for him. He was above us. He goes away and the fighter sees us and comes straight at us. The battle with fighters and bombers is if you see the fighter first it is nine tenths of the battle. This one we didn't see until it was too late. It only takes five seconds so you haven't got much time. He shot us up the starboard side and I can still see the bullets going through the roof in front of me. I am in the waste.

We were at 27,000 feet then and we dropped down to 12,000 in a straight dive with the inner starboard on fire and he managed to pull out at 12,000 feet and we started to limp back to England and the starboard engine is on fire. He couldn't feather it because the hole in the propeller made it impossible to feather. All the way back to England he had to lift the nose up to take the pressure off the starboard because he was worried about the blowtorch effect. We got in the water. We had no intercom, no radio, hydraulics were a bit uppy and he sent a message back to stand by to abandon the aircraft. That's how bad we were. Anyway we got our chutes on and stood by waiting. One of the crew was saying he wanted to go home. We got back to England all the way and we got over the aerodrome. We came into land and he made a beautiful 3 pointer but what we didn't know until we touched down was that we had a tyre shot away. So she swung sideways. A Lancaster had landed before us. The crew was standing there watching us and they suddenly realised that we were going to hit it. They ran, we hit it and chopped it clean in half. What we didn't know was that it still had a full bomb load on. Not that we could have done anything about it. We didn't find that out until we got back to the MO after we got out of the aircraft. The wireless operator was hit; he was the only one that got hit. I wrote and asked the skipper if the motor was still on fire when we landed. He said that it was and the Good Lord had looked after us and didn't let it burn.

AA How did you feel, were you terrified?

JP I didn't have time to feel anything. I don't think I was scared. I never ever felt scared. When I had an interview with a paper he asked me that question. I said we were young and stupid and had no brains and we didn't know anything. We were there for adventure and to do a job. When the skipper got a copy of that message he wrote back and said you mightn't have been scared but I was

scared enough for both of us up front. I worked it out at the time I was in the rear turret facing back and all I could see was where we had been. He's facing front and can see what is coming. That's why he was a little bit upset I think. I had no worries. I never had any guilty feeling about it. We were doing our job and they were doing theirs, it was either them or me. That's how it worked out. I did 25 trips and some of them were only short. I can think about it and laugh now.

10 mins

AA Did you have any scarring afterwards like nightmares?

JP I didn't, but some strange things have happened. I go up to the Macarthur Square once a fortnight for my pay. I was up there one day and was sitting there and a gentleman sat down next to me. We got talking and he said that he was in the army during the war and I told him that I was in the air force. I said to him "my skipper Murray" and that's as far as I got. He said was his name Murray Pedon. I looked at him. He wrote a book called A Thousand Shall Fall. I asked him how did he know and he told me he had met him in Canada a fortnight ago. I had never met the man before and have never seen him again. I wrote and told Murray and he said that takes the cake.

AA Did you have much experience before that day?

JP I think we were lucky. Our first flight was a mining operation over the Kategut and we got attacked by one of the first jet fighters. We didn't even know they had them at the time. With all the flight affiliation that the skipper had given us, all we could get out was shit, it was that quick. They knocked the astrodome off alignment, which was all they did. So we knew what to expect. When you think you only have five seconds once you see the fighter. We were on Sterlings at first, I was a tail gunner. Then half way through we got transferred over to fortresses, the B17s. Because we weren't dropping bombs anymore the bomb aimer came down to the rear gun position and I went into the belly turret. The Americans didn't like that. I thought they were great. You sit there and your guns are pointing straight down. Your feet are up in the air and you roll back. You know you have a safety harness on but you still grabbed hold but once you get used to it, it was good. The turrets allowed deflection automatic which was great. Once you got over the target area your night vision was gone because of the searchlights. That underneath turret area was no good so they took them clean off. So that is why I went on to the waste. That's D Day, you can read that one.

AA (Reading). Tell your dad that on our D Day series of patrols we were flying at 27,000 feet as briefed. It was minus 57 degrees at that altitude that night. Once we encountered very heavy icing so much so that it blotted out my vision through the windshield. I wasn't very happy about that because a bit earlier we

had all spotted a couple of contrails which we took as indication that there was a fighter prowling that area. I was earnestly hoping that his windshield if he came our way would be as thoroughly blocked with the ice as ours. After a short while the ice began to come off and soon rattled its way clear. We did four runs in from a selected point on the coast, ran in about 100 miles retraced our steps to the coast turned around and did it again.

15 mins

We did four separate runs. Going inland from the coast we covered our 100 miles fairly quickly with a very strong tailwind. But when we turned to head for our starting point on the coast again our ground speed was cut back very sharply and it seemed to take forever to reach the coast. On the last trip out just as we were clearing the coast and ready this time to head for England again we found ourselves passing a great air borne armada off on our port side. I have discovered from my reading since that this was the British air borne army going in to support the boys that had started everything earlier that night by landing in their gliders practically smack up against their objective, Pegasus Bridge over the Orne. All the best and remind Jack to have a wee belt of Glenfiddich on Christmas Day, Murray.

JP He was no idiot. I think he is two years younger than me. He is still alive and we are the only two left out of that crew. He was a Queens Counsel and he wrote a book "A Thousand Shall Fall". If you are interested in it, that will give you the full story.

AA So Jack you are 94 are you?

JP I will be 94 in December.

AA Do you march on Anzac Day?

JP The first time after I came back I marched with Dad, he was in the First World War. I didn't march again until I must been close to my 80s. My daughter came and marched with me in town. I don't know why, the march wasn't anything it was all the stopping. Anyway, I got through it. I have been here for five years now. I go up to the IRT thing they put on for Anzac Day and I give a little bit of a talk there. Now here's an operation that we did, this paper would be older than you.

AA Did you fly in the Sterling more than the other ones?

JP Yes, the Sterling was the first one. I didn't know until just recently that the Sterling had the worst damage done to them being knocked down from the sky. You could stand up and walk down from the cockpit to the tail in the Sterling. You couldn't do that in the Lancaster. It was really tight in the Lancaster. As far

as being scared, no I don't think so; I might have been a little bit shaken up now and then. When we got shot up I told the skipper he had to get us back as I was going to a party that night. I had relatives in England.

AA What made you transfer?

JP I had been in the army for about four months and they were calling for air crew and as I said we were young and stupid.

AA You were a presser?

JP Yes, I was in the tailoring trade.

AA So then you transferred and did your training.

JP Yes, that was in Bradfield Park. When I went for the interview for selection he said what do you want to be, I said a straight AT. He said wouldn't you like to be a pilot. I said I didn't think that I had the ability. He said what about a wireless operator. I said no I think just a straight AT. He said you go for a wireless operator course. So I went up to Maryborough. When I got up to 6 or 7 words a minute it went haywire for me. So I got my straight AT.

20 mins

When I came back from England they sent me down to Sale to do a conversion gunnery course. This is unofficial, what we ended up doing was we would do the flying and the Captains would do the gunnery. Then they would do the landing. We used to get up to all things.

AA So when you were in England you were based in East Anglia.

JP We were in Norfolk. This is amazing, my granddaughter met a bloke from England and they decided to get married. She went over to England to meet his parents. I was talking to him and asked him where his parents lived. He said they lived in Oulton. I said that was a little village inside our station at Aylsham. Ask them if they know the Redgrave's. I used to go their place if I wasn't flying to sleep at the weekend and then come home. They looked after me terrific. They had a daughter who was 12. I got a message from England they know them well. I am still in touch with the daughter. She asked me why did I go to Australia after the war. I said "because I am a bloody Aussie". She must have known that.

AA You had the Swedes shooting at you as well.

JP Yes, but I think it must have been more or less Germans. That wasn't the end of the story when we hit that aircraft at Gelsenkirchen. There was another aircraft up above in the same condition as we were in and they did exactly the

same, they survived. So should I be here? I did my tour of ops and came back to Australia and Mum put a party on for me. We lived in Bondi. I said that the Poms were pretty good to me so I went down to the Navy base at the bottom of Bondi and invited six of the ladies to come up. She was one of them and she got her discharge here. It will be 70 years coming up on 11 October. You only get 20 years for murder.

AA How do you feel about the Germans today?

JP My son is married to a Japanese girl. Why would I feel any different? You can't blame the kids for what their parents believed in, that would be stupid. I went over to Japan for my son's wedding and they treated us alright.

I queried the navigator's timing 3 hours 5 minutes considering we had to limp back from Gelsenkirchen to England. Murray made it 3 hours dead. We were fortunate, because there were two lots going out, one lot was going to Stetten and someone going up and then down. We were going up and down. The other lot went first and got all the fighters, we came half an hour later and they were all on the ground refuelling. It was the same on the way back. They came back before us and copped the fighters. They used to route us to make it hard for them to guess where we were going. They were up to all the tricks in the trade.

25 mins

AA This is June 1944 we are talking about isn't it?

JP Yes, it was the night of the 5th and the morning of the 6th. They had put it off the day before because of the weather. This is the log book.

AA How did your Mum and family feel about you going off to war?

JP I was in camp at the time. I told Mum when I got home and she didn't mind. Both Mum and Dad were English. They never objected and I was 21 anyway. We had a good trip over. It was the new Dutch ship Amsterdam which left from Melbourne. Every meal three times a day was hard boiled eggs and potatoes in their jackets. The boys were ropable. When we got to America they refused to get off the boat. They wanted a decent meal. The old Colonel was smoking his cigar and asked us boys what would we like. Everyone wanted steak, eggs and chips. He told us to get on the train and we would get it and we did. Six days and seven nights we were on the train right across the States.

The fighter that got us must have been out of fuel or out of ammunition or something. He was in a hurry to get back because he didn't make a second attack. When he came through he just knocked the astrodome out of position that was all. It was all over so quick. I was looking at a program on the TV yesterday morning about night bombers. It was all about what we were doing.

At the second half when we took over the fortresses we weren't carrying bombs we were just dropping tinselling and jamming all their fighter controllers and anything that we could jam. We even finished up jamming the rockets they were sending up. We would fly up and down the coast and we would get a signal and the wireless operator would jam. England don't know this but a lot of those rockets never made it to England, they would go straight back down.

AA What do you mean by tinselling?

JP It was bits of silver paper. We would shoot out a bundle every so often and it would drift down and jam their radar, they didn't know what it was. When we went out on D Day that was what we were doing. We were causing what looked like a second armada coming in. That is why on a lot of the coast where they actually landed didn't even see any fighters. Most of their petrol supplies were gone because we had been bombing the pumps and stores. They were getting low on ammo and everything.