

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Robert Milford

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Interviewer: Ed Metzler

Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler, and today is the 30th of March, 2019. I'm interviewing Mr. Bob Milford here at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site. So Bob, thank you coming down and spending time with us today, to share your World War II experiences. I'd like to get started by having you give us your full name, where you were born, and when, and we'll take it from there.

Mr. Milford: I'm Robert Milford, and I was born in Sydney, Australia, on March the 24th, 1923.

Mr. Metzler: So, you must had a birthday.

Mr. Milford: I just had a birthday, yes. In fact, this is how I'm here. I came down to be with my daughter, who lives with her husband between Denton and Dallas, and they specifically wanted me down from the retirement home that I'm living in up in Maryland, outside D.C., for my 96th birthday.

Mr. Metzler: So, 96 and counting!

Mr. Milford: Well, that's what they say! (Both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: Congratulations!

Mr. Milford: Thank you.

Mr. Metzler: Let's go back to where you were born, You were born in Sydney, you said.

Mr. Milford: I was born in Sydney.

Mr. Metzler: Uh huh. And your parents did what for a living?

Mr. Milford: Well, my father was an accountant, and my mother, well, she was a housewife in those days. Before she was married, she was a switch girl on one of the local telephone exchanges. "Hello Girl" they called them. That's how they met, over the phone.

Mr. Metzler: "Hello Girls," yeah, that's a good name. Were you raised as a child in Sydney?

Mr. Milford: No, no. No, this was, well, into the '20s, and I think even then it was a bit tough for my father. So he was away a bit, and my first recollections was living with my uncle, who was a World War I veteran out in the very dry part of New South Wales. Shortly afterwards, we joined my father and we moved up to Queensland. He got a job, and this was getting into the Depression time. He got a job, fortunately, in a garage in a small town called Pitsworth, which was just outside a bigger city, a place called Toowoomba. It was about 100 miles west of Brisbane, which is the capital of Queensland.

Mr. Metzler: So it's inland, not on the coast.

Mr. Milford: It's inland. I find I'm at home here in Texas because of this. This area was called the Darling Downs and it's very thick, rich, black soil. It's wonderful farming country. I've got to say, I'd love to see the black soils around here in Texas.

Mr. Metzler: Well, we've got all different colored soils around here.

Mr. Milford: No, no, but you know, I mean, predominantly; some of them very fertile. They're the backbone of the cattle industry.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have brothers and sisters in the family?

Mr. Milford: No, I was the only one.

Mr. Metzler: So, you were suitably spoiled as a child?

Mr. Milford: I was suitably spoiled as a child. Living up in this small country town in those days, there we were only 20 miles or 30 miles from the nearest larger city; we never got in there. There were no roads;

they were just dirt roads, and in the wet season, you couldn't get on the darn things in any case, so all our life and fun was spent in this little town.

Mr. Metzler: So your father was working at a garage, a repair garage for automobiles?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, and cycles and farm machinery, and that sort of thing. Yes, he kept the finances of that place, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: So, you went to public school, then, in the area?

Mr. Milford: Well, we only had public school in those days. There was no high school, in fact. The nearest high school was 30 miles away. If you went to high school, you had to leave home to do it. I graduated from the primary school, and I went off to a high school, Queensland Agricultural High School. I spent four years there.

Mr. Metzler: Where was that located, in Brisbane?

Mr. Milford: No, it was between a place called Gatton—there's a story about that, too. There's a place called Gatton about 60 miles west of Brisbane. That was a very fertile area, a rich irrigated area, a lot of potatoes, pumpkins and that sort of stuff, truck crops. This agricultural college had 2,000 acres of this stuff. It was quite a place. When the Pacific War started, very shortly, in about March of '42, the college closed down, the students left, and the U.S. Army took over, and it was the largest base hospital in the South Pacific. It stayed that way for a couple of years, until everything moved north.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, went further north. So, were you at the school when it shut down for the war?

Mr. Milford: Yes and no. I about graduated with my diploma in 1940, diploma in agriculture.

Mr. Metzler: So, you were 17 then.

Mr. Milford: Yes, I was 17 then. And then, I had a job there, working with a research program. I was just a field assistant in this (unclear).

They're breeding--they're looking for better pasture species for cattle raising. I was working with them; I worked with them for about a year, but on my 18th birthday or shortly after, I pestered my parents to--I wanted to--by this time--I was 18--the Battle of Britain was over. The Air Force was getting a lot of news from what was happening in Europe, and I began to join the Air Force. So I pestered my parents. I had to have their permission; I wasn't 21.

Mr. Metzler: You had to be 21 in Australia before you--?

Mr. Milford: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: You couldn't do it without a signature from parents.

Mr. Milford: Yes, exactly. So, I said, "Well, okay." I said, "Yes, okay." So finally, it was agreed that yes, they'd let me join. There was a stipulation that the local doctor in our little town, his son had joined the Air Force and was a radio or wireless operator. They said, "Yes." They reckoned it would be a bit safer, I think, if I was a wireless operator, so okay. I said, "All right." So, away we went. I met my father down in Brisbane at the Recruiting Center. He waited outside on the pavement. I went in and went through all the rigamarole.

Mr. Metzler: This is '42.

Mr. Milford: In '42.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, war's going on.

Mr. Milford: War's going on, and so it was, oh, then it came to this wireless operator. "Yes, okay." But then I had to do a handwriting test. A handwriting test? So they looked at this, "You can't be a wireless operator." "Uhh!" "But you can be an aircrew." "Ohhh," I said.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughing) You got what you wanted!

Mr. Milford: So I went out of the footpath, went out on the pavement, met my father who was waiting with the papers. I said, "They won't have

me as a wireless operator, but they'll have me in aircrew." "All right; don't tell your mother." (Mr. Metzler laughs). So that's how it all happened. I went down to--actually, they put me on reserve, and then, this was about in the middle of '42, and then at the local high school, they had special courses for us, you know, for preliminary going into initial training. I was called up--no, the Pacific War started in December, December the 8th it was down in that part.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you're across the date line, right, yeah.

Mr. Milford: So we were rather appalled at the way things were happening, as you can imagine. It was just getting worse and worse. I remember we were discussing what we were going to do when the Japanese landed that would help.

Mr. Metzler: Right, because they looked to be--they were on the way.

Mr. Milford: It looked very much as they were on the way. So, that happened, and then one smart day in March of '42, there was a notice spread around that the Americans were coming. This was when they decided that they're handing the agricultural college--it was a lovely campus, with facilities and so forth--they're handing it over to the U.S. Army.

Mr. Metzler: What was the name of the college?

Mr. Milford: Queensland Agricultural High School and College. Q-A-H-S-and-C.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so they turned it in--

Mr. Milford: They turned it into a base hospital. I don't know; I heard all sorts of stories about this, you know, when I came back. Someone said there were 20,000 beds there. I can't imagine that, but there were a lot of beds there and, you know, things we'd never seen in our lives. They built these wards and huts, and goodness knows what. There's a story there, afterwards, I'll tell about this; it's well worth hearing.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Milford: The Americans were moving in, and I got my call up to into the Air Force, more or less the same day almost. So, I left, and I wasn't there, really, when the U.S. moved into the place. Well, like all these ventures, military ventures, there's always got to be some initial sorts of training and boot camping and that. Well, I remember we were outside Brisbane, on Moreton Bay, in a place called Sandgate, and there was a ridge up behind the station, which was right on the water. As I said, there was this feeling that anything could happen, and here us guys that hadn't even--we didn't even know what end of the gun was--

Mr. Metzler: Which end to grab, huh? (Laughs).

Mr. Milford: --which way to put a bayonet on. We were sent up there to dig trenches, and we were going to defend Brisbane to the last man, so to speak. Anyway, in the process, we did our training, which was the usual stuff, you know, square bashing, and (unclear), a lot of (unclear) work. Well, I happened to be very fortunate to be a little bit ahead of the guys who joined, having been through high school. In those days, it was not many people made it to high school. At fourteen, most went and got a job and were apprenticed somewhere.

Mr. Metzler: How many years of schooling in Australia would you receive if you did not go to high school?

Mr. Milford: Well, you'd just go to--what did we finish up out there--eight years, age thirteen, fourteen.

Mr. Metzler: Right, right. Okay, so eight years of primary school, I guess they called it.

Mr. Milford: Yesh, yeah. And so, I did pretty well there, and then we fronted up to the selection committee at the end of this thing, when we'd finished our course. These officers are lined up, and the big inquisition, you know, when did you last see your father sort of

thing. You had to tell them what you'd like to be; you'd like to be a navigator, an observer, which was a navigator/bomber in those days, a pilot, a wireless operator, a wireless air gunner. So I said well, they won't have me as a pilot, but the navigator/bomber fellow, the observer, he got more pay than the wireless operator. So I says, "I'd like to be a (laughs)."

Mr. Metzler: So you were money-driven then, huh? (Laughs).

Mr. Milford: Well, yeah! (Both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: Why not?

Mr. Milford: But at any rate, the guy said to me, this is a funny thing. I aced all of these darn courses, but in the math, I only got 90% or something. I made a blunder on one of the problems or something, and the guy says, "You're rather weak in your mathematics." I said, "What?" because I'd been tutoring these guys (unclear). So, when it all boiled down, we were then posted, and anybody that was medically fit, were posted to be wireless operator, regardless, and I was one of them. They didn't worry about my handwriting then. (Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: They didn't care anymore, huh? (Laughs).

Mr. Milford: So, I went off to wireless school in Australia. Now, this is an interesting thing. During and immediately after the Battle of Britain, the Air Force was in need of recruits and aircrew, but they really didn't have any way to train them. So, Canada stepped in, and said to, I guess it was Churchill then, that we will train your pilots. It wasn't just pilots, but we'll train aircrews.

Mr. Metzler: The crews, yeah.

Mr. Milford: Your crews. Send them over here and we'll, you know, mix them with Canadians and we'll have a joint thing. At more or less the same time, down here in Texas, they started taking pilot training, some RAF guys for pilot training. That was early on; I mean, this was, you know--

Mr. Metzler: 1940, huh?

Mr. Milford: Yes, yeah. It was right on.

Mr. Metzler: That was probably right there in San Antonio.

Mr. Milford: I'm pretty sure it was, because my navigator, actually, they sent him over from England to here, but he didn't make the pilots and he went up to Canada, to Winnipeg, and he trained there. I'll come to this later, but he actually was one of those people that came, it wasn't in '40; it was a bit later on, but they were training British RAF guys here. So we did our course there, and then we moved out of there and did our gunnery course in another place, and then they made us sergeants. .

Mr. Metzler: You're still in Australia, right?

Mr. Milford: Still in Australia, wireless air gunners. Then by this time, the Pacific war was raging, and the First Marine Division was way up there in Guadalcanal doing their stuff.

Mr. Metzler: Right next door.

Mr. Milford: Right next door, and by the time I graduated and was ready to do things, I was--we were at the end of '42, yeah--they sent us all down to Melbourne, and I guess brought people in from their various training places all over Australia, pilots and observers and so forth. I think there were a thousand of us, and they put us on the U.S. America, and on that ship was, mostly were wounded, Marines from Guadalcanal. So they sailed us across the Pacific blue into San Francisco, and they put these Australian guys in Pullman cars and trained us across the U.S. Took about a week to do that trip. It was wintertime then; you know, it was January '43 and none of us, very, very few of us had ever seen snow. So that's another story, but that run across the U.S. was quite something. We stopped up at all places; once we got off the train, they could never get us back on. We just let out. That's why it took so long to get across the U.S. (Unclear, both speaking together). A group of

guys was walking down the street in Kansas City, and this guy, car pulled up, and he looked at the blue uniforms and they had this Australian thing on their shoulder. He says, "Australia! I say, guy," he says, "what branch of the Marine Corps is that?" (Both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: Welcome to America! (Mr. Milford laughs).

Mr. Milford: So we finished up in Taunton, Massachusetts, south of Boston, which was the big U.S. Army staging post for going over to Europe for what was going to happen sometime. We were there for six weeks. We got some leave up to Boston, but then it was decided that this reckless mob, we've got to keep them happy, so they said, "Well, we'll send these guys in three batches; you can go down to New York for a week."

Mr. Metzler: A week? A week's liberty in New York!

Mr. Milford: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: With a bunch of your mates.

Mr. Milford: But you had to have \$20.00 to go there, to prove that you have it, you have enough to sustain yourself for a week. You had to have that 20 bucks. So we, okay, they lined us up in ranks of three, and the officers came around and inspected the 20 bucks, and the 20 bucks just went down the line.

Mr. Metzler: I thought it might get passed around (laughs). One 20 dollar bill.

Mr. Milford: Well, sort of, you know. You get the message, though., But we went down to New York, and the hospitality, it was just amazing. Of course, the local radio stations got on the fact that these Australians were in town, and you'd walk into a bar and the guy would say, "Let's come and have a drink," and they'd put their money on the counter and then they'd leave and say, "Well, you keep the change." I went down there with 15 bucks, and I came back with 30. (Mr. Metzler laughs). We did the rounds. We did Jack Dempsey's and Jack Dempsey came and bought us a drink.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, and the Stork Club and Radio City.

Mr. Metzler: The Empire State Building and the Statue of Liberty...

Mr. Milford: And all of those things, and the American Canteen. They really, really looked after us there. It was amazing. So, very shortly after that we lit out for the U.K. in the Queen Elizabeth. That was an adventure; no doubt, you've heard this all before, about the boys going over there. There was our little mob, a few Canadians, but the rest were U.S. boys on their way. They said there was something like 20,000 guys on that boat.

Mr. Metzler: They really crammed them on.

Mr. Milford: You know, bunks were four high; you had eight hours in a bunk and then 16 hours just sitting around.

Mr. Metzler: Hoping you didn't get torpedoed. (Laughs).

Mr. Milford: It was interesting, because the U-boat pack just would wait for the thing, and the Queen Elizabeth, you know, could outrun the torpedo.

Mr. Metzler: She was very fast.

Mr. Milford: Thirty-two knots, but it was changing course about every 30 seconds.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, zig-zagging.

Mr. Milford: Like this, all the way. Yeah. It took us five days. It went up and did a sort of rhumb line course back into Glasgow. Well, we got up there, and then they wheeled us down to Bournemouth, where the Australian aircrews, an assembly center there. We were only there for a short time, and then we were posted to various advanced training units. The radio equipment that we were trained on in Australia was antiquated, and we had to go and learn the Marconi stuff and everything that would be in the bombers over in the U.K. I went up to Scotland and did that. I was rather fortunate, too, because the week--they used to have these drafting

parades once a week on a Sunday--and the following Sunday, we went one Sunday, and the following Sunday, three or four Messerschmidts came down out of the--over the British Channel, right at water level and under the radar, and they hit that parade ground right at the time when they were there.

Mr. Metzler: Which parade ground was this?

Mr. Milford: This is in Bournemouth.

Mr. Metzler: This is Bournemouth.

Mr. Milford: Yeah. And they made a bit of a mess, a lot of guys running around, and we got lots of funny accounts of the fellows that were--they didn't even make it to flying in England, these poor buggers. So at any rate, I went up to Scotland, did that, and then--by this time, I might add, as Royal Australian Air Force, when we landed there, we were part of the RAF.

Mr. Metzler: Part of--?

Mr. Milford: RAF.

Mr. Metzler: The RAF, right.

Mr. Milford: Right. We were integrated into the RAF.

Mr. Metzler: So you weren't RAAF.

Mr. Milford: We were, We were (unclear, both speaking together), and got our pay, which was a lot better than theirs, too.

Mr. Metzler: Yes, yes.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, (unclear). So then, after we had done that, and the navigators and people like that had to go into their particular training to get updated on things, then from that point on, after, I think it was two months of that, then we congregated pilots and navigators, and by that time, bombers and (unclear) separate, gunners, rear gunners, were sort of all congregated.

Mr. Metzler: You didn't have a crew yet.

Mr. Milford: No, no. Not yet. And this is a good story. Once we got there, they--one of the first things we had to do was crew up, because this

was the operational training. From that much you had done, your two months there, then you were sent to a squadron, you know, a bomber commando or whatever squadron.

Mr. Metzler: So had they separated the bomber from the fighter crew?

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah, by that time.

Mr. Metzler: So you're in the bomber (unclear, both speaking together).

Mr. Milford: We're in the bomber line, yeah. The crew was up, it was an interesting sort of exercise in sociology, I guess. They just put-- they want 20 crews, they put 100 guys, five men in a crew, they just put 100 guys in there, of all different categories, of the appropriate categories, and said, "Crew up."

Mr. Metzler: You guys do it.

Mr. Milford: You guys do it. And so, you wandered around, and you liked the look of a guy, something like that, I don't know, chemistry, and so that's how it happened.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have any trouble crewing up?

Mr. Milford: No. No, the pilot was actually--my pilot was Australian, and he was older than the rest of us. The rest of us were--I was 20 then, but Norm was 28, so he had almost grey hair!

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, he was a greybeard.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, but steady, you know, as it all turned out. By the time we surveyed each other, he'd already picked the navigator, and the navigator happened to be the only officer in our crew. The pilot was a sergeant, I was a sergeant. We got our bomber, thank God we got him. The gunner was a little bit funny, because we got this Irishman, and he decided that when he found out that we were going to be posted to North Africa, he didn't like that, so he chickened out and went to Bomber Command (unclear), so we got another gunner, and that turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to us.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Milford: Billy was a (unclear), and he was a guy with perfect night vision.

Mr. Metzler: That comes in handy (laughs).

Mr. Milford: For night bombing. For night bomber crews, it was very, very handy. So, that's how we found our crew. We did operational training.

Mr. Metzler: So, what are the five crewmembers then, pilot, co-pilot--?

Mr. Milford: No co-pilot. Pilot, navigator, bomber aimer, wireless operator--by that time I was done gunnery--I was wireless operator, rear gunner. We only had one gunner, and we were flying Wellington bombers.

Mr. Metzler: All right, that was my next question, flying Wellingtons.

Mr. Milford: So, we were supposed to fly, we were posted to North Africa. By the time the North African campaign was over, but the RAF and the USA Air Force still operating out of Tunisia, and flying up that way, they're waiting until they captured the airfields around Foggia and the Foggia plains. You've probably interviewed some of these guys, the 15th Air Force guys, have you?

Mr. Metzler: I haven't, unfortunately.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, well, at any rate, we just did a few missions. I think we did two operations from there, our crew. Then we moved out to Italy, and we were stationed down there.

Mr. Metzler: When you crewed up in the U.K., they then assigned you to a Wellington and then did what, flew you guys down to Africa?

Mr. Milford: No, no. This was interesting because--yes, we did, initially we were supposed to fly a Wimpy down to Africa, but we did our air tests and were ready to roll, and then, suddenly, we were pulled off. They said you guys, no, we're going to send you down by slow boat, and they sent us down on the SS Champollion, which was a French ferry boat believe it or not. Oh God, it was rough as guts.

Mr. Metzler: Those flat-bottomed ferries are rough.

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah, and we sailed across the bay in a convoy at like a snail's pace.

Mr. Metzler: You must have gone around the Iberian Peninsula to get to North Africa.

Mr. Milford: We did. We did, and we went down through the--

Mr. Metzler: Straits?

Mr. Milford: --straits.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah!

Mr. Milford: Then we got in there, and it was very funny, because all the guys was on the deck there. The night we had a Royal Navy escort, and these guys were hardly old as flicking, you know, about this is an area where three ships were sunk last week with subs, and this sort of thing (Mr. Metzler laughs). We were (unclear) to these other guys (laughs). So at any rate, they landed us then, in Algeria, a place called Philippeville. This was very interesting; they didn't know what the hell we were doing there. No one had heard of us. So, they plopped us down on the sand dune, and we were there for about, I think about a week.

Mr. Metzler: So, what port did you come in?

Mr. Milford: Philippeville.

Mr. Metzler: Philippeville.

Mr. Milford: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: That wasn't where the French fleet was, that got--that was in Oman, I think.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, it wasn't there, anyway. So, we were there for a week, and we just camped al fresco. They didn't know who we were. The officers had somewhere to go, don't know where they went, but we were just there. We had a lot of fun. You put your ground sheet down on the sand, and put your kit bag down and put your head on it and go to sleep at night. But when you woke up in the morning and pulled up your ground sheet, it was crawling with scorpions

(laughs). So I was telling my family here that we had one enterprising Victorian guy opened a book and we had scorpion races. None of the scorpions ever finished the race, because you let them go, and they just go straight down in the sand, dig in.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, they just go subterranean, huh?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah. They burrow down to get (unclear). (Mr. Metzler laughs). So at any rate, they put us on this train. It was one of those awful cars you see, when they took those people to those prison camps in Germany and Poland, those cattle trucks. As a matter of fact, it was labeled, eight chevaux or 32 hommes, There were eight horses or 32 men, Well, there were more than of us; remember, we had to sleep head to toe in this thing. We were on there for three nights. But they hadn't cleaned the horses up; they had horses in there before us, so, geez, it was quite a trip.

Mr. Metzler: What were you eating; what was the food like? Food must have been horrid.

Mr. Milford: Really awful. But that's another story on the squadron, too. Then when we got to Tunis, and then they distributed us around the RAF squadrons, they had a couple of Wellington squadrons that had come in from England when the invasion--when the Americans landed (unclear)--well, they were there (unclear) non-stop, and then the Desert Air Force guys came up and they combined them. We were posted down to southern Tunisia, in the desert, for about a month.

Mr. Metzler: What outfit were you with?

Mr. Milford: One-Fifty Squadron. We moved from there very shortly after we got to the squadron, and we wound up in a bit more civilized parts up in northern Tunisia to be closer to the targets that we were flying into, you know. By that time, Naples was about to fall, and the Foggia airfields were being opened, so within a few weeks, they moved us. We went across; we were just green crews in the

squadron. There wasn't enough flying these darn things across. There were plenty of crews, so we went over in a landing craft and landed in Naples and went over the mountains to our squadron.

Mr. Metzler: So, you went from Tunisia to Sicily.

Mr. Milford: No, we didn't go Sicily.

Mr. Metzler: You went around Sicily.

Mr. Milford: We went to Naples.

Mr. Metzler: Straight to Naples.

Mr. Milford: Straight to Naples.

Mr. Metzler: Because Naples was secured at that point.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, by that point, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: So when you arrived in Naples, what did they do with you?

Mr. Milford: They put us in trucks and took us over the mountains, over the range, to Foggia on the other side. We were posted to a place called Cerignola. It was a lousy airfield in the wintertime, and the aircraft were swinging off the runway, and immediately left the steel mat runway thing. The aircrafts were getting bogged, and a couple of them got blown up because they've got bombs on them and they couldn't defuse the bombs and (unclear) and blew them up, time bombs, you know. So we moved us again, farther north, into a good place, Amandola. It was, again, in the Foggia area. I might add that all these Foggia 'dromes are actually built and developed by the Luftwaffe. We just took them over.

Mr. Metzler: So you went over the mountains, so you're on the eastern side of the boot.

Mr. Milford: Yes, on the eastern side.

Mr. Metzler: Getting over toward the Adriatic.

Mr. Milford: Yes, we were in spitting distance of the Adriatic. We could hitch a ride and in 20 minutes or so, we'd be down at the beach. And Bari was the headquarters. Now, at that time, and this is the interesting part, we were in our squadrons, I think there were nine squadrons

of us, and they were mostly Wellingtons, but some B-24s, South African things, and they formed into 205 Group, RAF, and then the Mediterranean Strategic Air--we were then integrated into the Mediterranean Strategic Air Force, of which the 15th Air Force was the day bombing group, and we were the night bombing group.

Mr. Metzler: And which Air Force were you in?

Mr. Milford: I was in the RAF, in 205 Group, 150 Squadron, 205 Group. We did the nights, and they did the days. The American numbers were much bigger than ours, and some of our stuff was actually directly supporting the American day efforts; we'd go up and seed delay bombs on fighter strips and that sort of thing.

Mr. Metzler: Did you see Monte Cassino?

Mr. Milford: No, no. We weren't on that thing. We did the Anzio thing. We didn't do too much tactical stuff at all. Anzio was one that we certainly did.

Mr. Metzler: That's back on the Tyrrhenian Sea side.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah. That was very, sort of touch and go there.

Mr. Metzler: It was.

Mr. Milford: We went in, in relays, our group. You'd go in and you'd drop a flare, and any movement you saw, you'd just go and drop a bomb or two, and then go around and do it again, the idea being trying to keep the Jerries down on the ground, and stop any action or movement there. Some of our guys were flying two--a couple of missions a night there. (Unclear) runs, because no opposition; that was wonderful.

Mr. Metzler: They couldn't see you, huh? Did the Wellington fly at night as well? Was it a night bomber?

Mr. Milford: Yes, it was. It is a night bomber.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, okay.

Mr. Milford: Solely a night bomber, yeah. It was the RAF mainstay until 1943.

Mr. Metzler: Until the Lancaster came along, yeah.

Mr. Milford: Came and took over.

Mr. Metzler: Right.

Mr. Milford: But we didn't get Lanc's in Italy, though we wanted them. It was a shame because Old Butcher Harris, Bomber Harris, wanted them. He wanted his Bomber Command boys in England to have these darn things. The Wellington was very effective. As I say, we were attached to--the airfield we were at, we had, there were two U.S. B-17 squadrons there.

Mr. Metzler: I didn't know there were -17s down there, too. I knew there were -24s.

Mr. Milford: Oh, yes. Well, major -24s, but there were probably about a third of that force was B-17s. These were the B-17 squadrons there, and these guys were--it was a very good rapport between us.

Mr. Metzler: I was going to ask that question.

Mr. Milford: Well, I'll tell you that one very good reason was that the aircrew sergeants' mess of 150 Squadron was the meeting ground of everybody, because we couldn't go to the officers' mess; the officers came down to us, and we had some right good parties there. (Mr. Metzler laughs). There was the local stuff, you know, the wine and that.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, wine and cheese is supposed to be good in Italy.

Mr. Milford: But, you see, we got, in our sergeants' mess, we got a bottle of scotch and a bottle of gin per head per month.

Mr. Metzler: Pretty generous!

Mr. Milford: Yeah. The sergeant, whoever was in charge of that mess, he never--when anyone got lost, you know, got shot down--

Mr. Metzler: Didn't come back.

Mr. Milford: --the names took a long time to get off the list. So, we always had plenty of it. The American (unclear) were dry, so they used to come down to us (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: You guys were good buddies, all of a sudden (laughs).

Mr. Milford: But they'd never fly in the Wellington. We always tried to get these guys to fly an air test with us. Oh, and they couldn't, no, no. Those goddamn rag-covered bombers, they called the Wellington. Canvas-covered, the Wellington.

Mr. Metzler: Was it?

Mr. Milford: Yeah. It was very good, because you got hit by the flak, and just put a patch over it; you didn't have to mess around.

Mr. Metzler: I was going to ask you, what's it like to fly in the Wellington? Do you love that old girl?

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about the Wellington.

Mr. Milford: The Wellington was a very rugged two-engined bomber. There were lots of marks made. They started up Mark One, see, but they graded up the engine power as they went along, and we were flying in a Wellington Ten, with Hercules motors and, you know, there was plenty of power, which was okay if your two motors were running, but if you lost a motor over the target, you were in a bit of trouble, depending where you were. When we were out in the Balkans, we had to come over the mountains. We could maintain a height of about 5,000 feet on one engine, but it was pretty difficult otherwise. But it could take a hell of a hammering. As a matter of fact, I saw one guy come back one night, and he had a collision over the target, and he lost the whole of the starboard wing; the outer third section of the wing had been shorn off. And he and the bomb aimer flew this thing back from Budapest, I think it was, a hell of a long way.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it is!

Mr. Milford: Yeah. And he flew this thing back, and landed it. It looked rather strange. But unfortunately, they got the chop, I think a couple of trips later. At any rate, it was a remarkable thing, and it was

renowned as an airplane that could take a lot of damage and fly, a bit like the B-17 in that respect.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, the B-17 could take a lot. So did you have missions over the Balkans then, as well over Italy?

Mr. Milford: Oh, yes, Yeah, most of our--see we, as I say, operated nights and the U.S. in the day. I did 38 missions, and the pilot did 40. He had to do two beforehand. We did the, I guess 30-40 percent over probably Italian targets. The targets there were mainly transport, and there were some oil there, but in the Balkans, it was almost exclusively oil that we did with the Americans.

Mr. Metzler: Ploesti?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, we did Ploesti. Well, I personally, we never went to Ploesti, but we went to Bucharest, and that was just has hot, because those damned mobile 120, mobile flak guns they had there just moved up and banged away at you. Yeah, that was a hot target. They said it was about the third most heavily defended target in Europe. It was Berlin, Ruhr, and then Ploesti. It was that region, the whole region there. But we did, you see, that whole thrust at that latter part, the Russians were coming, but they hadn't arrived by then, and we were looking at that oil extraction, processing, storage, transport. Those were the things, and night after night we were going out on those things. No, it wasn't friendly places at all in those days.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have fighter escort?

Mr. Milford: No, no, no. We never went with--not at night; you didn't need fighter escort.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Milford: It was all, you just went up there and--

Mr. Metzler: Tried to find the target.

Mr. Milford: Oh, we found them, all right. We were good at it.

Mr. Metzler: So, was it anti-aircraft fire was the main thing to be concerned about, flak?

Mr. Milford: Flak over the target, but fighters on the way. Fighters were the thing that really, I guess, that got most of us.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Milford: Flak, you see, flak was only that, any of the guys will tell you, the flak was something that you had to fly through. Okay, you flew through it and hoped you weren't the one that was--

Mr. Metzler: Hoped you came out the other side.

Mr. Milford: --you came out the other side. And so, you did that, but it was the fighters going there and coming back that really got at you.

Mr. Metzler: Are we dealing with ME-109s or Focke-Wulfs, or what?

Mr. Milford: We ran into--I'll get into that in a minute.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Milford: No, no, I can tell you now, but the 109s, 190s, JU-88s, ME-110s—

Mr. Metzler: Oh, the twin-engined ones.

Mr. Milford: Yeah. The way they operated, and they learned this, the Germans were good at it, the night fighter boys, they learned this thing from the European, the Bomber Command stuff, and the way they operated on us was, they'd get in the bomber stream, or they tried to, and they'd come up from the rear, attack from the rear, and that's where our--

Mr. Metzler: That's where your gunner is, is on the tail, right?

Mr. Milford: --yeah, yeah. That's where night vision was, and they would come in on (unclear), and our gunner would see them and we'd take evasive action, never fire the guns. Underneath were the guys that were waiting to see your gun flashes, in any case. Towards the very end of our tour, the Germans up in the Bomber Command areas there, they'd got this thing they called Jazz Music, which was a JU-88 with two 20-mm cannons pointed from the rear, up on the top, pointed upwards.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, so it could shoot from below.

Mr. Milford: Shoot from below, and they waited until they'd see the gun flash from a bomber firing at a fighter coming in on them, and then they'd get underneath.

Mr. Metzler: I never heard of that.

Mr. Milford: Oh, yes. Yeah. We lost a lot of those around the Budapest area there. So, that was--

Mr. Metzler: So you got up to Budapest as well as Bucharest.

Mr. Milford: Five missions I did to Budapest.

Mr. Metzler: And Budapest is not oil country.

Mr. Milford: No, but we were doing transport and so forth there, and there were some armament factories there, which we bombed. We did a few missions as pathfinder, initial first flare droppers, 'til we got our regular pathfinders, came to the squadron I should say, and they took over from us. Originally when we started, each squadron would be given the job of pathfinding. They picked the most experienced crews, and you'd go up with a load of flares, two or three of us. One go over (unclear) first and you'd drop a flare, have a look around, and there'd be just a bit of silence underneath, and then you'd drop another flare, when you'd seen (unclear), and drop your main load of flares. As soon as they opened up, the whole ground would just--they were waiting for it to happen, and they just--if it's the flak they're sending you, a good bomber would use the flak positions and get an idea of where you were. So until you'd actually shown that you pretty much identified the target, they wouldn't fire at you. Then all of a sudden, searchlights would come on.

Mr. Metzler: Searchlights.

Mr. Milford: (Unclear).

Mr. Metzler: Of your 38 missions, the bulk of them were flown out of which air base?

Mr. Milford: Out of Amandola.

Mr. Metzler: Can you spell that for me?

Mr. Milford: A-m-a-n-d-o-l-a.

Mr. Metzler: What was your roughest mission of those 38 missions? What was the toughest one for you? The closest call?

Mr. Milford: Well, there were a couple. I guess that trip to Bucharest, that night wasn't a very pleasant one, because our bomber/aimer was sick; he had diarrhea so he couldn't fly, so we had a spare bomber/aimer. We took a pilot that was new to the squadron as the second pilot, which we'd never had. We never had them, but his chance to get experienced. Our navigator was off, so we had three strangers in the crew, and just the pilot, the wireless operator and the gunner. It was a nasty target, and I remember, our bomber/aimer was a--he was an amazing fellow; he had an instinct for speed and everything, and he could just--had the feel for it. We had a pretty good record. I guess probably 50 percent or a little bit more than 50 percent of the bombs he dropped were on the target. That's a pretty damn good--and that's the other thing. We had so few aircraft, the maximum we could probably put on 100 aircraft on the target, so we were, you know, you weren't going to run around and drop bombs indiscriminately if you could. You wanted to make them effective. So that target that night was uncomfortable, and there were a couple of nasty things alongside us. A big Halifax bomber blew up alongside us. That was sort of rather uncomfortable to see the bodies falling out of it and everything. So we were on our way back, and the moon came up or something; I know there was moonlight. We were cruising along the Danube at that stage, between Rumania and Bulgaria, so we're flying east-west, before we turned up north-south. We were flying along there, and all of a sudden, Billy screams out, "Jerry, Jerry!" and in back, there's a Focke-Wulf 190 in the back. Right, and he could see it, and then I looked out and this guy's in the astrodome. I

never would sit at the radio when we were over enemy territory; I spent most of my time in the astrodome, fighter watch. I looked out on the starboard side; the bloody fighter's there, right alongside us, Focke-Wulf 190. Then, the navigator looked out and he says, "There's one on the port side." We're boxed in.

Mr. Metzler: You were surrounded!

Mr. Milford: Boxed in by these damn things. So, what are we going to do? We reckoned that this was it, you know. We couldn't see anything out of it, we're going to get away with this. So, Billy, the gunner, the rear gunner, he did what, he'd only done it once before, in the whole tour. He just put about a 20-second burst into this guy in the rear. I think he hit him; I'm not sure. I'm pretty sure he did hit him, and he broke off. Damn, these other two fighters just broke off! So, we could never figure this. So we're sort of at that stage, whew! So we're flying back, and we crossed the Danube then, going over Yugoslavia, and Billy, the gunner, called up to the pilot. He said, "Hey Norm," he said, "I've got to go back to the Elsan." The Elsan was our little potty. Norm said, "Now, Billy, you know, Bob can get in the turret." And Billy says, "Look, when you're changing like that, we pushed a little farther afield over in that part of Yugoslavia," he says, "It's too dangerous." He said, "You can't do it." So anyhow, we get over the Adriatic, and he says, "Okay Billy, you can go up there now. Okay Bob, get in the turret." So I go down there, we switch over, I get in the turret, I swung this thing around on the beam, and I look up this fuselage, and here's Billy over at our little potty, the Elsan there. He took off his outer canvas suit, took this off. He took off his (unclear) uniform; took off his electric suit, and he took off--we had (unclear) boots off, too. He took his underpants off, and my picture was him dropping these things in the Elsan like that. When we got back to debriefing, Billy's going on, "You, it wasn't the

bloody Jimmy's diarrhea that you got, boy. It those damn fighters that got behind that (unclear, both laughing.) So in a way, it was an interesting story, but it looked like to us, a very close call at the time.

Mr. Metzler: Turned out all right, but it didn't look good for a while.

Mr. Milford: No, but move into this year, or last year, very, very recently, I was reading this book about the Mediterranean Strategic Air Force thing, and they mentioned about the 15th Air Force guys in the daylight, they were reporting Focke-Wulf 190s, too. And then, it turned out that they weren't 190s at all; they were Rumanian aircraft, manufactured in Rumania. This was interesting, because I think they were the only place outside Germany that was allowed to produce aircraft. The Rumanians, they had this aircraft factory thing going.

Mr. Metzler: Were they building 190s?

Mr. Milford: They were building something that looked--it wasn't a 190--but it looked like a 190.

Mr. Metzler: I'll bet it didn't perform like a 190.

Mr. Milford: I don't know; no, it probably didn't. At any rate, it didn't matter.

Mr. Metzler: That's interesting.

Mr. Milford: It performed enough for the Americans to worry about it, and so, at any rate, what we reckoned, what I surmised, this is what they were. At that time, just about when we did that trip, was when Rumania was switching, and they switched to the allied side. I think those guys were playing with us. On that score, what I'm doing here in America is that was a bunch of things that I happened to--I spent the last, since 1970, when I came here, for 18 years I worked in World Bank in agricultural development around the world. I happened to befriend a Rumanian guy that came--this was when Rumania was still under communists--and he was

(unclear) for our department. It worked out, he was in the air the same time as us.

Mr. Metzler: Small world.

Mr. Milford: Isn't it a small world, eh? Yeah, so that was that. But I think, you know, when we talk about the RAF effort in that part of the world, I think the most, certainly we did interdicting the transport of oil and storage was a very important thing. We did something that our American colleagues couldn't do, and that was to mine the Danube. I didn't fly on any of these missions, but our gunner did. They mined the Danube, see, they were transporting oil by rail and by the river. By far, the most important route was the river. One barge could carry over, I think it was 100 cars of gasoline. It was a huge amount of difference, just this one barge. So, they were storing it on the river banks and then putting it into barges, and away they'd go. Well, they got this bright idea, and so Wellingtons and the B-24s in our group then were dropping these mines. They went in at about 200 feet; this was a moonlight night job. Sometimes they were flying below the banks of the river, to get these mines in the river. The mines, our armorers weren't allowed to touch them. The Royal Navy guys were called in, and they brought their mines with them. There were three types. There was the acoustic, magnetic, and contact mines. They sowed these in the river over a period of a couple of months.

Mr. Metzler: So this is what, 1944?

Mr. Milford: '44.

Mr. Metzler: Okay.

Mr. Milford: They almost completely stopped the barge traffic on the river. The crews, most of these guys were from Yugoslavia, and these guys went to the mountains. They weren't going to ride these barges. The Germans would try to catch them, but they went and saw their friend Mr. Tito, and so they just wouldn't have anything to do with

floating these barges, because they didn't know when they were going to go up. I mean, they'd go and these magnetic mines, you know, you'd sail over it and nothing happened, and the next one, you sail over it, and then the third one, up you'd go. It caught the Germans really by surprise, and Ploesti, to the very end, it was vital to them, because they needed that for their high octane fuel. They could run all sorts of things with their potato distillery stuff, but they couldn't--

Mr. Metzler: Coal conversion and all that stuff.

Mr. Milford: --but they needed that for their things, and our efforts there, on those trips, was--I read this again--they say that the war in Europe was probably shortened by as much as six months because of the way that was (unclear). The biggest contribution in flying there was this damn mining of the Danube. It really was. Of course, if you knocked the railhead, the rail junction or anything else, they could just build it up again.

Mr. Metzler: Repair it, yeah.

Mr. Milford: Repair it. That was, I think, the most significant contribution our guys made to the war in Europe. I finished my tour--and actually, that was another year after the most dangerous runs. I think probably the most dangerous runs were the ones we thought were dead easy. This was when the U.S. guys were going up into Austria to Wiener Neustadt, which was their Messerschmidt factory up there. We used to go up at the night, and sow delayed bombs on the airstrips. Well, that was our last mission, our last operation. We, there were about 60 of us on that thing, and I think we lost seven. The next time they went, they lost 13 out of 60. So, you know, it wasn't--

Mr. Metzler: Losing this to fighters?

Mr. Milford: No, no--yes, to fighters, all to fighters, because these guys, they wised up to it. I mean, I know when we, that last night we were

there, I was in the astrodome, and this 190--this 109--the Messerschmidt, he was coming this way and we were going that way, and I guess our combined speed of approach was nearing 500 miles an hour, and he sort of looked at me. I was in the astrodome; it was so close. He looked at me; I looked at him, and he waved, and I waved to him.

Mr. Metzler: Are you kidding?

Mr. Milford: I kid you not. (Mr. Metzler laughs). And you know, in my World Bank day, again, there was a German guy that I got very friendly with, and he was a night fighter pilot up in that area, too. Yeah. Well, it was very, very interesting.

Mr. Metzler: Sure is!

Mr. Milford: So that was it, in very short term, you know, that sort of thing, I think.

Mr. Metzler: So why did they pull you after 38 missions? Is that what you knew you'd do?

Mr. Milford: It was the tour, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: That was the tour?

Mr. Milford: In Bomber Command, 30 missions was it. They had a chopper rate of about five percent. You know, between four and five, four and a half, five percent. Well, you looked at the math of that, and you did 20 trips and you've got ten where you're flying on borrowed time.

Mr. Metzler: That's right.

Mr. Milford: Well, we had too easier targets there, and to compensate for that, they just tacked ten more on the thing, forty trips.

Mr. Metzler: Yeoh! Sometimes it's the easy targets that aren't so easy at all.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, as it turned out, some of those weren't, but it compensated, and our casualty rate was about three point something, and so once we'd done 30 trips, we were on borrowed time then, too. So, you know, it was like that, but you know, it was an interesting thing. I

think some wonderful stories about the guys in our squadron. There's an Australian guy, actually a wireless operator I trained with, I knew him. They got shot down over northern Italy and they bailed out. He got contact with the gunner--he was a Scotsman--and they got together, and they walked the way down the spine of Italy, and they got handed on by agents that were there. There was the guy, I found out later, very instrumental in organizing that, was an Australian fighter pilot that had been shot down a long time before. He was just organizing the escape channels down there.

Mr. Metzler: I'll be darned.

Mr. Milford: Any rate, he and this guy, they got them through the lines and, almost unfortunately for them, there happened to be an Indian division, and these guys were trigger-happy, and they reckoned that they were spies, and they were going to knock them off, you see. So fortunately, they managed to get down to one of the officers and suggested that he try and make a call down to our part of the world, which they did, and they identified them. They were fine, then. So they came back, and they hit the squadron. Maybe it was in the morning, and this was six weeks later. What the hell are you guys doing here? You got the chop! You should not be here!

Mr. Metzler: You weren't supposed to be here!

Mr. Milford: Yeah, not supposed to be here, these two guys. Well, that was fine, but then later on, this little Scotsman, the gunner, oh, he was absolutely off with the lot of us! He was mad as a hornet! It turns out, you see, in addition to this whisky and gin that we got, we got another very precious commodity doled out to us once a month, and it was a big 26-ounce bottle of beer, each. So it was a custom in our squadron to save these things, stick 'em--we never had beds or anything, so we had to make our own cots and everything and it was pretty rough.

Mr. Metzler: So are you in tents?

Mr. Milford: We're in tents, yeah, and that was the old tents in the desert, and they weren't very weatherproof. The cooks had no facilities; they cooked on an iron plate. They dripped in water and old oil into a fire pit underneath and that's what they cooked on. Bert was the head cook; you'd ask Bert (unclear) your bloody rations, but it wasn't very good. At any rate, this beer, we used to keep under these things--I made a bed out of two tent poles and I wove camouflage strips of burlap, you know these things are about three inches wide, together. It sunk down to the ground, so it was (unclear, laughing). At any rate, when this Scotsman went to get his beer, it wasn't there. Of course, it wouldn't there because, when we came back from a trip, and we debriefed, and there might be a crew, a crew or two, missing. The first thing, there'd be a race down to their tent to get their beer (chuckles). (Unclear, laughing), we used to get the beer. We were saving that; the thing was, that we used it then for the big bash, the party, when we'd finished our tour. So, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: I should think so. (Mr. Milford laughs). Deserve a party. So your last mission was what, late '44?

Mr. Milford: No, that mission was in June 10, I think. It was just after the invasion; I think the invasion had happened, Normandy. Yeah. We finished then.

Mr. Metzler: So, where did you go?

Mr. Milford: We went down to Cairo for six weeks. We had a camp down there; it was a little bit more civilized. It was getting sort of around to the night clubs there and so forth. Then they shipped us back to England. The RAF with their aircrews, when they finished their tours from whatever, from Bomber Command, Coastal Fighter, they sent them up to a place up in New Inverness in Scotland. It was where they sort of, all these flak-happy crews were. It was a crazy place, and everybody being, you know, you

could feel the thank-God-we're-here sort of thing. They did all sorts of tests on us and everything else. Then from that clinic, we were posted out to other places. I finished up the last nine months, almost, of the war, outside Oxford Killington, which is a pilots' advanced flying unit. Those two-engined things, they had to have a wireless operator in them, so I flew with them.

Mr. Metzler: Where were they based?

Mr. Milford: Just outside Oxford.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, there in the Midlands.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, and so we were there. Actually, last year, my grandsons took me over there.

Mr. Metzler: Did they?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, we went there and went to the OTU, the operational training unit at Norton Marsh, where we crewed up. They took me there. As a matter of fact, there they had a picture of our crew we took outside the Swan Hotel. When we got there, we were walking down the street with my two grandsons last year, the Swan, still there! So we had a beer there.

Mr. Metzler: Things don't change fast in the U.K. (laughs).

Mr. Milford: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Well, that must have been fun.

Mr. Milford: It was, it was. Yeah. So, you know, it was a very interesting thing. There was a book--a Canadian bomber/aimer in our squadron, he finished up--no, he wasn't Canadian; he was a Brit. He finished up; he migrated to Canada, and his son there, he did military history. He was a teacher, but he majored in military history. So, Shorty said to his son one day, "Why don't you write a history of this squadron?" He said, "Well, how do I do it?" And Shorty said, "Well," he said, "look." He said, "There are plenty of people around," he said, "and still alive. Why don't you make contact with them?" Somehow or other, I was in the U.S., and I

got a note from him, from this guy, and I didn't know who he was, even. He said, "Well, blah, blah, blah," you know. So I put him onto a whole bunch of guys, one or two guys in Australia, and then they put him onto other people. Then he wrote this thing; it's more or less like this. It's not an oral history, but it's a written history. I've written stuff for him, and other guys have written stuff. It was very, very interesting. I remember thinking a couple of things about it, that the secret to getting through a tour was, okay, luck had something to do with it, but the more you did it, the better you got at it. It was like anything. The more you did was because you had a damn good crew, and you know, you knew how the other guys were thinking almost. You did things just automatically; you didn't need to think. It was that bond, that confidence you had in these people. I think any guys that said they weren't frightened; you didn't believe them. I was shit-scared most of the time. I think you needed that jump of fear to get the adrenalin pumped up so much that, you know, you just did things.

Mr. Metzler: As soon as you get complacent, you're dead.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah. It was a very, as I say, a period in one's life that you never will forget. And if I can digress here, I did a thing like thus last year at the Australian War Memorial. I got an interview, an oral thing. There, I got this treatment; they wheeled me around in a wheelchair, and I got to this darn Lancaster bomber, and there were these 4,000-pound bombs and other bombs underneath showing it. Then there was a light and sound display going. They had flak bursting; they had searchlights up and the tracers from the light flak, and I lost it completely.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Milford: I never; it just all came back. I was just--

Mr. Metzler: Really impacted you.

Mr. Milford: It wore me out; I was--

Mr. Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, and you know, I was saying yesterday when we went round, this is interesting here. I can come here, and I can look at here, and I know a lot about, you know, because I had so many friends in the Pacific War, and the campaigns and everything. But I said how lucky I was that it didn't impact like it did in that short time.

Mr. Metzler: That is interesting! Did you stay in touch with, in contact with your old crew, after the war was over?

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yes, and the navigator and I--he was RAF, but he never went back to England. He was, as I say, an officer. When we finished, he went down to Cairo, and he wouldn't take a discharge in England. He went back to Canada, where his sweetheart was waiting for him in Winnipeg. He married there, and they had kids. It was a sort of interesting thing. We had four kids, and they did, too, and they were about the same ages. As a matter of fact, my navigator, he did agriculture, too. After the war, I went and I got a high school diploma. It was clear that there was no future in just messing around as a field assistant in this (unclear) industrial research organization, so I (unclear) and took the equivalent of the GI Bill, and did the degree in agriculture. Then I went back into these research people and got a master's, and I became a research scientist, and worked in tropical pasture development for the beef cattle industry in Queensland. The way I got to the states was--

Mr. Metzler: You need some water?

Mr. Milford: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: I'm making you do a lot of talking.

Mr. Milford: It's okay. The way I got here was, I was at an international grassland conference in Brazil, and I've forgotten how, it was post-conference traveling, and we got an invite, another couple of Australians and I got an invite to go to Paraguay. We looked

around there, whoo, very interesting. The World Bank by then had just started a ranching project in Paraguay. So, I went back to Australia and thought nothing of it. Then six years later, I got a cable from them, asking me if I'd be interested in taking a job as a technician with the Central Bank of Paraguay in their second master ranching development project. So, with the family, we headed off there, and from that point onwards, it was World Bank financed. The World Bank liked what I did, and I joined the regular staff up in Washington. That's how I got to the U.S. Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: You've become a man of the world. (Mr. Milford laughs).

Mr. Milford: Let me ask you a question about when you were in the European Theater. Did you write letters home? Did you stay in contact with family?

Mr. Milford: Oh yeah, yeah. Again, you see, letters, well you can forget about them. They were just--it'd take weeks to get anything. It's a funny thing, too; we were heavily censored. Our American friends were a lot better off in that sense, too.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, but they were crazy. At any rate, they had care letters, and you'd write these things, and they'd photograph them, and put them in a little 35-mil thing. Then, I don't know; they flew them out somehow. I don't know how this all happened, but they got there a lot faster. So that was the main sort of way we kept in touch with people at home. They used to send us food parcels, which were very acceptable, as you can imagine. Fruitcake, you know, the real British fruitcake, fruit-fruit-fruitcake, which you kept (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: (Laughing) Dark and heavy!

Mr. Milford: Yeah. I still make these. You know, I did a lot of cooking after, and I still make these things called ANZAC biscuits, ANZAC cookies. They're a cookie that will last. They can stand the travel,

(unclear) all the tinned fruit and that sort of thing. I recall, I left Italy, and then we went down to Cairo and then over to England. Well, there was a whole bunch of parcels that didn't catch up with me. Well, one day when I'm at this place outside Oxford, I got a call from the mail room (unclear), and there they were, all stacked up there, a huge kitbag full of these things (Mr. Metzler laughs). So, by this time, we'd made very good friends with a family up in Ilford in Essex, and we used go up there, another buddy of mine, you know, we used to go up there every weekend, practically. I remember marching in with this kitbag and just throwing it on the floor, because you know, with the rationing they had over there, it was just like manna from heaven.

Mr. Metzler:

Yes. Yeah, I can imagine.

Mr. Milford:

In that respect, that Ilford, it was on the direct line of the V-2 rocket, between London and the launching sites in Holland. So a lot of those rockets fell short. I guess, if I'm telling tales of how I'm lucky to be here, well, this particular Saturday evening, I decided to go round and see this girlfriend, well not a girlfriend, a girl that we'd taken out a bit there, and go around from our house place, and around the corner and knock on the door. Mr. Smith came out, "Ohhh!" God, you know, we're great, so he called Mary and Mary's "Ohhh!" So we decided that we'd get a kit, some beer, so we went up to the off-license, up the block, around the corner to this off-license, like a liquor store, and so we came back with these huge, couple of quart bottles with screw tops on them, you know, two each carrying them. It was Broy, my buddy, and me and Mary, and we're going along, and then all of a sudden there was a goddamn flash, Boom, and next thing an explosion. We dived and I remember pushing this girl in the gutter and dived on top of her. Broy was there and Broy was running along, so where he was

standing, and the windows down the street just went ting-ting-ting-ting as they--

Mr. Metzler: As they broke.

Mr. Milford: --as they broke. Then this great chunk of tailfin of the rocket came skidding down the pavement, right where we were standing. At any rate, the end of the story was, it was a direct hit right over the top of the off-license. We were minutes away; we were just walking down the street, minutes away from the place. So we went out later to another pub and had something stronger than beer.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). Yeah, right!

Mr. Milford: That same weekend, it was Christmastime, and the pantomime, kids' pantomime, in Ilford got a direct hit. That was (unclear) from the rocket, the V-2. Look further, closer into town, Woolworth's, Saturday morning Woolworth's, was packed, and that was knocked, too. You never knew when they were coming!

Mr. Metzler: Especially the V-2s. The V-1s were a little slower.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah, but the V-2s, you didn't know. At the friends' house, though, we had a pull-out couch. Broy and I slept in this thing. I remember this particular morning, I'd gone off to work, and there were six or seven explosions all around us with these damn things falling short (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: Do you ever dream about the war after all these years, at night?

Mr. Milford: I think I might have had a nightmare after that business in Australia, just once.

Mr. Metzler: At the museum?

Mr. Milford: Yeah, but my--

Mr. Metzler: But that kind of surprised you, that you reacted like that?

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: Because you hadn't had any symptoms or--?

Mr. Milford: No. No, no, no. See, I married when I started at college, at the university. Veronica was teaching, she was teaching, and when we were first married, I'd wake up and be kicking, "Bail out! Bail out!" I had a lot of, you know, I never realized it was happening, and then I had to go, I remember after the war, again, student times in those days at university, there was no semester business. You started the year, and you went through the whole year, and you had your exams at the end of it. If you passed, you passed; and if you didn't, you might get a post exam if it wasn't too bad. If you failed at more than two, you had to repeat it, or that's it, sorry. Those exams took about five weeks for them to go through. By the time you finished studying, you were dead beat, you know. You'd put everything into it. After that, I went to this dentist; I had work done and extractions to be done. They put me under the gas, and I came to. The dentist, his mechanic, and the nurse were all on top of me. I was in a Wellington; we were in a spin; we were in flames, and I'm trying to crawl up the fuselage with a parachute to get out of the place. And yes, that was--

Mr. Metzler: So that wasn't long after the war.

Mr. Milford: No, that was--

Mr. Metzler: You got better as you went along.

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: What do you think about the Germans?

Mr. Milford: Oh, I think they're very (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). You do?

Mr. Milford: I never had--it's a funny war in that sense. You see, they were just shooting at us, and we were shooting at them. I remember, I never felt that we needed to--

Mr. Metzler: You were even waving to each other as you went by.

Mr. Milford: Yeah. And on that score, on one trip to northern Italy, these guys, they got wise to us. They dropped flares. So we were there flying

on our bombing run with flares burning around us. This particular time, I was in the astrodome, and I saw this fighter, single engined thing, and he'd been after another aircraft, not us, but he was hanging there, you know, they'd come in on a curve and then they stalled out there, waiting to drop out of that. Here he was hanging, and Billy had a point-blank shot. It was absolutely dead-cert we couldn't have missed him. I'm screaming to Billy, "Get the bastard! Get the bastard!" Billy says, "He hasn't seen us." He wouldn't fire his guns. I don't know if that German lived later on, but that night, he was a lucky German. He was a bit like us later on. So, those things happened. On that score, you see, I told you about this guy that made it back through the lines. Well, he came back in the squadron, and they put him in another crew. He was on his way to Budapest, and they got attacked. The plane blew up, but Stan, by this time, he was frightened, of course, and he always wore his parachute. We never wore a parachute. He always wore (unclear) here, you see, and what happened, was again this thing. Some guy came in from the rear, and they got him, but someone came from underneath, and they got them. The damn thing blew up, and all Stan remembers about that was that he was falling, and so he remembered to pull the ripcord, and he landed for the second time in enemy territory. So, he was going to walk down through Yugoslavia and everything else and get back. "I've been through it." But he found--a family found him, and he finished up as a POW.

Mr. Metzler: But he got out; he survived.

Mr. Milford: He got out; he survived. Yeah. He was shot down twice; it was not fair (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: Man, he's a lucky man! So, your war experience changed you as a person?

Mr. Milford: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: How?

Mr. Milford: Well, I grew up! I came to be more responsible, and certainly, much more aware of friendships, of people, and I certainly, like the kids that were here yesterday in the museum, I remember, what were they looking at? Oh, the Coral Sea battle. I told them an Australian's view, about the Coral Sea battle, because I was there, and saying that, you know, where we were in Australia, that saved us, in our eyes at that time, that saved us. That was the turning point.

Mr. Metzler: That was a big deal.

Mr. Milford: It was a big deal, and then I sort of said, you know, the whole point is that we never want another war. I'm afraid that what's happening in this day and age is that the younger generation have lost that knowledge of what war can do. Given the fact that what we have now in terms of firepower, of hypersonic weapons and space weapons and nuclear weapons, it's frightening to think of it.

Mr. Metzler: It's going to be even uglier, and it was plenty bad in World War II.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah. And, you know, it's a shame that that sort of lesson is being diluted over time. It's history.

Mr. Metzler: That's right. It's the value of history, to teach you not to do that again, if you can get that through. When you went back to Australia after the war was over, did you get back to Australia before the war was over?

Mr. Milford: Well, this was an interesting thing. We went through the Panama Canal. The war in Europe was over, of course, and we went through the Panama Canal. We were with a lot of Australia and New Zealand POWs, Army guys that had been captured years before in the desert. There were lots of those guys. Some of those, you know, three or four years POWs, they'd been. There were those and a few of us. I don't remember when, but the first of the bombs fell before we got to Sydney.

Mr. Metzler: The atomic bombs? Hiroshima was first.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, the Hiroshima bomb.

Mr. Metzler: Nagasaki was next.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, and then the war finished. The whole point was that it was a Godsend for us in that sense, because we realized when we left England that we'd probably be tapped to go up there for the invasion thing, somewhere.

Mr. Metzler: That would have been ugly.

Mr. Milford: Yea, yes. We don't know, but at least we were saved that.

Mr. Metzler: So where did you put in in Australia? You go back to Sydney when you came in?

Mr. Milford: We came to Sydney and then we rode up by train,

Mr. Metzler: How did it feel, coming back home?

Mr. Milford: Wonderful! Yeah, yeah. Into our little country town, we had a great celebration, I remember. The war was (unclear) and everything.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, I usually ask that question of the U.S. guys, and most of them came back in under the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, and they just wax eloquent about how that felt, seeing it and going under it. I'm sure you had the same feeling (unclear, both speaking together) in Australia.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, seeing the Harbor Bridge.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, absolutely; it's just as famous.

Mr. Milford: Oh, yes, yeah. It was good, and you felt, well, you didn't--I think someone who thanks you for your service to be (unclear), yeah. It was, we did it; we didn't expect any thanks. .

Mr. Metzler: Everybody did it.

Mr. Milford: Everybody did it.

Mr. Metzler: Full mobilization.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah.

Mr. Metzler: And that's something we haven't seen since, in either country.

Mr. Milford: In Australia, you see, the Australian--at the height of the danger there, and I don't know exactly how accurate these figures are, but the figure I've heard of, that Australia had about a million men under arms, in uniform at any rate.

Mr. Metzler: I've read that number, yeah,

Mr. Milford: Out of a population of six million or something.

Mr. Metzler: A huge percentage.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, but then of course, as the war moved further away, well I think they were able to get back to a more normal figure. It was a very exciting time, well, a very worrying time in Australia, to be there.

Mr. Metzler: Have you seen a Wellington since you left Italy?

Mr. Milford: Yes, I have, I have. My grandsons took me to England, as I said, last year. The idea was, they wanted to see, wanted me to show them my part of the war in England. See, one of my grandsons had spent a couple of years in the U.S. Embassy, three years I think, in London, and the other one was in homeland security, and he had ties to the British intelligence business there. So they wanted to see what I had, and so it was the time when the RAF hundredth anniversary was coming up. They closed the museum in Hendon, the RAF Museum there, and that was where this one intact Wellington was. I was looking forward to taking them up there and seeing that. Well, then we found out that there's a Wellington in Brooklands, in Surrey. Brooklands is a museum there; it's a motor museum, antique cars.

Mr. Metzler: It was originally a racing track.

Mr. Milford: The first racing track in the world, yeah. They have an aircraft museum there, too, and they've got a Wellington. It was actually, this thing had been from an operational training unit in 1940, '41? I think '40. It had got into trouble on a trip, a training trip in a

storm, and they ditched in Loch Ness. (Mr. Metzler laughs). It had sunk to the bottom. American divers, in the 1970s, found it.

Mr. Metzler: I'll be danged!

Mr. Milford: Then the operation was to get it up. So they raised this darn thing, and they transported the thing in pieces down to Brooklands, and then they rebuilt it. It was a geodetic construction, with the canvas on top, very, very strong. They did a wonderful job to build the bits and pieces that had been bashed around too much. They've got this thing now--I think I've got a picture here; I'll show it to you later--but they've got this thing now and they didn't put all the skin back on it; they left the aft fuselage open so you can look and--

Mr. Metzler: Look inside, yeah.

Mr. Milford: --and see where the Elsan was. (Both laugh). And where the radio set was. Around this museum place, they had, you know, various things, and they had this old Marconi radio stuff there. When I saw this, it looked a lot smaller than what I thought it used to be. (Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, well, I think that's a normal thing. It's like the house you were raised in. When you go back, it looks a lot smaller than the way you remembered it.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, it's so right. I had fun bashing out on the morse.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, you did? (Laughs).

Mr. Milford: Yeah, yeah. Yes, I had a little bash. So that was quite a thing.

Mr. Metzler: What else can we talk about, about your World War II experience? I told you I was going to give you a free shot at the end on anything.

Mr. Milford: Well, I think--there are a couple of things that I wanted to mention. When the Americans took over the agricultural college, and they built this very large base hospital there, we had all the work and bits and pieces. Well, you know, decent dining facilities, and a

mall and all these things. Anyway, move forward to the beginning of my third year of agriculture, and the University of Queensland. We did two years in the university in Brisbane, and then we did another year up at the old campus of the agricultural college. So, having worked there, as I had, I knew the people and everything else, so we did a bit. It was over the long vacation, which was Christmastime, summertime there. We were house-sitting, and I was off on a field trip, and Veronica--so we had our first born, he was two and a half months preemie. In those days, nothing.

Mr. Metzler: That's tough.

Mr. Milford: It was tough. We weren't looking to the fact that I'm up there, she's in Brisbane, I go down weekends, you know, all that sort of thing. In those days, I didn't have a car or anything, so you had to go on the rail, and so forth. So, Veronica went up and saw the principal, and said, "Ask Neil," and he was a friend of ours, incidentally. He said, "Hey, Neil. You know, we'd like, with Bob coming up here, I wonder if it's possible to let us have the morgue?" He said this was a great idea, so--

Mr. Metzler: Plenty of square footage in storage (laughs).

Mr. Milford: --yeah, yeah. And so, the morgue was a building, and it was quite, it was just a hut, five-by hut, with no trimmings or anything, but it had the necessities, the slab and the refrigerator, and all this other stuff.

Mr. Metzler: Plenty of refrigeration.

Mr. Milford: And a, what do you call it, a chodbin. And so, basics, you know. So, okay. So time comes to start course work again, and we moved up there. The guys in our year, they were a good bunch of guys, and so everybody pitched in, and we did the big furnishing, refurbishing of the morgue. Well, we took out the refrigeration and the trays and everything and we got rid of those, and that was our living room. Then, the kitchen area, well, we put an electric

stove in there. The slab, well, that was our dining table; we had the slab as our dining table. Then the chodbin; I said, "Well, give us a proper toilet seat." The local people did, but like all bureaucracies, that was another story. So, we lined the thing with burlap. The studs were all there, so just put the (unclear) of the studs, then put unprinted newspaper, we got rolls of that and pasted this on and painted it with that water paint. Then the ceiling, we stretched wires across and put the burlap on that, and sewed the burlap to the wires, and really (unclear) string tight, and then put the newspaper stuff on that and painted that up. So we had a nice--
Housing is housing.

Mr. Metzler:

Mr. Milford:

--yeah, and so that's what we lived in. But the toilet actually arrived, but alongside this morgue was the remnants of a huge emergency generator that the Americans had put in there, just in case. They had this huge concrete block there. Well, someone came to put the toilet in, so I put the toilet on the concrete block. It so happened that this was the route down to the mail, where the train came every day, and they used to go down every day to pick up the mail, and visitors would come and go past, and that toilet sat on that block for the whole nine months we were there (both laugh).

Mr. Metzler:

Oh, my God!

Mr. Milford:

The other one is in my World Bank days. I traveled a lot, and I did a lot of work in Latin America and Mexico particularly. This particular mission I was on, on a rural development project down in the Yucatan, and on the mission was a Japanese gentleman who was a fisheries expert. He was very good, and he used to (unclear) and go out with the local fisherman and, you know, so forth and so forth. It turned out that this guy was a kamikaze pilot.

Mr. Metzler:

Really? What was he doing alive?

Mr. Milford: Well, this was the interesting thing. He was one of the mob that they were saving for when we invaded, and that sort of thing.

Mr. Metzler: The invasion, yeah.

Mr. Milford: He said he didn't want to die, nor did any of his friends want to die. He thought this was stupid, you know, but it was something that he had been told to do and he had no option. I think that was really the point. David said I should tell you that story--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah!

Mr. Milford: --because it certainly, it was--I don't know for some of those earlier kamikaze pilots, what their mindset was, but at any rate.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. What else can we talk about, Bob?

Mr. Milford: Oh, I don't know.

Mr. Metzler: You have been rolling along for, we're working on two hours here.

Mr. Milford: Have we?

Mr. Metzler: Great stories! Real experience. This is a nice addition to our archives, and we appreciate it.

Mr. Milford: Well, you know, as I said, and this is another interesting thing. I was that far from not going to Europe, going out to the Pacific. The expansion of the Australian Air Force coincided with about the time of my, you know, of leaving. But they had a big commitment in England. This is commonwealth flying training scheme, which, it started in Canada; then it became Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Rhodesia, South Africa. They trained a lot of their own people there. A lot of Australians were trained, or they did their initial training in Australia; they went to Canada and finished up there. So in that sense, there was this commitment. I'm not sure of the stats, but I know that the, of the bomber people that served in Europe, just like the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Force, casualty rates were the highest of anything. I think probably, maybe there were 10-, 12,000 thousand Australians served in

bomber command, in bombers in Europe. Just short of 5,000 never came back. It was almost a 50 percent casualty rate.

Mr. Metzler: Tough times.

Mr. Milford: You know, so the Australians in the Pacific were a little less than that. But my point was that we left and then the next course after us--

Mr. Metzler: Went to the Pacific.

Mr. Milford: --went to the Pacific. They built up the Australian Air Force. The bomber force was mostly B-24s. If I'd have stayed there, if there was any possibility of being in the Beaufighters, they would have sent me--I did very well in the wireless school and they picked the top two guys in the course when we were about halfway through, and asked if I'd--they asked us both if we wanted to go to a navigator's course, because they wanted navigator/radio people combined to fly in the Beaufighters. I said, "No way!" I said, "This is..." I just wanted to get me sergeant hooks to get more pay.

Mr. Metzler: That's right. It's all about the money, right? (Laughs).

Mr. Milford: And I said, "If I had to, I would have gone to, yeah." (Unclear) we'd have probably finished up. Some of my very best friends were up there, and I lost a couple, you know. So, I was always interested in it, and it's an interesting thing that my family--I've got two kids living here and two in Australia. In Australia, I've got 11 great-grandchildren and a whole bunch of grandchildren, and this year--ANZAC Day is every year on the 25th of April, and that's the big day of parades and all that sort of thing. Well, last year in Brisbane, there was me and then there was Jack, who was the husband of my--the father of my son's wife. We were both there with our medals and that sort of thing. It's very interesting; this town of Brisbane (unclear) about 100,000 people lined up in

this mall, so we're waving at them like the queen from Algeria (both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: Makes you feel important. That's 'cause you are.

Mr. Milford: Yeah, and so this year, as Bernard said, well neither of you are going to be there. But our ANZAC Day (unclear), well Jackie's daughter, she's a social worker in the Australian Embassy. She's American, but she got this job, looking after the Australian forces. There's a huge number of Australian forces in the U.S., you know, mainly with the--tied up to the purchase, well most of it, the purchase of arms and equipment. Of course, the Air Force are in on the F-35 and so forth, so they're in pretty large number. So she travels all around the U.S. and Canada, looking after these families, because they come over, mum and dad and the kids sort of thing. That's what she does. She's told me that the ambassador wants to meet me, and I'll be invited to the--they have a service every year, on the 25th, in the National Cathedral. I was there once before, a couple of years ago, when my wife was still alive. We were guests of honor; it was nice.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. Well, I'm going to end it here, Bob.

Mr. Milford: Okay. Good.

Mr. Metzler: Thank you again for spending the time.

Mr. Milford: My pleasure.

Mr. Metzler: We appreciate it.

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