

IMMEDIATELY I WAS RUSHED BY GERMAN TROOPS

FROM SIXTY SQUADRON, TO CLAUSTHAL.

**The Adventures of Group Captain H.T. Hammond O.B.E.,
as a Scout Pilot and P.O.W. during W.W.I.**

by Keith Keohane & Barry Hickson.

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When World War I started, I was doing an engineering course at Sydney Technical College. My father had wanted me to go to University but I preferred to do the Tech. course at night and work in a motor repair shop by day. Some of the vehicles that I worked on then would be prized as veteran or vintage specimens today.

I was an only child and naturally enough my parents were not anxious for me to enlist. However, all my friends were join up and I didn't want to be left behind. I was nineteen years of age when I enlisted in the A.I.F. We were trained at Liverpool and Holdsworthy, where our "uniform" consisted of a white hat and dungarees. The new recruits were known as "Marmalades", probably because we got it with every meal.

Eventually the time came for us to be shipped away to Egypt, as a reinforcement for the 13th Battalion. However, at a routine medical inspection before embarkation, it was discovered that I had contracted measles! The rest of the boys went off to the ship and I was hurried off to hospital at Liverpool. As a result of this piece of bad luck, I missed the Gallipoli campaign and incidentally, the 1915 ribbon.

I finally got to Egypt, sailing on the S.S. "*Ballarat*" and was drafted into the 5th Division, stationed at Tel-El-Kebir. We did some pretty tough training over there, including sixteen-mile route marches in soft sand, with full packs. On one occasion the 14th Brigade got lost in the desert. We were doing a big march across country and were supposed to finish at a railway line. By some mistake, we missed the line, continued on into the desert and got completely lost. The heat was terrible, we had no water and fellows were throwing their rifles and other equipment away. Finally the Light Horse found us. Whole squadrons of them had been searching, with kerosine tins of water slung over their saddles. We were certainly glad to see them.

I was eventually shipped to France, with the 54th. Battalion. We went up into the line in Belgium, near Armentiers. On the 19th of July, 1916, the whole division took part in the battle of Fromelles. We went over the top at 6 p.m. on a summer evening. The artillery barrage was tremendous. We had about five or six thousand casualties in the division in twelve hours and, unfortunately, I was one of them, being wounded in the leg and head by shell splinters. Those frontal attacks were murder. At Fromelles we went over the top from our second line, which was about a hundred and fifty yards behind the front line which was packed with troops. The communication trenches could not handle the numbers, so we had to advance over

open ground within our own lines and under heavy fire. It was as bad as no man's land.

I remember travelling in the limber to the casualty clearing station at Fromelles and seeing what was left of our battalion, in a village at the back of the line. There wasn't one company left, there were only about one hundred and fifty blokes left out of a thousand.

After being taken to the casualty clearing station, I was moved to an advanced hospital. Later I was evacuated to England and a hospital in Birmingham. When I had recovered from my wounds, I had some sick leave and then reported back to our reinforcement camp on Salisbury Plain. While I was there a notice appeared in the Orderly Tent, calling for volunteer cadets for the Royal Flying Corps and I decided to apply.

I was interviewed by a General, who by coincidence was, like myself, an old Sydney Grammar boy. I don't know whether that had anything to do with it but I was passed as a cadet! Seriously though, I think that the fact that I had been a machine gunner in the infantry and had some engineering experience behind me, helped a great deal. The day that I received my instructions to report to Adastral House, London, was the same day that my reinforcement entrained for France. I was the only one from my unit to go across to the R.F.C. at that time.

We were posted to a training camp at Denham and then spent two months at Brasenose College, Oxford University. Here our course included rigging, machine guns, Morse code, deflection shooting and signals. We also learned something about rotary engines, all our ground training in fact. We received our commissions after this course and were posted to Netheravon Flying School. this was at the beginning of 1917.

We did our flying training and solos on Maurice Farmans. They would only do sixty five miles an hour and must have been pretty easy to fly. Kingsford-Smith was in my squad and did his first solo in the same Maurice Farman as myself. We had the same instructor, Smithy went off first and then it was my turn. I only had three and a half hours dual instruction before going solo.

There were lots of accidents in those days, around the training fields. I remember we used to wear big padded crash helmets for flying. There was one really amazing accident while I was at Netheravon. A student, flying a Maurice Farman, overshot his landing and crashed into the partly closed doors of one of the hangars. The wings sheared off but the nacelle of the Farman continued straight on, skidding over the concrete floor of the hangar. It finished up against the rear wall and to everyone's astonishment, the pilot stepped out unhurt.

Our next move was to the Central Flying School at Upavon. Here we had the opportunity of flying all the most modern aircraft of that day. I started off on B.E.2c's and B.E.2e's, later we flew Martinsydes with Beardmore engines, the 504K Avro and the B.E.12. I also flew the Morane 'Bullet', this was a very tricky aircraft to handle. It had warp control on the wings instead of ailerons and the whole of the

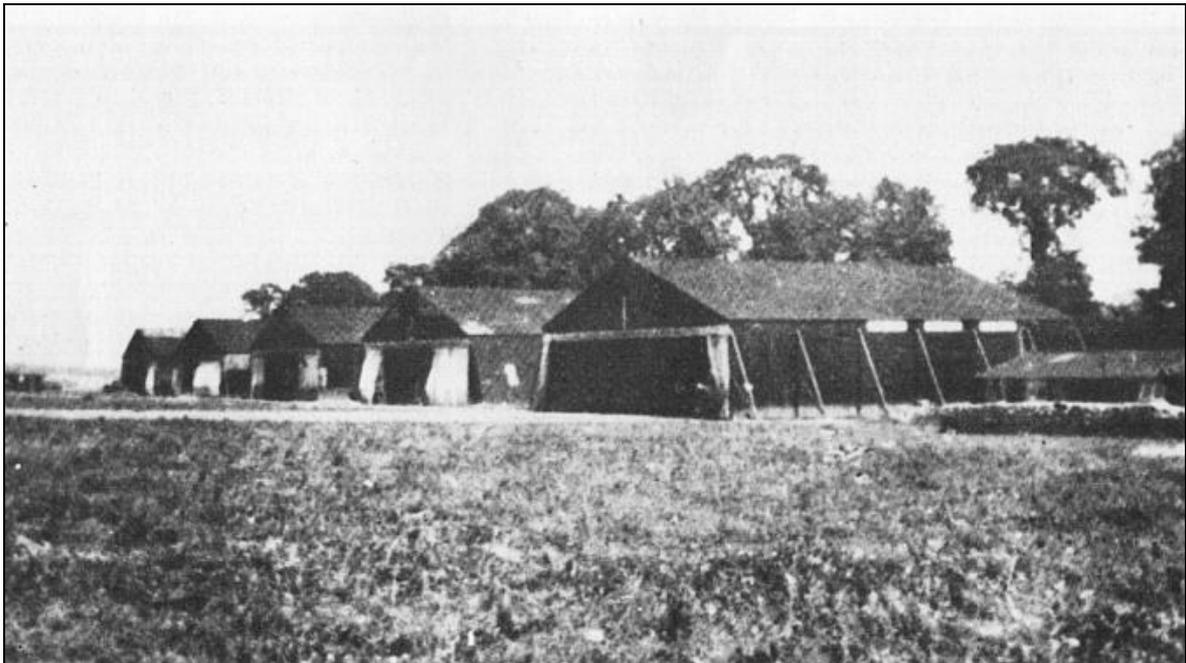
tail-plane was a moveable elevator. Fore and aft control was very sensitive, I remember that you only had to breathe on the stick during a landing and the aircraft would start "hunting" up and down. They were a real handful!

The Avro 504K was a good aeroplane, with the possible exception of the engine, which like all rotaries was a bit tricky on the controls. There were two levers to control the mixture and air, you would get them right to take off but when you were up and had to readjust them, the slightest error would cause the engine to cut out. The propeller would windmill around while you fiddled with the mixture, when you got it right again the engine would fire and away you would go.

Some of the early types we flew had Gnome and Monosoupape rotary engines, fitted with automatic inlet valves, These valves had very sensitive springs and if one stuck in the open position, the engine would fire back into the carburettor and the whole motor would burst into flames. You had to turn off the petrol tap in the cockpit and wait for the flames to go out, then turn it on and hope that the valve would not stick again. This could be dangerous, as the petrol tank was located in the front of the fuselage, behind the motor. Later, in France, our S.E.5's had the tank in the top wing, a much safer arrangement.

During this period of training, I was able to take several leaves in London. It was a wonderful place in those days. The leave trains were arriving at Victoria Station all day and all night, with troops from France. They were still battle weary and covered in mud from the trenches.

After finishing our training at Upavon, we went over to France. Our first stop was at St. Omer, which was a depot for pilots waiting to be drafted to the various squadrons. Here we heard stories of horrifying losses at the front, pilots being shot down wholesale, it all sounded pretty grim. Eventually I found myself on my way to 60 Squadron, which was then stationed at Izel le Hameau, under the command of Major C.K. Cochrane-Patrick.



60 Squadron's hangars at Filescamp Farm aerodrome in 1917.

During my first days at the Squadron, I was given quite a bit of instruction and had a few flights over the lines chasing observation aircraft. At the time, we were flying rotary-engined Nieuport Scouts but later in the month the squadron re-equipped with S.E.5's. Every day there were two aircraft kept on standby, with their pilots. Someone would come running up and shout, "*Two Hun observation aircraft over pinpoint such and such, off you go and see if you can get them*". On one such occasion, two of us attacked a hun machine doing "art. obs.". We dived on him through a break in the clouds and one of us got him. I did quite a few offensive patrols over the other side of the lines, looking for enemy aircraft or formations to have a crack at.

We soon learned how to dodge the German Archie. If they started bursting at the same level, the idea was to climb or descend a thousand feet. It would take the gunners a long time to adjust their range and when they finally did so it was a simple matter to repeat the process in reverse. A whole formation would do this, following their leader. On one occasion, some of our Nieuports were shot up by a squadron of Bristol Fighters. The Nieuport had swept back wings, similar to some of the German types. The "Brisfit" pilots probably couldn't see the roundels because of the sun glinting on the wings. Fortunately, none of our lot were shot down.

Our first S.E's had the 150 h.p. Hispano Suiza engine, later we received S.E.5a's with the 200 Hispano. The bigger motor made a considerable difference in performance. We used to patrol in flights of six, if we could get that many serviceable aircraft. The leader flew in front, with the next two aircraft on either side and behind him. Then came two more, with the remaining machine in the centre a little above or below, out of the slipstream. The Lewis gun used to give us a lot of trouble in the air, we had to take both hands off the stick to reload or clear a jam. The Constantinesco gear, on the fixed gun, would only work correctly when you had constant revs going on the engine. If you fired the guns with the engine ticking over, as in a stall turn, there was a danger of hitting the propeller. It was quite ineffective at slow engine revs, several times I shot holes in my own propeller but, fortunately, not enough to shatter it.

I remember once getting mixed up with the Richthofen Circus, this was at the time they were flying Albatros scouts. There was terrific turmoil in these dog fights, it was hard to know where you were or what was going on. You had to be always alert to avoid collisions. You would be doing stall turns and suddenly you would see an enemy aircraft flash past, you would fire your guns and have a crack at it. Then you would see an aircraft going down, perhaps in flames. After a dog fight, the machines would reassemble for the return flight if possible, Otherwise they would fly back individually.

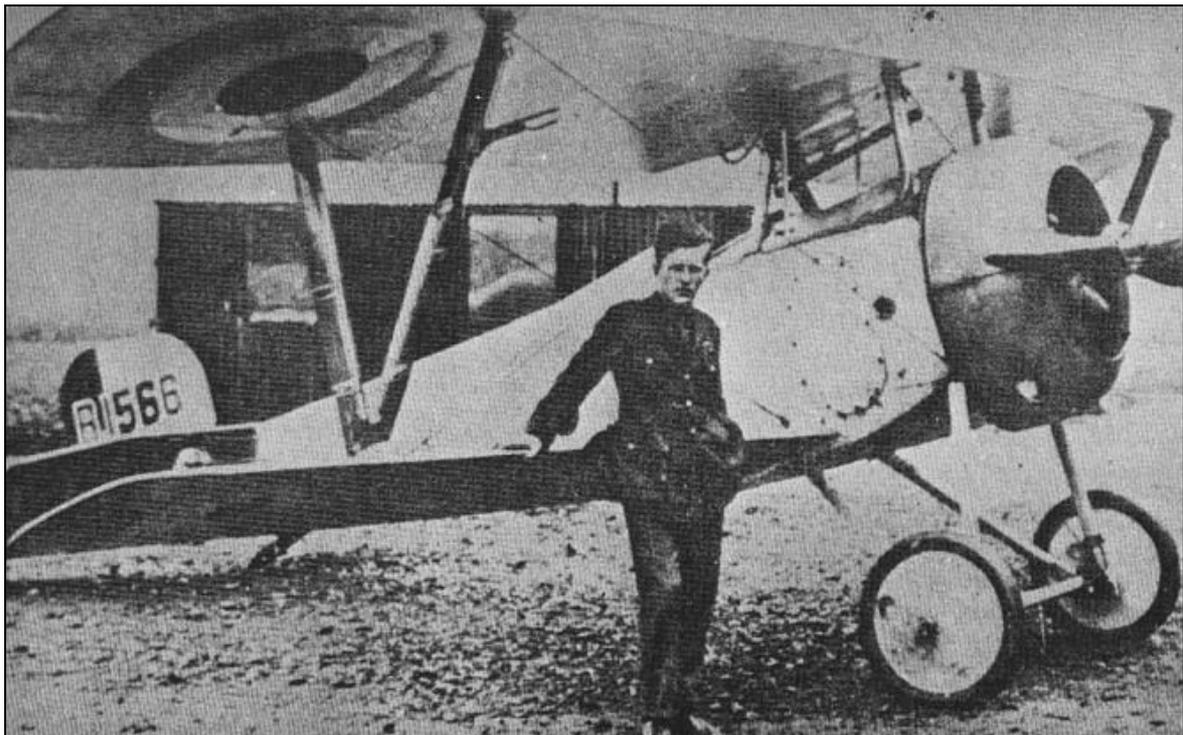
Combat techniques varied with the type of aircraft flown In the Nieuport Scout, we relied on tight turns to get on the other chaps tail and stay there. The S.E.5 wasn't quite as manoeuvrable as the rotary types but would dive at a terrific bat, you could go down at about 250 m.p.h. The idea was to come down fast onto the Huns tail with your guns firing, go past him and then pull the stick back and zoom away before he could do anything about it. The S.E.5 was a very strong aircraft and would stand

anything you could put onto them as far as a dive was concerned. On the other hand, the Nieuports were quite frail they had only a thin bottom wing with a "V" strut. We had a number of cases of wing failure with Nieuports, sometimes after a burst of Archie had come too close and weakened them.

In most British squadrons Nieuport Scouts had either a camouflaged or silver finish. However, in 60 Squadron we tried to match the Richthofen Circus and painted the fuselages a different colour for each flight. As I recall, "A" Flight was red, "B" was blue and "C" yellow. The wings were left in their original silver finish. When we got the S.E.5's, they were painted with eyes and sharks teeth around the nose. The flights were painted red, blue and yellow but the basic colour was khaki.

At the time I joined 60 Squadron, Billy Bishop was one of the flight commanders. He was a real live wire, with plenty of dash. He used to wander off on solitary patrols, shoot a couple of Huns down and come back thinking nothing of it. He seemed to be able to find Huns when no one else could. Sometimes he got caught over the other side of the lines and had to hedge hop back home. Although he was a wonderful combat pilot, he sometimes had trouble with his landings in the S.E.5. I remember that his aircraft had sharks teeth painted on it and eyes on the front of the manifolds.

I remember the night after Bishop got his V.C., it was the eleventh of August, 1917. There was a terrific party, some of the officers got Bishop's tunic out of his hut and tried to sew the V.C. ribbon on to it. Bishop grabbed the tunic but the others wouldn't let go, there was a struggle over it and the tunic was soon torn to pieces. Then they pounced on someone else and dragged his uniform off, soon there was a big pile of torn up uniforms in the entrance to the mess. The officers stalked each other with piles of gramophone records, whooping like red indians and throwing the records at each other. After all this, we had to fly a dawn patrol the next day.



Capt W.A. Bishop with his Nieuport Scout B1566.

It wasn't long after this, that the squadron moved to Marie Capelle, just behind Ypres. From here we worked the Cambrai Lens sector. I will never forget one particular day in September 1917. My flight was due to take off on afternoon patrol, I was still a junior officer in the squadron and was to fly as number six. Before take off the Flight Sergeant came up to me and reported that my machine was unserviceable. However, when the other machines had got off and were climbing, he came back to me and said "*Sir, I think she is all right now*". I hopped into the cockpit, gave her a quick rev. up, then taxied out and took off, trying to catch up with the rest of the flight who were circling overhead. It was quite usual to take off in this haphazard fashion, unlike the Second War. However, on this occasion I was unable to reach the altitude of the other machines as my motor was not developing full power. I finally managed to get within a hundred feet of the formation but by this time we were ten or fifteen miles over the lines.

My engine trouble steadily became worse, every time I opened the throttle it would choke. I began to lose height and soon fell well below the formation. I decided to try to get home and turned back toward the lines. Almost immediately I lost sight of the rest of the flight and a few moments later two Albatros scouts appeared. They dived straight at me and there was very little I could do, with my engine behaving the way it was. I pulled the S.E. up into a stall, put her nose down and dived into the clouds. It was a fairly thick layer but I finally came out underneath, fortunately the enemy machines had disappeared. I then had to decide on the direction to the lines. My compass was useless as it was still spinning from my violent manoeuvres and the sun was hidden by the cloud layer. Eventually I decided on what I thought was the right direction but my engine was not delivering any revs. and I was fast losing height. As soon as I opened the throttle it would choke and I would have to close it again.

Soon I was able to make out the figures of troops down below, to my dismay I saw they were wearing coal-scuttle helmets. As I got lower I could make out machine guns firing at me, I could see the tracer bullets coming up and some were going through my wings. I was twisting and turning, trying to find a place to set down. I spotted a patch where the bushes and barbed wire seemed a bit more scattered and set the wheels down. After a couple of bounces I managed to screw her around some bushes and things and pull up.

Immediately, I was rushed by German troops, who pulled me out of the aircraft at gunpoint and hustled me into a trench. A non-commissioned officer appeared on the scene but he couldn't speak much English. Then an officer arrived who could speak a little more. The Germans took everything out of my pockets, including my maps, which puzzled them. The sector that I had been working from our old base at Izel le Hameau was greasy from use, while the area around Marie Capelle was clean. This led the Germans to believe that I had come down well off course. Four infantrymen with fixed bayonets then escorted me to the rear. We tramped through miles of trenches and then into open country. All this time British shells were falling around us and when my escort heard them coming they would leave me and go to ground. Eventually we arrived at a place where there were some artillery limbers and other transport. I was put into a limber and driven up to Douai.



Lt Hammond's S.E.5a A8918, surrounded by German troops, after he was shot down on 15 September, 1917.

In Douai, I was locked up in the top room of the Bank of France for about a week. An English officer by the name of Shadwell was put in with me. I had seen him shot down in his Sopwith, from the window of the bank. On the wall of our room was a large map of the Western Front, after some time we noticed that there was a patch of new wallpaper alongside it. We thought that this was curious and started to peel it off, we discovered a layer of hessian beneath the paper and below that a row of microphones! The Germans never commented on this occurrence but they must have heard the noise of our efforts down in the room where they were listening in. Of course, the idea of the map beside the microphones was to encourage us to talk about our recent operations and refer to the locations shown on the map.

Soon after this we were moved to Brussels, where we spent the night in an underground cell, it was all I saw of Brussels. We were then taken to a transit camp at Karlsrühe. Prisoners were kept there while waiting to be transferred to camps all over Germany. Several times we were bombed by Allied aircraft. My final destination was an officers camp at Clausthal, which was high in the mountains and terribly cold in the winter time. Clausthal is the town from which Santa Claus is supposed to have come and it certainly looked very picturesque, with all the fir trees covered with snow. Unfortunately, we had very little winter clothing and I remember that we used to sew hessian and newspaper together with string, to make blankets. They were pretty good blankets at that. There were two hundred and fifty officer prisoners in the camp, many of the English had been there since 1914 and had never seen a trench or a Mills bomb. They were regulars, who had been caught in open country at the outset of the war, some of them by Uhlans! We had several notables among the prisoners, one of them being Leefe Robinson, V.C. and another Captain, now Brigadier General, Brian Horrocks.

Some wonderful escape schemes were tried at the camp. I remember on one occasion, a Naval Officer prisoner disguised himself as the Camp Commandant,

Hauptmann Niemeyer. It was a wonderful piece of disguise, the uniform had been made by the other prisoners and he even padded his stomach to match the Commandant's shape. His timing was perfect, he walked out of the main building along the pathway to the gates, carrying a stick the same as Niemeyer's. He flourished the stick at the sentry and shouted, "*Hier, hier!*" imitating the Commandant perfectly. The sentry pulled out his keys and obediently unlocked the big padlock on the main gates and opened them. The officer walked through and strode off down to the railway station. Unfortunately, while he was waiting on the platform it started to rain and the colours in the little red, white and blue cockade on his cap started to run. It had been painted on in water colours and as the rain increased, the colour ran down the peak of his cap and dripped onto his nose! Some soldiers on the station noticed this and gave the alarm. Not long after the officer had left the camp, Niemeyer himself appeared and walked down to the main gate, waving his stick at the guard and calling, "*Hier, hier!*" It was quite astonishing, the sentry's eyes nearly popped out of his head.

On another occasion, Brian Horrocks and another officer attempted a most daring escape. They knew that eight or ten sentries used to march in through a gate at the rear of the camp, when they were changing guard. The gate was always left open while they marched in, ordered arms and fixed bayonets. Just behind this spot was a row of garbage tins and Horrocks and his companion concealed themselves behind them. When they thought that the officer of the guard was looking somewhere else, they made a dash for the gate, hoping to get down the hill and behind some bushes for cover. Unfortunately, one of them tripped over a bucket! I think it was Horrocks, he went flying through the air and fell sprawling on the ground. One of the sentries raised his rifle, took aim at him and pulled the trigger. Amazingly, the rifle didn't fire, it seemed like a miracle. We decided later that constant ordering arms over a long period with the rifle loaded, had settled the fulminate in the cartridges. It was an astonishing piece of luck for the officer concerned.

I remember another escape attempt that relied heavily on timing. It involved the diversion of sentries from the front of the camp to the rear. A group of prisoners climbed up onto the roof of the main building. Carrying levers, they converged on a large water tank standing in the centre of the roof. Checking the time carefully, they disconnected the pipes from the tank and levered it from its mountings. It rolled down the long sloping iron roof, making a tremendous din. The sentries at the front of the camp all ran around to the back, with their rifles, to see what was happening. Having created the diversion, the officers then rushed out through the neutral zone at the front of the camp and using high powered wire cutters, made their escape. As I recollect, they were out for about two months. They were fortunate, as I well remember on another occasion, an officer being shot dead trying to climb over the wire.

I was part of a group of ten who tried to tunnel a way out of the camp. We obtained all our escape materials, maps, compasses, etc. packed in Maconachie fish tins, directly from England! You couldn't tell them from the genuine article, they were the same weight and had been packed at the Maconachie factory. It was organised by one of the prisoners, a Colonel, who had arranged a code with his wife

before leaving for the war. It was based on letters written between them and with it they were able to beat the censorship. Through these letters he was able to organise the deception with Maconachies, who sent the cans over in Red Cross parcels done up in grey paper instead of the usual brown. The parcels would arrive at the camp by cart, where they were unpacked and locked in the "tin room". We used to spring the door lock, with a lever and some of the smaller prisoners would squeeze in and collect the grey parcels containing the special tins. We got most of our special equipment that way, including excellent maps of Germany. I remember some prisoners receiving new pairs of shoes from home, that had compasses concealed inside the hollow holes.

While working on the tunnel, we kept our escape gear concealed behind sliding panels in the walls of our quarters. Although the tunnel occupied a great deal of our time, we had to be ready to come up at a moment's notice if guards approached, or if a bugle call sounded for a parade. We had a chap stationed at a piano in the recreation room, if Germans were in the area he would play "*The Campbells are coming*", as a warning. For an all clear he would play "*Onward Christian Soldiers*". The first ten feet of tunnel was revetted with bed boards. We constructed an air pump from cigarette tins and used toilet roll inners for the pipeline. We cut a trapdoor in the floor at the entrance to the tunnel and carried dust in matchboxes to conceal the joins when it was closed.

We worked steadily on the tunnel for about three months and then came a disastrous coincidence. A tunnel escape occurred at another prison camp, at Holtsminden, which was under the command of Hauptmann Niemeyer's brother. The two Commandants got together on the telephone and panic set in immediately. Guards with fixed bayonets carried out a thorough search of our camp, while other teams with shovels were digging and probing everywhere. Inevitably, they found our tunnel and also our working clothes made from pyjamas, with knotted handkerchiefs for headgear. From identifying marks on the clothing, they were able to track down the members of the escape scheme. We all received spells of solitary confinement as a result of our part in the attempt.

As prisoners, our only source of information on the progress of the war was from translated German newspapers. I was a prisoner of war for fifteen months and it was a pretty monotonous existence. The only time we left the camp was on controlled route marches, through the mountains and back again. We never saw or talked to anyone on these occasions. The Germans were reasonably fair to us but the camp sentries would not hesitate to shoot to kill if a prisoner entered the neutral zone. Generally speaking, the other ranks weren't bad but some of the officers were nasty pieces of work. Hauptmann Niemeyer, in particular, was fond of turning on unnecessary parades and keeping us standing for hours in the snow. It was ironical, that, when the war finished, those Germans that had been most objectionable suddenly became especially good to us!

After being freed from the camp, we all went up to the Baltic by train and then to Copenhagen by tug boat. From there we went across to Scotland. Immediately prior to returning to Australia, I was stationed at the R.A.F. station at Eastbourne, in England. A lot of us had motor bikes that we had bought while there and I well

remember riding over to Brighton one particular weekend, on my machine. A group of us stayed at the Ship Inn for the weekend and we had a wonderful time, going to dances, parties and other social events. On the Monday morning, I happened to notice a telegram for me in the rack in the hotel lobby, it was about three days old. When I opened it I found that it had come from the station orderly room at Eastbourne and said that I was to join ship at Devonport to return to Australia. It added that the vessel was sailing "*tomorrow*", which meant that it might have already sailed! This was serious₂ because if you missed your ship home you were expected to pay your own fare.

I raced back to Eastbourne and the orderly room, where they were all of the opinion that the ship had already gone. I made a quick sale of my motor bike to Haggarty, who had been in the tunnel scheme, for sixty pounds. Hastily collecting my gear I caught the first available train for Devonport. On arrival, I took a taxi to the dock and found to my dismay that the ship had indeed left. I caught sight of a sky blue uniform in the distance. It was another R.A.F. chap, who was accompanied by his wife and baby. They were sitting on a box on the deserted wharf. I asked the chap if he was supposed to be on the *Heluan* and he said that he was but it had already sailed. I ran to a telephone and rang the Naval Dockyard at Devonport, they told me that they thought the ship was still at anchor down the river, waiting for the tide. They offered to send a pinnace for us to try to get us to the ship. When it arrived, we put all our gear aboard and set off down the river. Soon we saw lights in the distance, which turned out to be our ship. By now it was two o'clock in the morning and fortunately there was no guard on the gangway. We all climbed up and I carried the baby! The whole ship was asleep, so we went into the smokeroom and lay down there till we were awakened next morning by the sound of the anchor being raised and the engines starting.

I rejoined the Air Force in 1925 and did a refresher course at Point Cook. After this I was with the Citizen Air Force for quite a long while at Richmond. During the thirties I did a lot of flying in New Guinea, mostly carrying in heavy freight.

I was called up on the second day of World War II and I reported at Richmond in my old uniform. After doing cypher duties, I was posted to Point Cook on an Instructors Course, with all the young blokes. I instructed on Wirraways at Richmond and then went to No. 1 Air Observers School at Cootamundra, where by a curious coincidence I met the lady whom I had carried as a baby up the gangway of the ship in England. She was married to an airman on the station. Next, I commanded No. 2 A.O.S. Navigation School at Mount Gambier, then became Station Commander at Richmond. After a spell in New Guinea I became Station Commander at Laverton.
