

I am the third and youngest child of James Charles and Ruby Harriet Brimblecombe (nee Faulkner) who resided at Lolworth, Kingsthorpe.

I was born in Brisbane on 23 December 1923 and had an older sister Marjory and a brother Jim. We lived on a dairy farm at Kingsthorpe, a small town about ten miles west of Toowoomba on the railway line running west to Charleville. A branch line went to Haden and as I remember a rail motor ran on this branch line daily and took the cream from the dairy farms to the factory in Toowoomba. Of course the rail motor also carried passengers who wanted to visit the city for the day.

The dairy farm of 228 acres, was approximately four miles from Kingsthorpe. It was about one mile in length and rather narrow on the front end and bordered by Dry Creek on the other end. This little creek ran from Toowoomba and only had water after big rains, hence the name. In later years it did run permanently as some of the drainage from Toowoomba must have gone into this creek.

My first memories concern a fall into a hole of water in this creek where there was a little waterfall. We three children were down there as we had visitors at the house and in those times we were seen but not heard and had to entertain ourselves. Jim had caught a fish and I went to take a quick look and fell in dressed in my Sunday clothes. Marjory pulled me out and we trooped home. What was said I do not remember, but one would not have been popular. I would have been four or five years old at the time. Small fish and fresh water crayfish moved into this creek when water was available and sometimes we caught a few fish and did try the crayfish as food. They had tasty meat in the tail, but we did not exploit them.

The farm was hilly and about half was cultivation used mainly for cow feed with some acres used to produce corn for grain for the farm. There was always a paddock of lucerne to be made into hay to be stored for the dry periods for the cattle and the few horses which were used for work on the farm. Around 1930 a tractor was purchased but the horses were used to mow the lucerne for hay and other jobs around the farm. Farm incomes were low in those days as prices were low as a result of the depression at that time. I do not remember the depression that well as I was too young but we certainly had no money to spare on luxuries. We always had food to eat as the policy was we would not walk off hungry if we had to do such a thing.

From what I remember we always had eggs and chooks to eat, pumpkins and potatoes etc were also grown and we learned to use a hoe to chip the weeds from the potato crops. Sweet and ordinary potatoes were grown and I will always remember Sunday with a chook baked with potatoes, pumpkin, whatever - baked around the bird in question. Cholesterol was not an 'in' word in those days as we ate fatty steak; roasts etc but probably the hard work and exercise helped to burn up the offending fats. Mum was a good cook and could produce good meals with what she had to work with, in a rather poor hot kitchen. It was on the south west corner of the house and in summer was very hot with the stove in a tin recess as was the practice in those days. This was a lovely spot in winter of course as these were wood stoves and I remember Dad had a favourite stone he heated on the stove to use as a foot warmer in bed in cold months. Young lads had to cut wood and bring in chips for the fire in the morning and this was a chore to keep one busy after school. Another job was to grind corn or wheat in a hand grinder. The wheat was used to make porridge and made a solid meal when boiled up. The ground corn was added to the bread Mum used to make for some variety. It gave the bread a nutty flavour. This grinder was my pet hate as it tested my young muscles but also it was a job to be done and no argument. Sometimes I helped Mum on the churn to make butter as this was common practice to save money. If the cream was too fresh sometimes it would not form butter and a lot of energy was consumed in the attempt. Various little methods were used to attain the result and people learned as they went along. Another of my jobs was to clean and polish the good boots and shoes and it was another unpopular chore.

We three children attended Gowrie Mountain State School which was about two miles from where we lived and we walked across adjoining farms to reach the school. I cannot remember going to school with my brother and sister, the memory does not stretch that far. Being seven years younger than Marjory and six years younger than Jim, I would have been in the early grades while they were at school with me.

Sometimes I walked to school with the neighbours children as some crossed our place. There were two places between our place and school. Numbers at school varied and in my later years were down to between eleven and thirteen children. Gowrie was a one room school with a verandah which was partly closed in to put our bags and coats, hats etc. It had a small tank for rainwater for use of the school and when this tank was empty we had to take our own water to drink. It was a one teacher school and my first teacher was an elderly lady, Miss O'Brien, a great teacher who tried hard to get some knowledge into our brains. Naturally she had to teach all grades and the task was not as easy as it is today with bigger schools and larger numbers. She walked about 2½ miles from where she boarded to school and of course this was done in all weather, wet or dry. Some wet days she and I would be the only ones at the school as the others did not come if it was too wet. I still did lessons on those days but went home a bit earlier on these occasions. At those schools we missed some grades through lack of numbers, grade four and six were two I did not do and maybe that had an effect on us if we went on to higher schools. I remember Miss O'Brien made a map of Australia from paper-mache about 3 foot square and clearly remember being asked to name the rivers down the coast. I always liked geography and if I remember correctly I got them right. I can still visualize the map and sixty years later and was much impressed by her efforts.

In those days a school dentist as he was called visited the schools with a foot driven drill and the children did not enjoy those days at all. Our family visited a dentist in Toowoomba and we were not allowed to be treated by these school dentists. Another diversion to lessons was a visit by a travelling magician with tricks which were too good for our ability to sort out. Rounders was the main game at play time and fierce encounters were played out during these periods. Under Miss O'Brien's leadership we built a gravel tennis court and for a couple of years we played tennis at school. We did this without any help from parents and this proves that country kids in those days had to use their abilities and innovations to make their own fun.

Miss O'Brien was replaced by Miss Stewart when I was about eleven years old. She was a young teacher but a very good one also. She boarded in Kingsthorpe but rode a horse to school and as the school ground was a few acres there was always plenty of feed for the horses. A girl my age also rode a horse to school and I remember having to catch the horse for the teacher in the afternoon. Miss Stewart taught me in the scholarship year along with a girl about my age. I still remember the school inspector who travelled around checking our progress under our respective teachers. He was a friendly fatherly type person who always had some tricky problems for us to solve. In scholarship year he posed a problem for the girl student and myself and I toiled for twenty minutes to solve it and was amazed I got it wrong with a mistake in addition, my fellow student did not have a clue and was really out in her endeavours. I passed the scholarship not with a very high pass, but pass I did.

The big day of the school year was the picnic break-up at the end of the school year which was a real get together for the district. We had races at these picnics and the prize was usually six pence which also bought quite a few lollies or two three-penny ice creams. There were two older boys than me so I did not win any six penny prizes. The families in the area put in some money, the largest sum I remember was 10/- or one dollar in today's terms. Those ten shillings bought a lot in those days and provided fruit; lollies, soft drinks etc. The ladies cut sandwiches and brought cakes. Tea was boiled in kerosene tins which were four gallon or 20 litre tins and were used for all sorts of things. One favourite use was as milk buckets to catch the skim milk from the cream separators. The boxes these tins came in were Oregon pine and were also useful for bush furniture. Petrol came in these tins and in all a very useful receptacle in the bush. Of course the day ended around 4 pm as the cows had to be milked and the jobs done. A good day for all as the older people got together for a good yarn and the children enjoyed themselves.

Walking to school gave one a good chance to observe nature – the birds, snakes, hares, goannas and the animals that lived on the farms. Nesting birds were always of interest as different birds built different shaped nests, some very neat, some not so well constructed. The area had a large population of magpies and at nesting time these birds fiercely protected their nesting areas. I was not into egg collecting but liked to see the young birds at these times. Friendly wagtails built close to people and were easy to observe. Wagtail nests were very neat and always had a good amount of spider webs to keep them intact.

As the young birds grew they overflowed the nest but the elastic web kept things together for the time the birds were in occupation. At one stage I remember a magpie's nest made from wire, different gauges of wire and even some copper wire mixed in with the rest. This was used to tie fences and in reflection it should have been kept for posterity as it is the only wire nest I remember. Peewees built mud nests and these were well built, if when they were new and too much rain fell they sometimes failed. Quails which nested on the ground were very secretive and not easy to see and the colour of the bird maintained the camouflage. I have an old bird book which was bought in 1930 and is inscribed with the words: This book belongs to Marjory, Jim and Lou Brimblecombe. We used it on Sundays as we walked around getting the identification from the book. It is rather worn now but retains memories of those years.

As a boy, insects created interest for me with all sorts of interesting shapes and colours. Hawk moths with their speed and perfect stream-lining were favourites as they dashed about. Grass hoppers whether flying or wingless and at times plague locusts moved through chewing up the vegetable matter in their path. Some wingless grass hoppers were well marked being yellow with red and black dots weather for show or camouflage. Beetles ranged from large brown pepperina borers to pretty Christmas beetles and rather noisy crickets as well as a lot of rather small ones. Spiders were well represented, large ones with big sticky webs to small ground dwellers whose webs were beautiful when covered with dew in the morning. Trap-door spiders made holes in the ground covered with a very neat lid which made them very hard to see. Also plentiful were the poisonous red-back but if one was observant were not a problem as they had a distinctive web and with the red band on their back were not hard to spot. Bees were plentiful and nested in the holes in trees and often were robbed for their honey which was a special treat.

Bees played a major role in pollinating flowers such as pumpkins and Dad always grew these to feed to pigs that were kept. Praying mantis were also of interest as they were different shapes and sizes as they waited in ambush for their prey. Hares always interested me as they have survived to live with development and with their speed could avoid most trouble. Walking home from school one day I found one asleep in the open and made my mind up to capture it. Placing my bag of books on the ground and selecting a stone, I managed to kill it and went home very proudly. The dogs did not mind as fresh hare was akin to ice cream to them. I might add that the hares did not often make mistakes and only once more was I able to capture one with the aid of a stone. The dogs we owned were not expert runners but kept the hares exercised by moving them around the property. The hares would always beat them up the hills and mostly looked over their shoulders as they raced away. I can still see one make a mistake as the faster dog took it up a hill and it did a smart circle round and ran into the slower dog still on its way up the hill. These little highlights helped to make life on the land interesting and if one used his eyes there was always something of interest to break the monotony.

When I was a lad, greyhound owners used to catch hares with nets to teach their dogs to chase. I suppose this is what was called bleeding their dogs and would certainly not be legal these days. These men would leave a bottle or two of beer in a prominent spot to reward farmers for the privilege of catching these hares. The bottles had their own coats made of straw to protect them in transport. These little presents were wasted on father as he did not drink and they sat in the cupboard until they went off with age; one would have thought as they were free they would have been consumed and not wasted in the hard times.

Stones were used to kill snakes and as they were numerous, one had plenty of practice and became rather good at stone throwing. Of course the snakes were lethal browns and blacks and one did not fool around with them. Goannas were also "dispatched" with stones but as they climbed trees were harder to get at and arms became rather tired as we attempted to dispatch these creatures. In later years I have come to respect these animals as they in their turn can beat a snake and kill and eat them. The goanna is a very tough and wily foe and has the ability to survive in a tough situation. One learned early to listen to the birds such as butcher birds and magpies as they told you when snakes and goannas were about. I always handled lizards and geckos and being harmless, one had no fear of them. Rainbow lizards, frill and legless were plentiful and were always of interest. These were not kept as pets but were there to be seen.

I suppose because I was younger than the others, I had to make my own fun and fill in the day with something of interest.

One job when I was at state school was to walk the older pigs to the lucerne paddock to graze and exercise. These were the mature sows and the boar or male of the family. They were easy to control and after an hour or two would walk back to their sty. They liked these outings and eating lucerne was to their liking as were some weeds, thistles and crowsfoot were extras. Pigs were always kept with the dairy and sometimes one was killed to add to the diet. These pigs were reared to bacon age around five to six months and sent to a co-operative factory to provide much needed income. The factory would cure one on the owners' behalf for home consumption when the farmers need one. It was my job to feed them after school and chop up the pumpkins which were grown to supplement their diets. Corn was the main grain in those days and was very subject to heat wave conditions and sometimes the crop failed and the cows were feed on the crop to reap some benefit from the effort of growing it. I guess father obtained some wheat for feed as his brothers grew wheat on neighbouring farms.

His younger brother Selwyn had a good farm about two miles from us and he was a favourite of mine. I can still see him come to our place and he would talk until tea time while we did our jobs and Mum would ask him to stay for tea. He was not married then and would always stop – dirty or not and talk well into the night. What his cows and pigs had to say when he got home would be interesting if they could have talked. As a lad I had to take a message to him and on arrival he had a man making a tank for water. His working man was sick and I was given the job of heating the soldering irons and tin them for the soldering. I managed the job and we got the tank finished and Selwyn gave me two shillings for my effort and I thought I had made big money. Of course I was late home and Marjory came looking for me and probably got roused on when I finally made it home. I liked to visit this uncle as he enjoyed life and he had a smile despite the problems of the times.

Another important event around that time was the assault of the prickly pear menace. The cactoblastis moth was used to control the prickly pear as it had encroached on a lot of farming land and rendered it all but useless. We children were used to distribute this moth by placing egg capsules on plants with the aid of pins. These insects did a marvellous job of controlling the pear, and in a short time. From then on it ceased to be a menace to the farming community.

Another event of those times was called a calf club where we children had to look after a calf for a few months, teach it to lead, groom and even grow feed for it. I had different crops in plots and we had to keep a diary and on the final day we had to judge some cows as a final round-up to the event. There were several schools involved and I won with my effort. Prize money was seventeen shillings as I remember and of course the 'halo' was a bit tight that day. Another contest I entered while at school was a writing event but I am a bit hazy as to what it was about. However I won a book prize but alas it was a girls book awarded to Louisa Brimblecombe as they got the first name wrong, a bit of a let-down for a keen lad.

During my primary school years I can remember a couple of trips to Brisbane to stay with grandparents who lived at New Farm in the city. The train trip was a big adventure as it was a four hour run each way and one can still remember the smell of smoke from the coal fired steam engines. Two things stand out. I got into trouble because I tied my tie the wrong way as I used the left hand and that was not the way I had been shown but my way worked, so what. I can still see grandfather criticize the way I rubbed the polish on my shoes before shining them. Small events indeed, but still clear to this day, maybe one did learn by trial and error.

Grandfather would take me down to New Farm wharves which were near where they lived to look at the ships in port. I remember seeing a visiting German warship tied up at the wharf. The wool stores were located near these wharves and to a small boy were huge buildings. New Farm Park close by had a large rose garden in those days and there was also a sugar refinery – all things to wonder at. Trams ran from there into the city and were a great novelty. They could move a lot of people with fewer problems than we have today. When we left to go home grandpa would have us at the station at 6am. The train left at 8am so one got a good look at the main railway station. These were all steam trains with plenty of black smoke from the coal fired boilers.

One felt widely travelled on these trips; little did one know what a few more years would bring up in the Air Force. I remember a trip to Toowoomba when I was about eleven to see Uncle Fergus McMaster on a flight to Brisbane. Uncle Fergus was married to Mums sister Edna and had properties in the Mt Isa, Cloncurry area and he was the driving force behind the formation of Qantas Airways, started in the outback to overcome the distance and lack of roads. The plane was a DH 86 with four small engines and a twin wing fuselage. Mum took afternoon tea to Fergus as the plane stopped at Toowoomba for some time before it flew on to Brisbane. It was the first plane I was close to and perhaps had an influence on me in later years, some seven years as it turned out as world events took command.

After scholarship I was given a choice of Gatton College or Ipswich Grammar to further my studies and I chose Gatton as they had practical work as well as theory and for the next three and a half years I enjoyed life at college. I was not good at study and must confess the action of sport appealed much more to me. I enjoyed the practical work which covered all aspects of farm work. In my last year at Gatton, half way through I contracted pneumonia and lost a couple of months of classes. I could not see how I would catch up and so ended my college days. I was trying to do senior at sixteen and it was rather young to have that challenge.

I came back to the dairy farm and worked there until entering the Air Force in April 1942. I had joined the Air Force reserve when I was seventeen years old, but was not called up until I was eighteen. My brother Jim had joined the Army in 1940 and that must have been around the time I came home.

While at college the jobs I enjoyed most were leather work; piggery; poultry and blacksmithing, although one did not learn that much in those days. I enjoyed the birds and poultry as they ran several varieties of ducks and also had a very good bee keeping section. I also enjoyed cutting lucerne for chooks with the poultry supervisor Mr. Holmes. We would go in a horse and cart and get a load of green lucerne and then cut it with a hand chaff cutter for feeding to the chooks. The college had a large incubator and raised poultry both for the table and egg production. They killed a fair amount of poultry to feed the students but I confess I never cleaned any as I went to get the green lucerne on most chook cleaning days. The bees were also interesting to work with and lead me to work a couple of hives at home after I left college. These were swarms of bees from wild ones which were plentiful in hollow trees on the farms. They were easy enough to handle in a proper hive with frames and yielded good honey as yellow box which grew in the area was a very good honey tree. In full flower one could smell the nectar on these trees and the bees made a continual hum when working them. In those days the hollow trees with bee hives were cut down to rob them of the honey with some good yields. I must admit I was not too confident handling bees but if one picked good sunny days, the bees behaved very well and one did not get too many stings. The hives fell into disrepair while I was in the Air Force and I did not start up again in civilian life.

The college had a good piggery and as I was used to pigs on the farm, it was easy to fit in with work at that piggery. These were purebred pigs and there were several breeds to give students the benefits of these different breeds. The college had a butter factory which processed cream from various farmers and this was an interesting place to do practical work. In those days it was run with steam power and we had to work on the boiler for production of steam – a hot job as it was a wood fired boiler and as I was not all that big at thirteen or fourteen years of age – it was a tough job. Farm work was mostly done with horses and I enjoyed the practical work. The orchard was another area I enjoyed with a large variety of fruit trees and it was here vegetables were produced for the kitchen. Of course we consumed some of the fruit in season and learned to prune the trees.

In sub senior I concentrated on the stock side for a Diploma in Stock. This covered sheep and wool which interested me as I liked working with those animals but the course ended half way through senior as I became ill and left the college. In the dairy we had to hand milk around fifty to sixty cows, mainly Illawarra and Jersey and when working in the dairy had to rise at 5am. Each day there was a milk run delivering meat and milk to the various houses of the masters who resided around the college area.

Sports were cricket; tennis; rugby union and rifle shooting plus athletics on sports day. The competition was between the four houses of the college, and rivalry between the senior teams was torrid. We were not coached at sport and perhaps missed out on full enjoyment of these sports as a result. Sport in those days was for the enjoyment of sport and professionalism was not evident as it is today. It has become a business.

After leaving college I returned to the dairy farm and did the various jobs that helped run a farm. Some horse work was performed even though Dad had a Fordson tractor to do the heavier work. I remember cutting lucerne with two draft horses in a mower and as the hay was loaded by hand onto a dray and then placed on a stack by hand. It was pretty heavy work. This was performed in hot weather with leaves from the hay falling over one as we forked the hay up onto the stacks. This hay was used for horses and cows when feed was in short supply but in later years as horses were replaced by machines this practice ceased and lucerne paddocks disappeared. These paddocks were also used to graze the cows when the crop did not grow tall enough through lack of rain. This involved a good deal of manual work and one was never idle.

One rather tiresome job was picking the ripe corn cobs by hand; carting them to the barn and when that was finished a mobile would come around the farms to thrash the grain which produced a very busy couple of days while the thrashing was in progress. When thrashing finished another hand job was to put the bags of corn back into the barn. Neighbours helped one another when these jobs were in progress as extra manpower was needed. Sometimes the corn was sold to feed starving sheep in the dry western country as the large grain could be spread straight on to the ground in a trail for sheep to pick up. Speaking of western areas I remember a dust storm which passed over our farm during a drought and one could only see for about one hundred yards in the middle of the day. That would have been in the early 1930's. It must have been a widespread drought as I have not seen one so dense ever since.

I became interested in the Air Force at seventeen and remember going to a fete held on *Croxley* (a nearby property) where I talked at length to Peggy Paterson who had an uncle in the Air Force. I had always been interested in planes and that discussion made up my mind to follow suit. I had to do an aptitude test in Toowoomba which did not prove a problem and then travel to Brisbane for a medical. After passing that I was placed on the Air Force reserve and did lessons by correspondence mainly on navigation until I was called up on Anzac Day 1942.

One was very much a new chum to Air Force life but soon learned to fit in and handle the new conditions. The first base was at Sandgate where we did initial training and were sorted out to do various jobs. Most of us wanted to be pilots. The camp moved to Kingaroy at this time and as I had lost time through measles had dropped to the next course and spent some time at Kingaroy. We did lectures in flight navigation; signals; meteorology etc. From there I was posted to Narrandera to pilot school. My main trouble here was lack of confidence and also a bout of mumps which lost me a month of training and broke up flying training. Along with some other slow pupils we were given a final test and most of us were re-mustered to navigators. They had heaps of recruits who wanted to be pilots so could keep the numbers up without wasting time on slow pilots. Success depended on the type of instructor; some did not care much for slower pilots whilst others were very good and helped the slower ones. My first instructor was of the former type and I would have benefited by a more kindly one who was prepared to help. However as things turned out navigation was a good position in the crew and I must admit I came to enjoy the job. At pilot training we flew Tiger Moths, a reliable twin wing aircraft which could absorb the punishment we trainees put them through. After dropping out as a pilot, re-mustered aircrew were posted to Sydney to await movement to Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme. After pre-embarkation leave a group of us left on an American ship en route to San Francisco. I was just nineteen and at the time did not realize one had to be that age to go overseas. Having never been on a ship this was a massive step for an inexperienced young fellow.

After about a week we put into Pago Pago to pick up American hospital cases to go back to the USA. These troops were marines with problems of tropical illness. Another week took us to Honolulu where we had a few hours ashore. In 1943 there were only two hotels compared to the concrete jungle seen on a trip

to the United States in the late 1970s. Another week of sailing saw us pass under the Golden Gate Bridge at San Francisco. The food on the sea trip was very good as the Americans looked after that part of the war and were not short of ice-cream and turkeys.

On leaving the ship in America we were put on a train to Canada travelling up the west coast to Vancouver. The size of the engine on the train was impressive, compared to the ones I had seen at home. The first snow we saw was in the northern states of America, but I will always remember the deep falls of snow we were to meet in Canada. As we were travelling in March it was the end of their winter and the deep snow had not started to melt. The trees were different to those at home and gave the hills and mountains a softer appearance, not the harder dry look of the eucalyptus of home. We changed trains in Vancouver and travelled through the Rocky Mountains. Terrific scenery was to confront us and having never seen snow before I was impressed with the white coat over everything and the thick layer of snow on top of the buildings. At Kamloops in the Rockies I remember a girl in a light dress, while we Aussies were curled up with the cold, naturally she was used to the conditions as we hot climate people were not.

After about 1½ days on the train we arrived in Edmonton where the navigation school was, to do our new course. The barracks were well built to cope with the conditions of the region. Some of us had trouble in the early part of the course but thanks to a very good instructor we managed to pass-out about five months later as navigators.

One thing that impressed me was the change of seasons from winter to spring. Naked trees came into bud and burst into leaf in contrast to our types of trees and everything had to grow quickly due to the short season. We did not see any cropping land as the course was concentrated and we did not get extended leave. We got on well with the people of Edmonton as they were mainly of English/Welsh extraction and not French as in eastern Canada. We had a cricket team of sorts and played social games with the Canadians after the snow melted and the ground dried. In winter the bowling alleys were popular and we played both five and ten pin bowls. We did lectures on navigation and meteorology, signals etc and had to fly and navigate from one point to another both day and night. I liked the practical navigation but lectures tried one but I admit I was never a good studier.

We flew in Avro Anson aeroplanes with civilian pilots most of whom had been bush pilots in Canada before the war. The country was flat prairie land but we had railways, roads and small towns to get positions to navigate from, also lakes, rivers etc helped find our positions. We also had night exercises to navigate by the stars which was called Astro navigation. We did not use Astro on operations as it turned out later. I enjoyed the practical navigation and always enjoyed coming up to a turning point on track.

After 5 months we 'passed out' as navigators, most of us sergeants, some were commissioned of course and became officers. After pass-out we headed east across Canada and most of us headed down to New York for four days of leave and crossed to USA at Niagara Falls and down to New York. The Falls were truly impressive and it is not hard to this day to recall their size and magnitude. We saw some of the sights of New York and I remember going to a circus at Madison Square Gardens. Another area still clear was Central Park, a green area in a large built-up area. Even in 1943 the large number of taxis was a sight at the traffic lights but one had never been in a city of that size.

From New York we travelled back to Canada and moved east again to Halifax, Nova Scotia to assemble for the trip over the Atlantic to England. After a month waiting at Halifax we boarded the Queen Mary which was then set up as a huge troop ship of some 70,000 tons. We were thought to be part of around 20,000 troops on that crossing. We sailed without escort and after five days pulled into Greenock in Scotland. The ship was very fast and travelled in a zigzag pattern to avoid submarines waiting on course for us. On that trip two meals a day with the large numbers to feed and we even shared bunks – so much for wartime travel.

From Greenock we boarded a train and went across England to Brighton in the south which was a staging base for Australians. We were here about a month and went to an advanced flying school for a short course in navigation. This school was at Halfpenny Green near Birmingham and introduced us to conditions in England and once again we flew in Avro Ansons. From advanced flying school we set off for the Operational Training Unit where we were to crew up with other members of aircrew. This was at 26

OTU at Little Horwood, about 30 miles north-west of London. As we left the train I met up with Noel Hibberd. He and I had been in the same classes at Gatton College for three years and as he was a pilot and I a navigator we decided to fly together. We had also entered the Air Force in Sandgate, Queensland on the same day so we were crewed up before we got to the station. At the OTU they put us all in a room and let us choose who we would fly with – pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators and two gunners plus an engineer. Our crew was the Australians, two Englishmen and two Scotsmen. This seemed to work out quite well but if someone could not get on, that person could be changed. We did our operational training on Wellington twin-engine bombers, a reliable aircraft which in the early days of the war had been one of the main aircraft. At the OTU we flew about eighty hours on navigation exercises landings for the pilots and fighter affiliation for the gunners. When we had time off we went to the local pub or village and on leave we usually went to London to see the sights and visit Australia House. The Australians would use this as an assembly point in the hope of meeting someone we knew. This rarely happened for me as I knew only the ones we trained with in Canada, and as they were spread over a fair bit of England chances were not good. At least one saw blue uniforms and felt he was with his fellow countrymen. Years later I was to see a photo of my wife's brother and I said I have seen that face in Australia House. He was a fighter pilot sitting on his own and I was farther down the room on my own and to this day I will swear that was the face in the photo. One night Hibberd and I went to the local for a walk and a beer and on coming out of the pub we struck what was known as a 'pea-souper'. The fog had come down and combined with the smoke from coal fired heating had made it impossible to see. We were not inebriated as some may think but with an inverted temperature these fogs just sat and things did not move. We navigated home by holding together and as the road had a footpath, I walked in the gutter with Noel on the footpath and we navigated back to the base.

From OTU we moved to Heavy Conversion Unit where we flew in four engine planes. These were Stirlings with four radial engines, large cumbersome aircraft which had once been lead bombers until Lancaster and Halifax bombers replaced them. They were inclined to struggle for high altitude when loaded. In these we did more circuits and landings for the pilot, some bombing exercises and a couple of cross country navigation trips for the navigator. This was at Stradishall, not too far from London again. We completed about four hours here and were then posted to a squadron and the serious side of all the training we had been through. We were attached to No. 3 Group of Bomber Command and had trained at OTU and HCU units of that group. This group was based in south-east England, just north of London and consisted of several squadrons on various bases in that area.

After the conversion to four engine aircraft we were posted to No 218 Squadron as a trained crew ready for the serious side of air warfare. We arrived at 218 Sqdn just before the invasion of France on 15 May 1944. As we were a new crew we did not fly in operations in the early days of the invasion of France. 218 Sqdn experienced crew flew a diversion to the actual invasion and simulated another invasion going in to the Calais area while the real invasion was going on further to the south. This was done by flying a box type of track moving forward at the approximate speed of a real naval convoy. This confused the German intelligence and held forces away from the true operation. 218 Sqdn was called the Gold Coast Squadron and was supported by the then Gold Coast along with gifts of cigarettes and other amenities to help along the way. This squadron was flying Stirlings on operations which were mainly mining of the French ports which were bases for the German submarine fleet. These were trips where only a few aircraft flew and whether we sank any u-boats we were not to know, but it was all part of the larger scene and kept the Germans busy as they would have to get these mines out of the shipping lanes or suffer losses. These were large mines about a ton in weight so could cause considerable damage.

We did quite a few cross country trips to sharpen us as a crew, get us to know our area and probably sharpen me up as a navigator. The better we worked as a crew the more alert you were and chances of survival increased. Our first operation was 10 June and was a short mining trip to the Belgium coast, I guess to break us in gently. After that we went on mining runs to Brest, Frisian Islands, St Nazaire, Brest again and also to Lorient on the French coast towards Spain. We also bombed a Flying Bomb depot by day on Stirlings dropping 20 x 500 pound bombs. These flying bombs were pilot-less early jet propelled

missiles aimed at London to cause as much panic and disruption as possible. Apart from killing civilians I doubt they helped the war effort all that much for the Germans.

Squadron life was relaxed as we did not have parades very often and we usually assembled at our various sections to keep in touch. Each section had its leader and it was his job to keep his personnel at top notch. Of course experience was once again the best teacher. We had leave every 6 weeks and most of us went to London to see the sights etc. I remember going to Madame Tussaud's Wax Works and marvelling at the likeness to real life subjects. They had a wax usher who would be mistaken for a real live person.

We Australians always checked in at Australia House for contact with other Aussies and maybe meet someone we had trained with. We would visit the Codgers Club where Australians liked to congregate and the visitor's book would have contained so many Australian signatures.

During August 1944, 218 Squadron converted to Lancaster bombers which were faster and able to lift a larger bomb load over a longer distance. Stirlings left the scene after being the first of the heavy bombers used by Bomber Command. We did circuits and landings, short cross countries and some bombing practice to get used to flying in the Lancaster. Near the end of August we did a raid on Stettin on the Baltic coast, flying in over the south of Sweden to the target. This raid took 9 ¾ hours and is the longest I was on during the tour of operations. During September we did three support operations to help the armies take the channel ports of Le Havre and Boulogne. The heavy bombers pulverised the German positions, and made the task of the army much easier. Around the middle of September our pilot Noel Hibberd took sick and went to hospital, so we were a crew without a pilot and at a loose end. Towards the end of October we were posted to 514 Squadron at Waterbeach as they had a pilot without a crew, they made us a complete crew again. This pilot, Les Sutton had been shot down on his first trip with another crew and evaded the Germans with the French underground forces and when the armies overran the area came back to his squadron. He was an Englishman and we got on well with him. He was 12 trips behind us as we had done 12 missions with 218. We did a couple of cross country trips to get used to one another as a crew and then started on the rest of the operations to complete our tour. 514 Sqdn had started operations on 1 November 1943 so was a new squadron formed during the expansion of the bombing effort against Germany. This squadron operated not far from Cambridge and we would say *we had been to Cambridge* even if it was only for a feed.

Our first operation with Les Sutton as pilot was at the end of October. It was on an oil plant in the Ruhr as at this time the German oil industry was under persistent attack and Bomber Command played a large part in this area. The Americans operated by day and would have also attacked these targets. Over the next 3 months we were to complete the rest of the 30 operations which at that time constituted a tour of operations. The relief as we reached that figure was profound and one just wanted to get away from operations and relax.

Our pilot had not done a complete tour and had to continue with someone else. I learned later that he also finished and survived the war. These targets were oil refineries, steel works and railway yards in the main with bomb loads averaging 12,000 pounds, often with a large percentage of incendiaries to burn oil plants, houses etc. One of these trips was on my 21st birthday, it being a relief to complete that operation.

On completion of the tour and after a period of leave I was posted to a training unit and flew with new crew to check the navigator of the crew. Most were fair quality navigators, but occasionally we had to speak to some to work harder. I remember one whom I had words with, for he remarked that the war was over as far as he was concerned as the Germans gave up in early May. I thought that was very poor as he being English had no thought of helping us in the Pacific area. I walked away in disgust. In that theatre of war we lost 4050 Australian aircrew helping England to defeat the Nazis. The attitude of some English personnel towards the people from the so called colonies was to make us to feel below them. My attitude had always been to do my job, get the war over and return to Australia. Some of the new crews were very good but some were average or worse and would have struck trouble on operations.

During the month of June I had the good fortune to fly with Flight Lieutenant Ron Reeve, an Aussie, on a sightseeing trip over the Ruhr with ground staff aboard to show them what the bombers they serviced had achieved. It was a great trip to fly about 500 feet above the ground over those hot places from previous experience. The damage had to be seen to be believed and it proved to me at least that the bombers had contributed a great deal to the overall war effort. On the 10 July I flew for the last time in England and from then to October we passed time in England on extended leave waiting for a ship back to Australia. I spent a lot of that time at the Anchor Hotel, just west of London. These people were a cockney Englishman, and his wife who was French, and their young son. They lived in the area of Yiewsley where our second pilot came from, and billeted four Australians for most of the war. We travelled with ration cards and I would give them to her when we went there on leave. We made friends with the locals who came to the pub and played darts with some of them. My leave was extended several times until in late September an order came to embark for Australia. With farewells to the "Anchor" family I proceeded to Southampton from where the Aussies assembled then boarded the Andes for Australia. This was a fairly new ship and made the run through the Suez Canal to Australia in three weeks. The trip could be described as boring as we had nothing to do except eat and sleep. Finally after a smooth run we reached Melbourne in late October. The weather there was very cold, and NSW and Queensland airmen were glad to embark on the Stratheden and sail to Sydney. We then went by train to Brisbane. While in Sydney a WAAF came to our group and she was Barbara Brimblecombe, a cousin of mine, and we had a few minutes together. The next day we were in Brisbane and were taken to Sandgate where mother was waiting to see me. I did not know someone would be there and so after 2 ½ years, met family again. After a night at New Farm with Mum's people, we left by train for Toowoomba where Dad was waiting and thence to Kingsthorpe and the dairy farm where brother Jim was. He had been in the army and was wounded at Buna in New Guinea and eventually left the army unfit for service and father had applied for his early release to help on the farm. The farm was still the farm I had grown up on as a kid. Owing to its size a lot of money could not be made there but Dad talked me into hanging on until blocks became open for soldier settlement. Jim and I both applied to enter the ballot and had to go before a selection board where we encountered no problems and were passed to enter the ballot. A short course of two months duration was run at Gatton College where I had been for three years before joining the Air Force. One could call it something of a holiday but it passed the time until the ballot started. Finally in 1948 some good blocks out from Jondaryan and Bowenville became available and we received maps of the blocks with a description of land and improvements if any and cost of same. Jim and I balloted for most of them and I was lucky enough to draw Block No 96 Parish of Jondaryan, 780 acres with a bore and a windmill, fenced on three sides, and 1 tree which a wind storm broke in half soon after drawing.

After the ballot and still at the dairy farm I set about getting ready to go to the block to start wheat growing as that was the main form of income of the time. For somewhere to live, it was a tent early on and a place to cook over an open fire. The tent was no great size and with a stretcher for a bed and a box or two for a table that was it. This was near the bore and windmill, so one had water to wash with. Rainwater was in a 44 gallon drum and one used sparingly indeed.

I had a Fordson Major tractor and a four furrow mould-board plough and started to break up the grass country. This was a rather slow process and I looked around for a disc plough to cover more ground. Machinery was tight after the war and I eventually got hold of a McCormack Deering 12 disc plough. With this I worked around about 250 acres to get the first crop in the ground. The neighbours who were established when we ex-servicemen came to our blocks were helpful and even lent one machinery to make the job lighter. This type of farming was new to me as on the dairy farm there was no large scale operations. The country was flat and it was possible to see neighbours on their tractors *hard at it*. My nearest neighbour was Ted McMahan who had come from wheat farming so I was able to learn from him. He had more equipment and started to farm nearly all his blocks of 660 acres. He built a shed to live in on one end and more importantly to collect rain water from the roof. I could see I needed better quarters and eventually put up a small shed with wooden walls and doors on one end to open up for breezes. To make a floor I put 4 x 3 on the ground and a floor of undressed 6 x 1" boards. This served quite well and was

100% better than the tent. With this shed one could catch rainwater and add to the improvement in living conditions.

One neighbour George Foster got me to help him harvest his crop and paid me with wheat seed for the first crop in the next season. This was a great help and got me to know the varieties available at that time. As Mrs. Foster was a very good cook I appreciated some better meals while the harvest was on.

Harvesting was slow in those days as machinery was smaller and the grain was put into bags which after sewing stood in the paddock until carted out by trucks. This bagged wheat was taken to the nearest depot and stacked in large piles. The people who handled these bags took them on their shoulders and would place them neatly in sections and so build up large stacks. These stacks were covered by flattish roofs with open sides which were later covered by hessian to keep out rain.

When George's harvest was finished, Jim Carter, another neighbour to my block was looking for help to finish his harvest so I did a few days work for him. It was a useful period of learning as I had never experienced a harvest of any length.

Meanwhile on the dairy farm, Dad and Jim were trying to harvest about 40 to 50 acres as well as do the dairy. They were glad to get relief as I arrived with George's working man Eric Richards and we two finished their harvest and then carted the wheat to the Oakey depot with a Ford army Blitz truck.

Then it was back to Bowenville and the block as George wanted his man to work the ground for the next crop and I wanted to work more ground for my first crop. It was about this time that the shed mentioned previously came to pass and I got the poles for the walls from Doug Young who had a block next to the Danline country which was later balloted. He had cypress pine and we cut some for the poles about nine inches in diameter. White ants do not like the timber and it was safe to put it on the ground. This hut or shed had no architectural appeal but it served the purpose.

Also at this time I got word that the family had sold the dairy farm and was coming out to help me on the block. This was rather a shock as no mention had been made of this action and prior knowledge would have been appreciated. It was a bachelor's set-up but they brought out a small shed pulled down from *Lolworth* and thus Mum and Dad had some sleeping accommodation and the family left the dairy farm they had been on for about 35 years. In those days we did a lot of tractor hours as we cultivated the land continually to control weeds and get it in good condition to germinate and grow a crop of wheat. Planting took place from May to June period. If rainfall was sufficient we could plant later but yield would drop if the season started later.

I had acquired a new 24 row combine to plant the crop and was later to be allocated a harvester before the crop ripened. We settlers were given some priority in the purchase of equipment to get us started in our farming venture.

The purchaser of the dairy farm was Malcolm McDougall and his wife Pat. I had known him at Gatton College and he married a Bowenville girl, Patricia Bell. It was on this dairy farm that I was to meet the lady who was to be my wife. She was Pat's sister, Mary. We learned sometime after the dairy was sold that Malcolm and Pat were to sell the cows and my Dad wanted one of his pet cows for a milker. It was on that trip that I met Mary, but it was sometime before we met again and became serious. Her father had served in the Light Horse in the First World War and at one time was with an uncle of mine who was a sergeant over George Bell at that time.

It was around this time that I joined that Bowenville Cricket Team which was a team in the Oakey and District series. The cricket pitch was built on George Bells' property known as Bowenville Homestead and I got to know the rest of the Bell family.