# Australians at War Film Archive

## David Mattiske - Transcript of interview

### Date of interview: 8th October 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1033

## Tape 1

00:36 **Okay, David, if you start with a life overview concept and we'll start with where and when you were born?**

Well, my name is, of course, David Henry Mattiske, and the Mattiskes came to Australia in about the early 1840s as part of the Lutheran migration that was fleeing persecution

01:00 in Germany at the time and we understand the family came from a town south of Berlin called Treben. They were farmers, wheat and sheep, my father was already fourth generation, I'm fifth generation, and I was born in Palmer where my father was the pastor of the local parish. Shortly after that he shifted to Murtoa in the Wimmera district in northwest Victoria.

01:30 I went to school at the Murtoa Primary School, a thing called a higher elementary school, and then onto Horsham High School where we boarded. I joined the Shell Company on leaving school, transferred to Melbourne as a young lad, I was then 17, very keen to join the navy, having read much about the navy as a kid and always interested in sea stories. Joined the navy,

02:00 did the usual training through Flinders Naval Depot, drafted to HMAS Shropshire, joined Shropshire at Milne Bay at the start of the great island-hopping campaign that went from New Guinea right through to Tokyo. After the war I went back to the Shell Company, became a senior representative in charge of the Ballarat area. Eventually resigned

02:30 from there to go into [my] own businesses, and ran service stations on a couple of occasions, and then went into the hotel game, hotel at, in the Mallee at a place called Werrimull, between Mildura and Renmark, and then we had the major interest in the paddle steamer Avoca on the Murray River. Went back to the south and owned and operated the hotel-motel at Kilcunda on the Bass Coast

03:00 and eventually sold out there and moved to the Gold Coast to retire.

**Excellent. that's really good, alright, we'll cover everything in detail, so we'll start with where you were born, tell us about that area.**

I have only been to Palmer once,

03:30 I left there at six months old, and my wife and I went back to Palmer some years ago, the manse where I was born was still there, it was a little store and a pub and a church. It's up the back of the Adelaide Hills, overlooking the Murray River and the town below it, some miles down the road is the town of Mannum.

**And then, well, tell us about**

04:00 **your father in more detail.**

Well, the family had been farmers and I don't know what prompted my father to go to a seminary and become an ordained clergyman, but he was a gentle man, a quiet man but as straight as a die, if he believed something was right, all the world could not deflect him to a path that he believed was wrong. And we grew up in that atmosphere

04:30 and that helped me greatly in my little naval career and also in my business career, because I learnt basic and fundamental virtues that human beings need to live by and that helped me considerably. I hope I've never ever drifted away from the things that my father taught me. My mother, incidentally, was an interesting character,

05:00 her antecedents were similar to the Mattiske family. Her great, great grandmother had been a lady in waiting of the Kaiser's children in Berlin in the 1830s and early 1840s, and she married a seminarian, another Lutheran clergyman who was migrating to

05:30 Australia and they got married in Berlin, came to Adelaide, the story is that Governor Grey received this

rather distinguished scholar from Berlin and sent him down to Victor Harbour to administer to the natives as a missionary and a general helper for the education of those native people, the Aboriginal people.

06:00 So there's always been a fairly close connection between Aboriginal welfare and the family. My great, great grandmother was the first white woman born in Encounter Bay, what was the bay there, which is now the town or city of Victor Harbour. Her mother, at least my mother's father, had travelled broadly as a young man,

06:30 he was a teacher at the famous, what is now the famous art gallery and academy at Hahndorf. He went to America to do theological studies and back in about 1942 or three, he was the first Australian clergyman to be awarded the Doctorate of Divinity from the Fort Wayne in Illinois [actually Indiana] where he studied his,

07:00 where he did his theological studies. He came back to Australia of course after a few years and married the lady who was then my grandmother. He finished up as the president of the Victorian district of the Lutheran church and retired in Melbourne. He lived in Toorak for many, many years and that's where I often stayed with him as a young lad.

07:30 I also boarded with him then when I was in the Shell Company as a young fellow and it was from there that I enlisted in the Royal Australian Navy.

**Tell us what stories you'd hear from him of those past times?**

He remembers in parts of America where people were still carrying weapons and were bitterly divided after the Civil War, the American Civil War.

08:00 He didn't tell me a great deal about that, but we were very close, he was a very big upstanding handsome sort of fellow, a well known figure in Melbourne and we got on famously. He had some sort of affection for me as his grandson, and we thought about things in very similar lines and we occasionally went out to things and functions together and it was, he was a very good

08:30 and interesting companion. In, just harking back to Murtoa where I grew up, Murtoa was a town of some 1400 people at the time, it was a bit unusual because it had quite a nice lake, Lake Marma, and our home at the manse was on a street that overlooked the lake. And not far away from

09:00 the manse on the shores of the lake was the cricket ground, the football ground and show grounds with all the ancillary buildings, and it was during the Depression years where I was a lad of seven, eight, nine, that area of the showgrounds were always occupied by large numbers of itinerants and tramps [and], quite often, figures from the underworld who were

09:30 getting out of Melbourne during the hard Depression years, because Murtoa was some 200 miles northwest of Melbourne. I don't think anybody in Australia has ever understood, I'm talking about people who have grown up in the post-war years, I don't think they've ever understood what conditions were like in those days. It's something like a third of the population was unemployed,

10:00 and they had nowhere to go and nothing to do, so they just tramped from town to town, begging, and because the Lutheran manse was quite a large home and it was diagonally opposite, some five or six hundred yards from where these people camped, our place was a constant, almost, hostel for people

10:30 who wanted to chop wood for a bob – a shilling – or they'd just come begging and want something to eat and my mother never turned them away. My father's salary was a pittance, but all the farmers made sure that we lived well and we did actually live very well with the produce of the farm houses, meats and vegetables and all that sort of thing that the farmers' wives would bring into the town because they knew that they had

11:00 no money or they couldn't support us with a lot of money but they could do, they could support us in that way. One of the interesting people that used to call occasionally, not because he camped in the showgrounds, he stayed at a hotel but he travelled by train with his bags of clothes and he would call at a lot of places where he got known and he would sell clothes, his name was Rockman.

11:30 You know the name Rockman? And my mother would always see to it that he had lunch with us or whatever, I'd come home from school for lunch and just occasionally this man would be there. And he would join us for lunch and he never forgot that and when they became the prosperous firm and had stores and shops all over, first of all Victoria and then Australia, he had given instructions to his staff that Mrs Mattiske

12:00 was always to be looked after, he never forgot that. I got home one evening on a cold winter's blowy afternoon and at the back door where I came through from the back from school, I would have been about eight, seven or eight, seven, my mother was fending off a person who was obviously drunk and

12:30 he was shouting abuse and foul language at her and eventually she got him away out through a side footpath to the gate and sent him on his way. My father had been away at some convention, he was away for a couple of days, my mother didn't know what to do, so a near neighbour came across, she was a spinster lady, she agreed to stay with us for the night, and they rang

13:00 Constable Mattey, now Mattey was a well know figure in the Victorian Police Force, he had been middle weight wrestling champion of the state. He was a tough character. And he gave instructions to mother to lock up the place and not to answer anything. Not to answer the doors or whatever, windows, we had a little side veranda where we used to sit at in the evenings facing the west and watch the sunset in the summer

13:30 and there was a long form there and we put the form across the veranda so that anybody coming up the steps in the dark, there were only four steps but very steep, just like a little ladder, that when they got to the top they would fall over. About eight o'clock that night we could hear crunching on the gravel footpath, a body came stamp, stamping up these stairs and bang, base over apex over this form, see, terrible collision, see. And the next thing, banging on the door.

14:00 So my mother and her friend said, "What do we do?" So they opened the door, and they pushed me out because I was the only male in the house, or the eldest male in the house. There was this dirty character with a singlet and a dirty old sport coat and a hairy chest and two great paws went down underneath me and picked me up like that, right, you can imagine the fright I had. He said, "It's alright son, it's only me, Mattey." It was he, Constable Mattey, and he's going crook on Mum, he said, "What on earth did

14:30 you put that form there for?" He said, "I could have broken a leg." And of course they all had a big laugh about it and she said, "Of course, what we're really concerned about is, are we safe?" and he said, "You're as safe as houses, don't worry." And we said, "What's happened?" and he said, "I dressed up like this, I went over and joined the gang and I sat around the campfire watching," and he said, "I picked a bloke who I know was a wanted man," he said. "I knew that would be the fellow," and he said, "You've got no need to worry, he's on the

15:00 road now, half way out to the next town, very sick, sore and sorry, and he'll never come back to Murtoa again." That's the way they had to treat them. He'd obviously punched him up, kicked him out of his car and said, "Now get on your way and never come back." OK so Where do we go from there?

**Yeah, just some questions, about this policeman, was he a strong man?**

Oh yes, strong,

15:30 pretty thickset, well built. And he was one of two constables, but they simply ran the town, they kept law and order.

**And were there any issues with this kind of way of enforcing the law?**

No, people accepted it, people understood that there was only one way to deal with an emergency

16:00 and you acted on the spot. And I have never known of any instance in my childhood growing up there where they did anything that was wrong or unfair. They handed out justice but it was fair justice. And, mind you, as kids too, in those days you weren't allowed to ride your bikes on the footpaths, because that was for the pedestrians and the ladies and the women doing their shopping or whatever up the main street. We

16:30 would never have put our bike on the footpath or ridden up the footpath because we knew that if Mattey or Disney saw us we'd be in trouble, so we obeyed the law, that's what we learnt to do. That helped, once again, that sort of thing helped in the navy too, because you understand that laws were made for the common good.

**How would he enforce the law on kids on bikes?**

Well he never had to do it to me,

17:00 I never got into trouble. But, I would imagine that he would raw the living daylights out of them, frighten the wits out of them, threaten them with telling their parents, because the parents would have supported the police in those days too, there would have been nothing like running to the police and saying, "Oh, you can't do this to my child." They would have backed the police and if you were told in no uncertain terms by the police that you could or couldn't do this,

17:30 that happened, that's what you did.

**Was it pretty unusual to have one of these, one of these men threaten someone like your mother, was that an unusual occurrence?**

It was an unusual occurrence, mostly the people were, the men were very good and they respected my mother and father, because as I mentioned, some of them kept coming back, they would do

18:00 the rounds and then months or so later you'd see the same person you saw a while ago. And actually, Mackey told my mother on one occasion, I can still remember him saying this, I was as I say only about seven or eight years old at the time of the Depression. He said, "Mrs Mattiske," he said, "You are inviting trouble and these people are coming to you because your name is on boards at different

18:30 towns where they pass the word along by the local bush wireless. If you're in Murtoa and you want a feed or something, you want help, you to go the Mattiske family," and he said, "You've got to stop this."

And she said, “It is my Christian duty to help these people, I can’t do otherwise.” And she refused to, she refused his request and he didn’t mind that because he knew that he wouldn’t get anywhere with

19:00 Mother anyway.

**And how would they dress, these people?**

In the oldest possible clothes that they could get out of, what would you say in those days, handouts, you know, there would be places where you could [get] handouts. And old trousers, sometimes it was just a hay band, they’d have no belts, a hay band around it to tie their trousers up. Old shirts, old sweaters, old jackets with holes in the elbows

19:30 and things like that. Sometimes the people like that would be quite well spoken, quite decent people, but they were in big trouble.

**And what about their faces, did they have beards or how would they look?**

You’re testing my memory now, but I don’t remember them as being any different to

20:00 any other people around, because they were just an ordinary strata of society that had fallen on evil times. There was that element, occasionally, where you would get the real roughies and the police would be concerned about the criminal element. But they weren’t, there were not all that many of those.

**And what was your impression as a**

20:30 **young man, a child, of these men?**

With our family background, I think I would, I could say now that our attitude generally was one of sympathy and even as kids, we were taught that we were to help people who were less well off than we were.

21:00 **Well tell us about this Lutheran background, you mentioned that they had to escape persecution, what persecution was this?**

Back in the 1830s and ’40s, 1820s and ’30s and ’40s, the Kaiser of Prussia, because there was no Germany at that stage, it was Prussia,

21:30 they wanted to impose a sort of a uniform doctrine and liturgies on the people. There was actually a department as I understand it, there was a department of religion which ran the whole show. And the people who had faithfully followed the reformation teachers said, “No, we can’t do that, you are imposing on us, not just forms of liturgy,

22:00 but certain beliefs that we will not adhere to.” So these people used to meet in farm houses and the pastors who were faithful to the original word would visit them and conduct services privately, but the police would then hound them and say, “If you do this, well, you’re in trouble.” In fact, several of the pastors were imprisoned or fined or whatever. And,

22:30 about that time, Wakefield and Angus, [George] Fife Angus, who had made, who was starting to make a fortune out of railways and transport, it was the new thing in Britain, they were planning the setting up of the South Australian colony based on free labour. Freehold properties that people could

23:00 acquire and farm. And they heard about a lot of the troubles in Germany and one of the leading pastors went to England, had long discussions with Fife Angus, and he said, “Look, you are the people that we want. You are independent, you’re competent, hard working and you’ll be the loyal type citizens.” And so the first shipload arrived

23:30 in 1837 plus or minus a month or two, I couldn’t be sure. And the captain of the ship was a bloke named Hahn, not the beer Hahn, but Hahndorf, the famous historical town of Hahndorf was named after him. He explored into the Adelaide Hills and found this valley and went back to the ship and he said, “Look there’s a place out there

24:00 that you people would probably find acceptable, and you could make a good living out of it.” So they trekked over the Adelaide Hills with all of their luggage and baggage and set up their little properties, and that was the start of Hahndorf. Later on, migrants went sort of north into the Barossa Valley and the Mattiskes were not vignerons or interested in the Barossa Valley, they acquired a magnificent property on the Para River, between

24:30 Gawler and Roland Flat, which is part of the Barossa Valley and it was a big area of wheat and sheep country and they built a home there on the banks of the river, and that stayed in the Mattiske property, because the only name on the title until only a few years ago, when unfortunately one of my cousins sold it. And it still had the original thatched cottage on it that they lived in. It was

25:00 totally dry and waterproof, but they’d long since built a magnificent brick home as the farm, as the homestead, as the farmhouse. The original homestead had been turned into a pen for the sheep in the wet weather, the sheep gathered in there and were dry and safe, you know.

**And so, how did elements of these Lutheran and German**

25:30 **backgrounds influence your kind of childhood?**

Not a great deal in many ways, not the German background, because by this time I was fifth generation and so the family had been here for 160, nearly, getting on for 170 years I think, yeah, over 160 years. The Lutheran background is

26:00 important, now without going into the long diatribe on Christian doctrine, but if you know anything about the reformation, the church in Rome had become very corrupt and a manmade organisation, put it that way. Luther was probably, was the greatest brain of the Roman Catholic Church at the time.

26:30 And he agonised over the way the church was going, he said, "Look, manmade structures are not what the Christian faith is all about, it's an individual, personal thing. And the only way to do it properly is to go back to the true word, if it's in the bible it's there, if it's not we don't want to have a bar of it." And of course this caused a frightful upheaval right across Europe,

27:00 because Luther was joined by other people all over Europe, in England and Scandinavia, and although they branched out on sort of slightly different tracks, eventually you had the whole protestant movement springing from Luther's teachings. Or not so much Luther's teaching but simply going back to the word. All organisations eventually go corrupt in some way or other and to some extent, in fact to a

27:30 large extent around the world, the Lutheran church has done the same thing. After they become a strong body, then they start to disintegrate again. But my father and what he taught me are the sorts of people that would never change, once you have a basic structure you don't change from it. And it might sound at the time out of date, or old fashioned, but eventually it comes back again and they're the things that you stick to.

28:00 I mentioned before and I'll say again, this is important because in the navy it is exactly the same thing. We were put into a situation that was life and death and you had to learn certain basics and if you didn't learn those basics, you put yourself at risk. And I have no doubt in my own mind that

28:30 the Royal Australian Navy was a very successful organisation because it stuck to those basics. It had the basics, the operational basics of navigation and gunnery and the things that always worked and you had to stick to, but the navy in those days also had a fine spiritual background, because it had been, the Royal Navy had been staunchly Anglican over centuries,

29:00 and so many of its senior officers, right through to the men, regularly followed Christian principles and in my day it was compulsory to attend service every Sunday morning, what was known as divisions, everybody mustered for divisions, where we were inspected, put through the hoops and then marched off to the hall, chapel, or quarterdeck in Shropshire, and divine service was conducted. Now that doesn't mean

29:30 that everybody is going to be a model Christian, but the basics were there in the back of everybody's mind whether they agreed with it or not.

**Now life as a kid was, as a son of a Lutheran pastor, how did that affect your childhood?**

I don't think it really

30:00 had any effect as far as our activities in the town are concerned, because I went to school with all the other kids, like everybody else. I played football, I played cricket, I got into little bits of mischief sometimes, I loved swimming, we had a swimming pool beside the lake, it had been built into the side of the lake so that we could all

30:30 swim in there in the summertime. And I, I suppose you'd say it was just a normal country upbringing, I can't imagine doing anything differently or being any different to any other kid, really.

**What is a normal country upbringing at that time? What kind of games would you play,**

31:00 **what kind of fun would you have?**

Well, I've mentioned the cricket and the football, but before we even get to the stage where I was old enough to play that seriously we rode our bikes, everybody had a bike, every kid had a bike. It was not uncommon in the school holidays

31:30 for perhaps a dozen or more of us to get on our bikes and ride 15 miles to Minyip, another little adjoining town, or to Rupanyup, meet kids over there, take the footy down to the ground, and kick the football around, have a bit of a competition and then get on our bikes and ride home again. The dams that the farmers had

32:00 were often inhabited by large amounts of yabbies. A yabby is, well would you know, would people know today in the city what a yabby was? It's a little, it's shaped like a lobster or a crayfish, it's freshwater naturally and they grow to about eight or nine inches long and the tail

32:30 is a sweet fish, absolutely delicious. And during the late summer and autumn when they were at their peak, if you, if a farmer had a good dam where there were plenty of yabbies, we'd all be out there, we'd ride our bikes, take a sugar bag, some old stinking meat from a rabbit, piece of string and a stick and you put the string in the bank,

33:00 tied the meat onto it, threw the meat into the dam and then you had a net, a hollow flat net with chicken wire in it and as you pulled in the string the yabbies would be on the meat and you'd scoop them up and put them in the bag, take them home and boil them. And that was a famous pastime, anybody in the country, who you talk to about yabbies, they all reckon

33:30 that was the feast of the year, you know, to get a bag of yabbies. We did that a lot. I was reasonably good at cricket, I can say that, I suppose, without boasting. My father was a good cricketer. I can remember my father being called upon when there was a shortage in the team to go over to the cricket ground on a Saturday afternoon and he'd go and fill in. And it was quite a thing

34:00 in the town, oh, Pastor Mattiske is playing for the local side, you know, but he did when he was called on, because he should have been home preparing for sermon for Sunday. The captain and coach of the local cricket side was a chap named Harry Pollock, who was the manager of the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission, which had a big office in Murtoa, it was the centre of a big area, irrigation area, open channel area.

34:30 Harry used to teach kids who were interested and I'd always go to practice on a Tuesday and Thursday night after school, and he taught me the fundamentals of batting. But he came to me one day, I suppose I would have been late 13, early 14, and he said,

35:00 "After the holidays, after the Christmas new year break, we're always short, we're picking you for the side, is it okay for you to play?" And I said, "Oh yeah!" You know, I thought that was terrific, and I had to go home and tell Mum, "Is that okay?" "Yeah, that's okay." And we played Rupanyup, and Rupanyup was one of those places that had always been enemies of Murtoa, whether it was football, cricket, anything,

35:30 there was always immense rivalry, we get to Rupanyup, it's about 105 degrees in the shade, we're opening the batting, batting first. We lose about four or five wickets for about 50 runs and there's a crowd of wives and women from the Rupanyup team all barracking and rubbishing us. Harry says to me, "Put them on," so I put the pads on,

36:00 I'm about, the next wicket falls, I go out I'm out and I can, as I walked out I can hear these women saying to Harry Pollock, because he was a famous figure, everyone knew him, see, "Harry, what's going wrong with your Murtoa mob?" They said, "You're putting in the kids to bat?" and he said, "It's alright, just you wait and see, wait and see, he'll be alright." I can still remember this, you see, and I went out and the other bloke up the other end was a good batsman and I made about, I don't know

36:30 15, 17, 18 runs, but I stayed there for about half an hour and stabilized the innings, stabilized until we finished up with a reasonable score. When I was eventually out, I walked off and Harry turned around to this barracking mob of women and he yelled out, "That's the sort of kids we grow up in, we breed in Murtoa." See, and my chest was out here, you know, I thought to myself,

37:00 all my Christmases had come at once. I never went onto great heights in cricket, although in Melbourne I played with Croydon for 25 years, it became a sub-district club, it was a good class cricket, you know. And perhaps the highlight of my cricket career was that the suburban leagues were asked to

37:30 furnish a composite side on a Wednesday to play the Melbourne Cricket Club and to give them practice, match practice for the main games and they included their test players from Melbourne, if there was a Melbourne cricketer in the test side, Sheffield Shield players etc, see, and you could just imagine the thrill of walking out onto the Melbourne Cricket Ground, on a Wednesday morning

38:00 to face this crowd, you know. Not a crowd of spectators but to face this other side who had lots of stars and famous players in them. And I can, that's that sort of thing I will never forget, walking out onto the Melbourne Cricket Ground and batting under those conditions, you know. Very good. Football, Australian Rules, the Wimmera League was a very powerful

38:30 Australian Rules association or league, and at Horsham I was a fairly, when I was at school and then my first year with the Shell Company I was a fairly big, hefty young lad. Six foot one, and 13 odd stone, and I did fairly well and one of the people I played against, it was wartime so there was no regular competition, but we had

39:00 other areas, made up teams so that we could have an unofficial competition, and one of the blokes I used to play against and locked horns with on numerous occasions turned out to be a former Melbourne Football Club player. And when he knew I was being transferred to the Melbourne office of the Shell Company, he immediately rang Melbourne and said, "Look, there's a lad I'm sending down, and you want him in your club." So that next door to me I trained with the Melbourne

39:30 Football Club and played in all the practice games and did quite well, actually, I was kicking goals, they put me full forward at different times and I was doing alright, and then the call up came for the navy and I had to go along to the Melbourne Football Club president who was the managing director of the then Vacuum Oil Company, [now] Mobil and a famous figure in Melbourne, a very powerful man, but

he'd taken me under his wing. And I said, "Excuse me, Mr Blair,

40:00 I've got news for you, I've been sworn in for the navy." And this gives you an indication of Melbourne football, what football is like in Melbourne. And he looked at me as much, as though I was sort of, you know, a foreigner, an enemy, and he said, "Lad, what on earth did you want to do that for?" and I said, "Well sir, there's a war on and I'm going to be 18 soon and it's, you know, we got to fight for our country."

40:30 He looked me in the eye and he said, "Anybody can go and join the navy," and he said, "There's not many people in this world that can play football for the Melbourne Football Club." I said, "Well I'm sorry sir, but I think it's my duty to go off to the war." And that's how it happened, so I never went back again after the war, I was too, we were too tired and dispirited after the war, I never really took footy up seriously again.

# Tape 2

00:36 **I will just start this tape and ask you about schooling a bit, you boarded at Horsham?**

Yes I did.

**What was the school like there?**

In those days the only high school for miles around was at Horsham, Murtoa was what was called a higher elementary school, which went to Intermediate Certificate, tenth year, so to do years

01:00 11 and 12 you had to go to Horsham. Kids from Jeparit, Dimboola, Murtoa and those surrounding smaller towns, if they thought they were bright enough to go any further they went to Horsham and boarded there.

**What is boarding school like?**

I boarded in a home run by a lady who had a very big home

01:30 with lots of rooms in it, and about, she took in about five or six boarders I suppose. I must admit, I thoroughly enjoyed it, we had one of the teachers, who didn't actually teach me, but one of the high school teachers boarded there at the same time and he was a chap who got on well with young fellows, he talked to us as equals outside of school.

02:00 My first day at school, which is a rather frightening experience, as you probably know, when you go to a new school, and I'm used to a school with 100 kids or so and I am going to a school with 3 or 400 kids. I am standing there wondering what to do, all dressed up with tie and jacket on and a school blazer and this kid comes up to me and flicks my tie and he said,

02:30 "Your breakfast all right on that tie," and I thought, "Have I spilt something?" and I looked at it and I said, "What is wrong with you?" He said, "Where are you boarding?" I said, "I am boarding up with Mrs Hausler up in Dimboola Road." He said, "Is it alright?" I said, "It seems alright, I have only been there one day and a half," and I said, "Who are you?" He said, "I come from Jeparit, my name is Neil Harcourt,"

03:00 he said, "I don't know where I am staying, I don't like where I am," he said, "Do you reckon I could get in there with you?" I said, "I will ask the lady." So we rode our bikes home for lunch, well I did, and when I got back to school I said, "Yes, I am in a big room where there are several beds and you can have one if you want it." So Neil moved in.

**What was wrong with the place he was staying at?**

The meals were terrible,

03:30 he didn't like the meals. Neil Harcourt now lives at Burleigh Waters, we have been like brothers ever since, never been apart all our lives. The only mistake he made was he joined the army instead of the navy. We have been like that ever since.

**What were the rules and regulations of this boarding house that**

04:00 **you stayed in?**

Provided you behaved yourself and turned up to meals at the right time we were free to do what we liked. Some of our escapades I suppose. There was a chap who was the storeman at the Shell Depot. In those days the oil companies had their own properties with their own staff, a superintendent and driver

04:30 and storeman, and the storeman there was the light weight champion of the Wimmera and Western District boxing, a very good boxer. He had a coach who trained him up in the loft at the White Hart Hotel where, in the back, when there were stables people went around with horses, the stables, and up top was a big loft and in there was a boxing ring up there.

05:00 I don’t know how we got there but we were invited to come down and have a look one day. The little training session is in full swing, “Here, put on the gloves and have a go.” So I learnt a lot about boxing. I became, I suppose, reasonably competent and aggressive and not long after that one of the boarding,

05:30 a couple of chaps came into the boarding house where we were, at this home, they were contract painters and they were going to paint the high school and they asked me, I don’t know how it happened, but they said, “We are up here to paint the school, where do we stay?” and I said, “Come down and stay where we are,” so they moved in. This chap’s name happened to be Doug, known as ‘Snowy’ Ryan, former lightweight champion of NSW.

06:00 Doug we told him about what we do on Tuesdays and Thursdays, “We go down to the boxing,” and he said, “I would like to come down and have a look,” and he told us about his boxing career. He taught me things how I could look after myself that from then on I never feared anything, it didn’t matter what you ran up against, you knew you could handle yourself.

**What did he teach you?**

Boxing.

**Any particular – ?**

06:30 No, just how to box properly, how to defend yourself or to attack. I was then only 15, not quite 16, I might have just turned 16, I became one of the sparring partners for some of these blokes who were fighting semi-professionally. We used to have a lot of fun, we got knocked about occasionally, perhaps a black eye or a blood nose, but we thoroughly enjoyed it.

07:00 After a session, it was six o’clock closing after a session, in the evening in the loft boxing we would go down to Mike Lologis’s café, he had the Greek café in the town and three or four of us would get in there and order a cup of coffee. Mike had his own still where he brewed his own plonk, we used to get stuck into Mike’s Greek wine,

07:30 it was pretty potent stuff and it wasn’t all that, it wouldn’t win any gold medals or it wouldn’t win any silver medals either. We used to have a lot of fun.

**What was it like, having some freedom from home?**

I was growing up, I was experimenting with things, I was going out doing things,

08:00 I think I can say with self justification that we never did anything which would upset anybody or broken any laws, we got into all sorts of mischief. The proprietor of the Exchange Hotel in the main street of Horsham was Pop Johnson who had been a publican at Murtoa, he knew my father well. I would go in there with Neil one afternoon after school

08:30 and [he] said, “I don’t mind you kids having a beer, but,” he said, “for God’s sake, put your school caps in your hip pocket.” We said, “Alright, sorry Mr Johnson, we will do that in the future.”

**You were 16 at the time, were girls starting to become interesting?**

Yes, but in those days, not like today, no hanky panky like today.

**How would you meet girls?**

09:00 School dances, school functions, sports days. When we played the other schools there was a very intense rivalry between the schools of Ararat, Stawell, Hamilton, Hamilton College, Warracknabeal, Horsham perhaps some others,

09:30 and interschool visits and the local football ground was hired and we would play them. We were all lads, 15 and 16, but country boys, all pretty big and strong, I tell you what, the football was pretty rough I can tell ya, but of course particularly when we played a team that was a rival, most of the school would be down there in the afternoon to cheer us on including all the girls, we thought that was alright.

10:00 **What was the school like generally, how well did you enjoy your schooling?**

I enjoyed it very much, we had very good teachers in those days. Jamieson was the headmaster who became quite a figure in the Victorian education system. He was known as ‘Rocky Ned’, a very stern disciplinarian but also a man who understood kids, he knew how

10:30 to handle them. After one particular rough game that we played against this school I had been in a bit of an altercation with a fellow who had bowled me over and I waited for him and eventually when the umpire wasn’t looking I got him. He was going to do a dirty trick to me on the back and

11:00 jump into me. I realised he was not far away and he was coming and I had my fist ready and I whacked him in the guts and down he went and nobody saw it, not on the ground. Next morning I am walking past the headmaster’s office and he said, “Mattiske, come in here take a seat. You played well,” he said. “One of the reasons why we won yesterday was because you did a good job in that team, you were going well, but,” he said,

11:30 “A little bit free with that right fist, weren’t you?” He had seen it from the grandstand. I said, “Yes sir.” He said, “Well okay, that is alright, we won.” I think he understood that I was only getting even, that I hadn’t started anything.

**In amongst this sort of rich life you were living with the boxing training and sport and this sort of thing, how hard was it to keep your mind on**

12:00 **study?**

I suppose our social life and sporting life did interfere with the studies. I was able to pass exams reasonably well because I was just lucky enough to pass them. Murtoa had given me a good education and I had a good memory for things, so I did

12:30 alright scholastically, but I didn’t really want to go on with an academic or scholastic career and I was offered this job, I was called up and asked to go ’round to the Shell Depot. The superintendent knew me and asked me if I would like to get a job when I left school, which I did, I went into the Shell Company.

**Just before we talk about that,**

13:00 **how old were you when you started at Horsham?**

15.

**Were you still back home for the declaration of war?**

I was at home when war was declared.

**What are your memories of that event?**

Very clearly listening to the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] on the Sunday night and Menzies broadcast his message about wanting people to remain cool and calm and that we were now at

13:30 war because of the actions of the German army or whatever in Poland. Next morning or next day on the Monday afternoon, I was riding home via a street from the school and I ran into one of our shire councillors who was a close friend of my father and the family and I stopped and said hello,

14:00 and he said, “Hello,” and he said to me, “David, this is going to be a long hard cruel war,” and I said, “Oh, is it?” He said, “Yes, I think it is.” He had had a younger brother killed at Gallipoli, he had never been in the army himself but he was a shire councillor, a well known figure in the district, and I thought to myself, “Old Bill would

14:30 know what he is talking about, that is what we can expect.” And that is exactly what happened.

**With your parents having a vague-ish German background, and with the Lutheran Church having a German background, was there any negative response from anyone, either during the First or Second World War?**

It was before my time, in the First World War there was. In South Australia there had been quite a lot of

15:00 friction and a lot of the towns that were named after German places were changed to English names. I understand that years later it was a matter of great regret and names like Hahndorf were brought back into the system. In Murtoa I wasn’t aware of any of that sort of rivalry or ill feeling.

15:30 The second Sunday after war was declared, my father had a special service in the evening because a lot of our young people were already in the militia or the CMF [Citizens’ Military Forces] and he asked them to come along and those who had their uniforms were in uniforms and I can still remember quite a line of the young fellows being called to the rail at the altar where Father,

16:00 what did he say? I couldn’t remember what he said. He encouraged them to do their duty and he blessed them and said, “Whatever happens, you have got to remain faithful to your Christian principles,” that sort of thing.

**What sort of opinion were you forming of war at this stage or impressions of war?**

16:30 Remember that in those days, the middle and late ’30s, most of our school teachers our male school teachers [who] had seen some service during the First World War and probably four or five of Dad’s parishioners and close friends

17:00 his age were members who served in France during the First World War and I heard their stories as a kid, I would listen to their stories if I was visiting them. I suppose the word used to describe what you are asking me would be intrigued, this was something different that people did in an emergency,

17:30 When they had to fight for their country. I can remember seeing Eddie Tepper, whose scroll, which was given to him after he returned from France, ‘For God, King and Country’, and I understood what that meant.

**What did it mean to you.**

It meant that people who

18:00 the first thing, God, where people had a just cause or a cause that seemed correct and right, it was worth fighting for, for King we understood that the King was the symbol of our nation and our good government,

18:30 whether we were prosperous or not, but our stability and security stemmed from a system where there was a King, and country, of course, was the country in which we lived. We were happy people despite the Depression and all the political troubles that had gone on during that period from ’29 to ’33, ’34, ’35, basically we were happy, secure people,

19:00 and to preserve those three things to me was important, even at that stage when I was only 13, 14, 15 years of age and I think I can say I had already made up my mind that when I was old enough that I would enlist. The RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] had a recruiting team at the pictures [on] Saturday night

19:30 at Murtoa at the local mechanics institute, everybody went to the flicks Saturday night, and in a passageway down the side of the hall they had a desk and some officers and papers and application forms, in signing up people you could ask all sorts of things about the RAAF. I went and I saw them and I went up, “This is interesting, what is this all about?”

20:00 A big lad, I probably looked a lot older than I was, and the officer started telling me things and handing me an application and one of the ladies who was known as Auntie Minna, I had grown up with her, she was a very close friend of the family, said, “You can’t take this lad, he is only fourteen.” I felt like saying, “Shut up. This is nothing to do with you.” Anyway, they said, “When you grow up you can

20:30 think about it.”

**I am intrigued by the three thing, I am intrigued by the ‘King’ part of it. I guess knowledge or allegiance to you personally was that to Empire.**

You must remember that our history books were based on the history of England and the expansion of the Empire

21:00 and I think it was clear to me even then as a young lad that the British Empire was a very unique organisation that had been made up by very fine people, it had established itself around the world,

21:30 it wasn’t only militarily powerful but it had sent its Christian missionaries all around the world spreading the gospel where possible. We thought of Britain as the source of our strength

22:00 and security, which it was. It wasn’t just our thoughts, it was. My own personal background and family background also required people to be straight and true and loyal and on Monday morning when we all lined up from little kids, five, six years old in grade one,

22:30 “I shall honour the King and I shall serve the flag and chiefly and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the laws.” We understood that as little kids, I certainly did and I am sure all my friends did. When you look around today, and I have seen this here even

23:00 in a nice place like Runaway Bay, the attitude of kids, to the high school kids, the attitude to life, to their parents, to the laws of the land, there is something very sadly missing in our society that kids like I grew up with.

23:30 **During that first year of the war, you spent the first year of the war, before you went, in Horsham.**

Yes.

**What immediate changes did it bring to your life?**

Well already, some of my friends who were a year or two older were gone and then

24:00 they would come home for a weekend’s leave or something and they would be in khaki because they all joined the army. In the country it basically was everybody joined the army, nobody thought of the navy. A few joined the air force but mostly the army. One of my father’s members in the church was

24:30 a lady, I don’t know her Christian name, she was the wife of Bernie Jones, the local tailor, and I can still remember this very clearly. Two of the boys joined the army early on and they were in the 6th Division which went to Greece and when the

25:00 German army decided to knock off Greece first before attacking Russia, large numbers of Australians were involved in the campaign and captured, they couldn’t get away, and the two Jones boys, Stan was one of them, can’t remember the other one, they were listed as missing.

25:30 Mrs Jones was in a turmoil, she was a, shall we say, slightly emotional, unstable sort of person, and she would depend on my father a lot, he would, [the] term these days is to counsel people. I can remember, this is funny and I know my facts are right, I can still remember this clearly

26:00 Dad came home from visiting the Jones family one afternoon or evening and he was telling Mother at the dinner table that he had been doing this and doing that and he said, “I am worried about Mrs Jones, she is just distraught,” he said. “I prayed with her and I assured her that the boys would be alright,” and Mum said, “That is a dangerous thing to do, we don't know, what happens if the news is

26:30 bad?” He said, “I felt that is all I could do to calm her down.” Within a couple of days they get an announcement to advise that the boys were safe, and of course these are the things that happened to families, to a lot of Australian families in that time.

27:00 They, the army had been, we followed the news of the army attacking Bardia and then Tobruk and the casualty list coming out and everybody would be looking for this. I don’t think that worried me so much but I can remember being in the Warrnambool area on holidays, school holidays, and

27:30 the 6th and 7th Divisions in the Middle East had assaulted Bardia and Tobruk with overwhelming success, outstanding success, they just ripped through the place, great victories, and I can remember thinking to myself, “Well, the Australians could do it, we can do anything we want to if we really try, and the boys in the army now are carrying on

28:00 where they left off in 1918,” because I had read all these stories as I told you about 19 – one of my school teachers had won a Military Cross, Bernie Gow. There were quite a few others but we won’t have to go into all their names but I knew something of their background and I had read a lot of the history like the old Anzac book that was produced

28:30 and I had been to a meeting in Murtoa where, George, later Sir George Holland, had addressed a wartime rally and he had addressed a big crowd of people, he was campaigning, he was from Gallipoli and France, he was an original 7th Battalion man. I got to know George later on in the RSL [Returned and Services League] very well when I grew up when I was an office bearer

29:00 but he had told us of some of the things that happened in France and the respect that the French people had for the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. And I thought, “Well, this is tremendous, they are carrying on, they are doing what they are supposed to be doing.” I still didn’t want to join the army [but] I always liked the stories of the sea.

29:30 **What kind of stories of the sea?**

History, we learnt about Sir Francis Drake, about Granville, Hawkins, Frobisher, these people, Nelson. I knew a fair bit already in the history lessons we did of the Battle of the

30:00 Nile, Copenhagen and Trafalgar. Books like the Swiss Family Robinson, have you ever heard of that one? they are stories at sea, Robinson Crusoe, and I mentioned this in the book, Fire Across the Pacific, we had a big picture in the school and it was also in the reader that they used to –

30:30 they publish all the time, there was a picture of obviously a fishing port, or a port on the coast of England and there is an old bloke who is obviously an old sailor and the picture shows across the stone wall the sea and there is a young lad who is listening to his story and he is pointing out to sea,

31:00 obviously telling him a story about what happens at sea and I always thought this was a fascinating painting. This young lad is learning how to go to sea, to go out there and experience something different that land-lubbers never knew about.

**You spoke about the British Empire before, was there any of that sort of the might of the British,**

31:30 **was that an influence at all, would you learn stories about the – ?**

No doubt about it. On one occasion my Uncle Alf Brauer who was Dr Alf Brauer in Warrnambool,

32:00 I had all my summer holidays down there and he went to Melbourne for something or other and took the family for a few days and while we were there in the middle of January the papers announced that HMS Danae is in port, she was a light cruiser. Uncle said, “We will go down and visit her.” I can remember very clearly scrambling

32:30 over everything that I was allowed to touch or go near. A couple of English sailors were there and I asked them to take me around or show me around, which they did, and I asked lots of questions and afterwards Uncle Alf said, “Where did you learn all about the questions you asked, the things you were asking?” I said, “I just like reading stories about ships in the navy, I suppose.”

33:00 The Danae was part of the Far East fleet and later on sailed with HMAS Hobart and some of the Australian ships around the times of the Battle of the Java Sea and Japanese conquest of Singapore and what is now Indonesia, but she survived the war. She would have been pretty old and not very modern then, but she survived.

33:30 **What are your memories of Japan entering the war?**

I had just finished school and was about to start work and it was sort of break up time, December 7th or 8th, we had a geography teacher by the name of Menadue,

34:00 and he later on became quite a famous figure in Melbourne, he was for many years the president of what was called the Australian Natives' Association, a sort of loyal group or society that met to promote the interests of Australia and they had branches and things all over Australia, he was president for many, many years. He was a very good geography and history

34:30 teacher and I can remember him saying to me one day when the class had finished and there was three or four of the boys, he was sitting there talking about things with us and we had been studying Japan and the Far East, the geography of Japan, this was about a couple of months, two or three months before Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, and he had this map of Japan and he said,

35:00 "You know, things are moving fast for you fellows," he said. "Mattiske, I think you will probably be dropping bombs or firing things at that part of Japan one of these days." There was another kid and he said, "I don't know what you are going to do, but if you get into the air force dropping bombs about there," and he said, "there will be war."

35:30 We all laughed, we thought he was a bloke who could pull your leg a bit or make you smile in the course of conversation. "Okay sir, that is all right, yes." Little did we know that I would actually be doing that in a few years' time.

**What was the general reaction?**

36:00 **To a lot of people it must have come quite a shock.**

I am not aware of it immediately because at this stage people thought, these little brown myopic fellows can't aim a rifle straight, they can't drop bombs on a good target, we had a division in

36:30 Malaya in Singapore, a division of Australian infantry would clean this mob up.

**Was this the general opinion of the Japanese at the time?**

Yes.

**How was that?**

Even if you read the official communications and instructions by headquarters staff in Singapore they said in their documents

37:00 there was really nothing much to fear from a Japanese attack, that we would be able to handle it, so Pearl Harbour came as a surprise, but even in Malaya when they first landed at Kota Baru, "oh well that's okay, we have got the British army and an Australian division here, they will handle that," so when Singapore fell it did come as a shock.

37:30 I was working at the Shell Depot at the time, I had started work and the oil companies put together a thing called BIPOD, Bulk Installation Petroleum Office of Defence, I think it stood for.

38:00 After Singapore fell and the Japanese were pushing towards New Guinea, steps were taken to protect things and secure things and the supply of petroleum products would be vital. A team of painters came around and everything that was silver, because all your tanks and installations

38:30 are silver or bright white colours to reflect the light and keep the temperatures of stored petroleum products down and all this was painted dirty green khaki. My boss, the superintendent, a bloke named Bob Hutchinson, a well known figure in Morimwa who had been wounded in Gallipoli a member of the 8th Battalion [who]

39:00 landed there on the 25th, and he and quite a few of his mates joined the VDC, Volunteer Defence Corps, it was known as and they were mostly old diggers form the First World War, but they did invite young people like me who at that stage was 16 and a half, 17,

39:30 and I used to go out with them on little bivouacs and we were given rifles and taught how to handle a rifle, they were old stuff but wouldn't have done much good in war, but we learnt how to handle a rifle. I had been doing shooting with a pea rifle in Murtoa as a kid on the farm for years, so I knew how to handle a firearm alright, we would go out into the countryside and a bloke named

40:00 Waite, who was the undertaker, he had been in France during the First World War, he was the commander of this little group of people, there would be 20 or 30 of us I suppose, he used to pick the younger ones like me and say, "I want you to get out there in the bush and hide yourself and we will line all these fellows up and we are going through to simulate a patrol

40:30 and your job is to see how many you can pick off before they get to your line where they can catch you." We used to have fun, I thought that was good fun.

# Tape 3

00:37 **Would you like to tell us first off how you came to work at the Shell Depot?**

The chap I mentioned before, Neil Harcourt, he was older than I am and he had a job with the Shell Company as a junior clerk, it was called, at the depot, he was

01:00 being transferred to Melbourne after doing a number of months in the depot. The idea was that the Shell Company used to train young lads, they picked about half a dozen lads around Victoria and gave them practical experience in the depot where you could paint drums, do the bank, count the stock, you did everything, it was good practical grounding. Neil is being transferred

01:30 to Melbourne, so the chief of the area said, “Do you know anybody who could replace you?” and Neil said, “My mate David, I am boarding with him, David Mattiske,” so they rang up the school and spoke to the principal, the headmaster, and I was called into his office and he said, “You better get on your bike and get around to the Shell Company quick.” So around I went,

02:00 there we are and I said, “Okay, that is fine, I will be leaving school in another week’s time.” It was the end of just before Pearl Harbour so I was sent to Melbourne rail and accommodation paid, you had to be interviewed. This could be of interest because it doesn’t happen like this anymore.

02:30 I am given the ticket and I am to leave on the afternoon train on Friday and appear at the Shell Company’s office on Saturday because everybody worked on Saturday. I was to stay with my grandfather and grandmother in Toorak. On Saturday morning I front up and somebody takes down a few particulars and they say I have to go up,

03:00 here is a tram ticket, you go up the top of Collins Street and there was a doctor who examined you as though you were going into the army or the navy and then back to the Shell Company and a few more questions and particulars taken down and then I am to be ushered into the office of the Victorian manager, Mr ET Hindmarsh. He was an Englishman,

03:30 I learnt to know later on that he was rather a fearsome character, a very big domineering type figure, and people who were not doing the right thing were always in fear and trembling of him because he always was a disciplinarian, this is what I learnt later. I am taken into his secretary’s office and then there is a call

04:00 that I am to go in. A rather impressive type place, big office with big desk and here is this man sitting there and he opens up this folio which is obviously my particulars. I am expecting to be quizzed on all sorts of things of a school or academic nature to see whether I was bright enough

04:30 or knew enough about what goes on, perhaps he could even throw questions about arithmetic or grammar at you. He looked at me and he said, “Hmm, we are thinking about giving you a job in Horsham,” he said, “your father and family live in Murtoa. But,” he said, “you will only be at Horsham for a certain number of months until you learn the ropes and then we would have to get you down here

05:00 to our Melbourne office. You would be a young lad by yourself, do you think you can behave yourself away from your family in Melbourne?” Interesting question. My answer was from memory, “Sir, I have been brought up the right way by my family, I have a fairly good family background and I am sure I would be able to look after myself properly in Melbourne.”

05:30 “Thank you very much,” closed the file. “That will be all, you will be told, you will be advised.” I wonder if that goes on today. He wasn’t concerned, I learnt later on, I thought about this much later on, the Shell Company could teach me how to stock take or could teach me how to do this or whatever,

06:00 that didn’t worry them but they wanted people who once again in an old Australian term to do the right thing, that is what he was after. So presumably I filled the requirement.

**Tell us about the changes at this workplace, being an oil depot**

06:30 **during the war, that you saw.**

The most important factor of change in the depot was that people could no longer come in and order what they wanted. Because there was petrol rationing and woe betide the person who manipulated stock incorrectly. In those days and possibly now

07:00 one of the worst offences in the Shell Company was what was called falsification of records. I probably say that they wouldn’t have liked people to tickle the peter or pinch money but that wasn’t the important thing, the worst damage can be done to a company by the falsification of records and we have seen that in recent years,

07:30 so if you wrote out an invoice that had so many gallons of this or that and the price on an extension, it had to be right. You could never hand a customer a certain amount of goods and mark a delivery point which was priced

08:00 lower than the point you were giving him his goods because in those days, and I think it still applies, there was a scale of prices depending on how far you were from Melbourne, there was a price differentiation. That was just one of the many things that could be manipulated if you wanted to, but no way, you learnt those things. People would come in,

08:30 instead of just accepting their order, farmers and things like that, you couldn't sell it to everybody but you would have to make sure they had their ration tickets and if they had ration tickets to the extent of 44 gallons, you could sell them a drum of petrol, as simple as all that.

**What about security around the depot, was there things done for security?**

09:00 No, there wasn't security as we know it now but the place was well fenced and walled and locked up. Horsham was a place, by the way, where we would normally have had stock of half a dozen nine- or ten-thousand gallons tanks for petrol and one or two for

09:30 lighting kerosene, power kerosene in bulk and distillate diesel. Not long after the Japanese were well on their way to getting into New Guinea and places like that and there were threats or problems on the mainland it was decided that there should be vast

10:00 storages of petroleum products at selected places around the countryside around the interior, Horsham was one of them. I hadn't been there long in the depot as the clerk in the office when a gang of people arrived and they start excavating right out the back, there was a lot of vacant unused land in the Shell Company property and they installed, if I remember rightly thirty ten-thousand gallon tanks.

10:30 Then once that was fixed in place and all the pipelines connected and all the valves and what not to the pump house, along came train loads of rail tank cars which were pumped in there and that was put aside for emergency use if that ever occurred.

**Was there any case for plans of potential Japanese bombing or**

11:00 **anything like that?**

Not to my knowledge, if there were I was never told about it.

**What about camouflage or – ?**

The whole of the place was covered with this khaki brown paint and the depot was a fairly extensive area with a large loading platform and sheds that were roofed with corrugated iron painted silver. I can still see the painting contractors up there on that roof,

11:30 not with brushes in hand or paint pots, they had buckets of khaki paint and yard brooms and the yard broom went into the pot and the whole area was painted over in one weekend.

**Did this seem unusual?**

We knew, we understood that it was necessary to have the thing camouflaged, that if it

12:00 stayed in its silver colours on a bright sunny day you could see it for miles. It was obviously a sensible precaution to cover it up.

**What were you thinking at the time about the war, at what point were you thinking of joining?**

After being in the depot for about seven or eight months and learning the ropes there

12:30 I was transferred to Melbourne, to the Victorian office and just around from, I got involved with the Melbourne Football Club as we had [talked about] before and also they still did some cricket practice and I used to go down to the Albert Ground where they had practice nets on a Thursday afternoon,

13:00 Evening, and play practice cricket. But not far from the Shell office on the corner of Bourke and William Streets, just down one block in Collins Street, was an old building that had been there ever since Melbourne was Melbourne, called the old fleet buildings, and in there were the naval recruiting office. I used to go for walks around at lunchtime, looking at the city, and I saw this building and I realised I was

13:30 about seventeen and a half by then and I will go in and find out, it is the navy. So I went in asked the usual questions about joining up and was given the pieces of paper and the applications and filled them in and away we went. A month or two later I was called up for the medical examination, which was very extensive in those days. Seamen had to be

14:00 equivalent to what I think the army called 'A1', and a little while later I was called in again to be sworn in and there was probably fifteen people about my age where we all had to hold our bible in our hand and swear allegiance to God, King and Country and not long after that I was told to report at that same office,

14:30 that same building. Cold, miserable, windy day in Melbourne we were marched down to Spencer Street Station, put on a train and that night we finished up at Flinders Naval Depot.

**How old were you?**

I had just turned eighteen.

**You didn't need approval?**

Yes, mother had to sign the papers.

**How did she feel about that?**

15:00 She was 200 miles away, I sent her the papers and, she signed it and they came back, but I don't think she was very happy but she knew it was inevitable.

**Why?**

A) Because everybody was going to get called up anyway in some form or other, and B) she knew that I had always been interested in joining up something. I don't think

15:30 she had any – she had no qualms about me going off to fight for the country, her concerns would have been a personal one as to what would happen to me. How I would go. While you're on that subject later on, after I had been in Shropshire and we had done a few operations and the first time we got leave to go

16:00 home, we had been to Sydney and we knew the ship would be there for some clean up and some work done on it and we would be there for a few weeks so everybody got home leave. I arrived home, it was an unusual situation, me arriving in uniform, the papers had obviously disclosed to everybody that the Shropshire had been [in]

16:30 action a few times, I thought to myself, I am not going to say anything that is going to upset mother and I deliberately developed a policy of not saying anything about life on board, shells, guns, explosions –

17:00 so we just talked about all the family things and the things that went on in town and amongst the farmers and Dad's church and his congregation and etc, etc. I found out later on that what I did was right because mother had a lady who used to come in and help her, one of Dad's parishioners out in the country,

17:30 and she often used to stay with mother, she was an unmarried lady and she was a member of the famous Vickers Ruwoldt people, they're the armament people, foundry people, in Melbourne, and Rita said to me one day towards the end of the war, she said, "You don't talk to mother about the Shropshire

18:00 or anything." I said, "No." She said, "That is good that you don't, because just occasionally your mother has said to me [that] she wakes up at night wondering, worrying." I said, "Thanks for telling me, Rita, but as you know I don't won't talk about it anyway." That was it.

**Did you talk about it with anyone?**

When you came home on leave you didn't, you didn't bother.

18:30 For a start, the navy was the silent service, you weren't supposed to say too much anyway. I would always, when I say always, we only got home a couple of times, but on those occasions I went across to Horsham to see one of my old girlfriends who was the daughter of Bob Hutchinson, the depot superintendent, we are still very close friends, all our lives, she was older than I am,

19:00 there was no sort of romance boy-girl stuff, we were just good mates, we went everywhere together did things together and Bob Hutchinson being an old Gallipoli man I could mention a few things, talk a few things but otherwise, no, not to the family. Uncle Jack McKay in Melbourne was a marine engineer

19:30 and he was in the Royal Navy in the First World War as a reservist, he had been in London on merchant ships when war broke out so he joined the volunteer reserve and I could talk a little bit to him but not much because he liked talking about ships and the sea, otherwise no, never spoke to anybody.

**Did it help when you got to speak a little bit about it to anyone?**

20:00 Didn't make any difference, I was content and happy with what I was doing on Shropshire, that doesn't suggest I am a very brave or courageous man. I will skip forward a bit.

20:30 I joined the ship in Milne Bay, Shropshire hadn't been there very long, she had just come out from England after she had been picked up by the Australian ship's company, recommissioned and refitted at Chatham Docks and sailed to Australia and commissioned as a Royal Australian Navy ship. I was just acclimatised to shipboard life in Milne Bay and learning where things were and

21:00 everybody is talking about things are building up, there is going to be an operation. The USS Phoenix, Nashville, HMAS Australia, the heavy class county cruiser the Shropshire, we were the four big ships and about eight or ten, ten or twelve destroyers, [HMAS] Arunta, [HMAS] Warramunga, etc, and everybody is saying, "There is an operation on,"

21:30 everybody always knew beforehand, despite, no matter how secret things were, the word always got around [that] something was on the go, there were signs, you could tell. This evening we sail out of Milne Bay and we are line and I had already got the job of being a lookout, I don't know why I got the

job

22:00 although I have a clue, I am only a newcomer, a greenhorn, I'm still classified as ordinary seaman second class, the age of 18 hadn't caught up with us, before 18 you were second class and got paid accordingly. I am forecastleman, we helped get the anchor up and number one lookout team fall in on the bridge, the platform,

22:30 I am told I was gong to be in that team, so up I go, up through the structure. I was placed out there on a limb on the starboard bridge given a pair of binoculars and told what to do in two minutes, that is all, there was no long academic course of what you were supposed to do or not do, or how to handle yourself. "If you see anything, up there on the

23:00 compass platform is the officer of the watch and the gunnery officer, you yell out – Ok!" There I am, it is dusk or getting on towards dusk, I can't remember the exact line but I think the Arunta and Warramunga were out leading, HMAS Australia, Shropshire, Phoenix, Nashville and the American destroyers in line, we are all in line and we are starting to move out slowly around the buoy

23:30 and in the channel and then around again. I am looking at that, fascinated, here is this line of warships and I am in it, we're off on an operation. I can still remember very clearly being so proud to be part of the show, this is

24:00 history in the making, here is all this firepower, the allies are now becoming powerful, we are ready to strike. I had no doubt whatsoever that whatever we would do would be successful, it wouldn't be unsuccessful. It was …

24:30 I was there when Shropshire fired its first shot and I was there in Tokyo when we did the last. I can still remember that line of ships, the first time I had ever seen warships at sea, does that mean anything?

**Of course.**

25:00 **You mentioned a feeling of pride, was there also this feeling of genuine excitement?**

Yes, I suppose a bit of excitement because this is the first time I had ever been to sea, I had never been to sea before apart from rowing boats and a bit of work that we were taught in boats on the Westernport Bay out at Flinders,

25:30 I had never been on salt water before.

**I think I might just go back to your joining up. That was well said. You mentioned that you signed up, was this quite a quick process that you**

26:00 **were going through?**

It took a couple of months, it seemed like an eternity but it probably wasn't long as far as navy or service operations are concerned, they usually take a long time, everything takes a long time. There is an old standard saying, I think more in the army than the navy, if there is an order, hurry up and wait, that is what we did all the time, hurry up and wait.

**Did you have any mates joining up with you?**

Very much no. Ahhh no, no,

26:30 I did not know a soul in that class. When we got to Flinders Naval Depot and off the train, cold and miserable and hungry, wind blowing like it can only blow off across Bass Straight at Western Port and I am sent off into a class with a group of blokes and there I made a good friend who stayed with me till he died, stayed with me, I kept meeting him all the time,

27:00 Peter Mayor and 'Spider' Webb – Max Webb – who lives in Sydney still. Peter Mayor and I were drafted to Shropshire together, we caught the same troop train, we stayed all the way, he stayed with us right until the end of the war. Spider Webb got sent off to the Persian Gulf and I think on the HMAS Gawler, a corvette that he served on, and that was a terrible time,

27:30 terrible conditions. Do you want to stick to Flinders Naval Depot for the moment or jump to the Webb family?

**We will hear a bit about the Webb family and then we will go back to Flinders.**

After the assault on Cape Gloucester, which was MacArthur's first big jump out of New Guinea, that I mentioned how we left Milne Bay, we did a big bombardment

28:00 at Cape Gloucester, retired, stood back for the moment to see how things were going to go at Buna, there is a bay there, and then we came back to Milne Bay and we had some bearing trouble I think it was with one of the shafts and there was nothing on for a few weeks so we were sent back to Sydney unexpectedly. I had never been to Sydney except on the troop train going through,

28:30 I get off on my first afternoon we were there and I have got my little notebook in my wallet and there is

Max Webb's phone number. I walked up and down George Street and around Wynyard Station, "Here is a phone box, I will ring." I ring and this lovely voice says, "Yes?" I said, "Look, you don't know me," and I said, "I probably don't know whether I should be ringing,

29:00 but my name is David Mattiske." She said, "It is David," she said, "Yes, I know all about you, Max had told me all about you, Max is still home, he hasn't left." I said, "That is good." She said, "Now I want you to do something, have you got a pen?" A fountain pen in those days, no biros, and I took the number of Bedgood Shoes, a big shoe manufacturer and retailer at the time. Cliff Webb was the

29:30 New South Wales manager of Bedgood Shoes and she said this is his office number and she said, "Now you ring him and tell him who you are," and she said, "I am going to ring him and tell him to pick you up at Wynyard Station at five o'clock and you are coming home for dinner," and there started a lifelong friendship. The Webbs lived out at 10 Luxor Parade, Roseville I'll never forget it in fact Max has moved back into the old family home, a lovely old home.

30:00 The Webbs looked after me, Bernice Webb looked after me like another mother because she knew when a ship came in seldom would I get home to Victoria, that was my home. There have been occasions when Shropshire sailed in, that didn't happen very often, that Shropshire sailed in

30:30 at dawn. If I was off duty and wasn't required for 24 hours we worked sometimes, I had jobs that took me on 24 hours on, 24 hours off, whatever the case may be, I have got off, I have caught a train and it is just starting to get light already, gone out to Roseville, walked down Roseville road across into the area where Luxor Parade was, knocked on the door and Bernice said, "It is alright, I have been expecting you, your beds there and

31:00 I will get your breakfast ready." What used to happen, if a ship came in somebody who had navy connections and family, mothers and father's who had their own people in the navy, they would see a ship come in, "Oh, so and so is on that, I will give them a ring and tell them," she knew the Shropshire was in. Back to Flinders.

31:30 **Describe what the place looked like when you got there, in your view.**

It was dark, I couldn't see anything.

**The next morning.**

There were four big brick blocks, several stories, that housed all the permanent people and out the back were built a whole lot of huts,

32:00 I think you would call them today big hall-like things, but consisted of tables, benches, shower block, toilets and bars in the ceiling where you slung your hammock. We lined up at some place and said, "Here you are," you were given a hammock

32:30 and I think there were 22 in this class, in this particular area, the petty officer showed us how to put a line or the stanchion or bar and hitch it with a half hitch or a couple of clove hitches or whatnot at that same end and you climb in and there is your hammock, you sleep in that.

**Did you expect to be sleeping in hammocks?**

Yes I did, I think I climbed in it when lights

33:00 out at nine o'clock came and I slept. In those days young people, you could sleep anywhere you liked. I got to the stage in Shropshire I could sleep anywhere, I could sleep standing up.

**How do you do that?**

You just lean on something and go to sleep, you are so tired. But that's another story, a long way ahead.

**What were the first things said to you by some of the**

33:30 **instructors?**

The first thing you do is you go around and you get your kit and your gear, hopefully you get something that fits you and they were reasonably careful and then you go through when you get your gear on, I think that took at least a day, a petty officer was assigned to us, a bloke named Fosdick,

34:00 he was a top fellow, very careful, understanding, quiet-mannered bloke, but he knew what he was about. He had been in [HMAS] Swan as a seaman, HMAS Swan, when they were damaged in the first Darwin raid, he had gone through all that in the Northern operations so he knew what he was about. He helped you very much,

34:30 he fitted you with everything, you got your brushes. A stamp, a metal stamp with 'DH Mattiske' on it and everything was stamped, I have still got a clothes brush up there with 'DH Mattiske' on it. The next day was injection day, you went around, once again, hundreds of people doing it, you

35:00 spent hours waiting for your turn, a great line of blokes and we lined up and you are passing through this area where they jab you with this and jab you with that and jab you with something else in the other

arm. A funny little incident occurred there, the Melbourne Football Club has a famous family of Cordners, there was Doctor Ted was the oldest, Doctor Don, a Brownlow Medal winner captain of Melbourne, later on in the post war years

35:30 Ted Cordner had played in Melbourne's first triple premierships and I had been playing with him at weekends as practice games before I enlisted, he had joined the navy, he was surgeon lieutenant by this time, we were all fearsome of anybody with a bit of gold braid on their arms. I am doing as I am told in the line and getting a jab here

36:00 and the next thing I know, "G'day, David, what have you joined up, have you?" It was Ted Cordner, he was doing some of the injections, so we had a quick little chat and away we went. That was the last time I ever saw him I don't know what he does now. We started classes and you went through various schools, the seamanship school which took a week or fortnight and you did all the things about learning about seamanship, about handling boats and ropes, tying knots and bends and hitches and all that

36:30 sort of stuff, you always had some sort of drill that you had to do, exercises during the day. You went through the torpedo school, the gunnery school, you spent a day or two with a bloke who taught naval history.

**What would they teach you there?**

About the origins of the Royal Navy and naval traditions and things like that, which most of it I knew anyway, because

37:00 I had been a good history student at school.

**What kinds of things would you learn in seaman [school]?**

Handling boats. Every morning at the crack of dawn before breakfast you would be down on the wharf, there would be classes all lined up, hundreds of blokes, you would be allotted a boat, it might be a whaler, it might be a gig [small rowing boat] or a pinnace [large rowing boat] or whatever and they 'd have races

37:30 you would have, if there were five or seven or ten, whatever, to a boat, they would put you in the boat and you would grab your oars and there would be a race out to a buoy and back again. You would have to do this a few times and warm up. Naturally your arms would be tired and aching by the time you finished because there was no letting up but it was good practice because it kept you fit. You learnt how to climb up and down the scaffolding,

38:00 rope scaffolding and all that sort of stuff. How to tie a few bends and hitches and clove hitches and half hitches and you name it. I wasn't terribly interested in that, I didn't think that is what the war was about. When we got to the gunnery school I enjoyed that immensely because I had handled rifles before when I was a kid,

38:30 we learnt how to fire a Lewis gun, a Vickers gun, throw a grenade or two. I mentioned before about being allotted to a lookout team, I had just arrived in Shropshire and there was 900 fellows, a lot of them had already been at sea for years, I was just a boy.

# Tape 4

00:37 **The final point that we left off on.**

I had just arrived in Shropshire but was there a week or two and we were allocated jobs and this lookout job, there could have been perhaps several hundred other people who could have done it,

01:00 People who had been to sea with a lot of experience. On reflection I think I know the answer. One of the mornings in the gunnery school was to be in a room that was completely darkened and there were a couple of petty officers, we sat at desks but from where they were talking to us, about chest high,

01:30 the long bench that they stood behind and on this bench they had a number of models of ships, cruisers and destroyers and battleships. The lights went out, the place was in complete darkness and they had some gear or devices that made flashes and bangs and noises and things like that and while this was going on they

02:00 were shifting the models of the ships around and then they would ask you where had that gone once it was dark again, where was this, which one was that. I think I got all the answers right because obviously my eyesight was pretty good and even still is and I was concentrating.

02:30 I think that was probably why, or probably my papers were marked that I was capable of observing things and picking out things and many, many years later, not so long ago, a friend of mine who was a director of supply down at Flinders commander rank, I used to visit him occasionally and he took me through the historical section that he had constructed with all the old records and

03:00 things, he was building a museum down at Flinders and there were all the gunnery school books and there from 1943, I turned it up and there was my class and my name and everybody got a P for pass but two names had an E on it and mine was one of them, so I think that is why I was chosen as a lookout. After

03:30 that first operation at Cape Gloucester, which was done and successfully completed without too much trouble, I got called to the gunnery office and I was told I was to man the port evershed bearing indicator. A bit difficult to picture the super structure of a cruiser, but what was called the bridge structure,

04:00 Had in the middle of it was a dais another foot higher than the actual bridge deck that jutted out a bit and that was called the compass platform, that was where the captain, the navigator, the gunnery officer, and everybody controlled the ship from, it was only a small area but in each corner there was a big mounting called the evershed bearing indicator. A huge pair of binoculars and a whole lot of dials and bearings that gave you all sorts of information

04:30 and it was also known as the captain's sights because on the port side where I was the captain sat just behind me a couple of feet away, we were the eyes and ears of the captain. You could say I was tickled quite pink to think there I was, just a new chum, but I was being asked to man this thing and I wasn't the only one. There were six of us that manned it at alternate times

05:00 but it was an interesting job.

**A question about, you would have been in the gunnery training, you mentioned the different types of guns that you train on, can you explain the differences between them and the way they react differently when you fire them?**

The most important thing about them all was that they were old fashioned, outdated, absolutely useless, why we were told all about them I don't know.

05:30 By this time naval armament had progressed to Oerlikons, a much bigger, heavier anti-aircraft gun, and even though by the time Shropshire was in operation the Oerlikon was out of date. The Bofors 40 millimetre gun was the main anti-aircraft weapon, other than that we were equipped, the Shropshire was equipped with four inch guns

06:00 and the main armament was eight inch guns, neither of which I saw until I got to Shropshire. It just gave you the feeling of handling a weapon I suppose.

**What did that feel like?**

I don't think I had any special reactions to firing a 303 rifle,

06:30 that was the other weapon that we were taught on the rifle range. I had known how to handle weapons ever since I was, before I was a teenager. In the country every kid and particularly if you lived on farms, and I was on the farms with my friends all the time although I lived in the town, picking up a rifle and knowing how to handle it was second nature.

07:00 Shooting rabbits were the main things that you shot and there were millions of those in those days before the days of, what do they kill them with now? Myxomatosis, that is the one.

**What did you learn about the torpedoes?**

07:30 **Was there a section of the gunnery – ?**

Yes, we were told about torpedoes and we spent a day or two looking at all the machinery of a torpedo. To be quite honest I don't remember much about it. The torpedo was a weapon that had become virtually out of date on a cruiser, although Shropshire had been equipped with

08:00 torpedoes, we still had them, but they were taken away from us in a major refit because they were useless. The torpedo was a weapon that went hand in glove with destroyer tactics, so the blokes on destroyers had to know all about torpedoes, but not on a cruiser.

**How were you finding**

08:30 **the discipline or the lifestyle?**

Training in the important things was important and that is where self discipline is more important than anything else because you have to do automatically and react automatically to a situation,

09:00 and do the right thing without thinking about it. There is another side to discipline which is petty. You are not allowed to walk here at certain hours, here I am taking about Flinders Naval Depot, you are not allowed to smoke at certain times, you had to be dressed in a certain way at certain times of the day, what we called night attire, which was only taking

09:30 off a striped collar, all this sort of stuff. I know those things have their place but depending on who administers them they can be very petty, almost childish, and very aggravating. An officer who went out of his way to do these sorts of things

10:00 really wasn't serving a good purpose. The sort of officer that did that, as a rule, was what we called act of parliament gentlemen. There was an act of parliament under which officers were commissioned,

10:30 I think generally speaking, and this wouldn't apply to all of them by any means, but generally speaking those sort of people who joined up and weren't permanent navy arrived at the stage where they were commissioned were more inclined to be petty with the little rules and regulations than others.

11:00 Once you got to Shropshire and the ship had been on operations for awhile you didn't worry too much all about those little petty things, they went by the board. Although the system required that everybody had to hand over their pound of flesh when it was necessary.

11:30 Sometimes it wasn't necessary. I laugh about it now. After a bombardment at Seeadler Harbour, which was our next big operation after Cape Gloucester, I was a man under what was called men under parliament. At dawn I was on the compass platform, Captain Collins beside me,

12:00 I had come up from our dawn action stations to man the lookout and all I had was a pair of overalls on and when you are out in the hot because it was hot all the time anyway you just rolled your overalls down and I had it tied around my waist, so I was standing there, bare from the waist up, and the executive officer, who was in those days known as a commander,

12:30 Commander Harries, had typed so and so went to breakfast this watch, that watch hands to battle dress because we had been cruising off the Admiralty Islands to the north, in Japanese territory, and we may be called in to do a bombardment under some circumstances, hands to battle dress. I couldn't leave my place to go and get battle dress and the bloke who was to relieve me was late,

13:00 he was not to come up for half an hour. Harries comes up on the bridge to check things out when I was relieved and stepped off, the corporal of the gangway, he said, "David," he said, we had already met each other, I knew [who] he was, he said, "You are at commander's table at nine o'clock." I said, "What for?" He said, "You are out of the dress of the day." I said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I am just here doing my job." He said, "You are not in your proper battle dress,

13:30 Harries is up here and he saw you." I said, "Captain Collins is there and so is the officer of the watch and they haven't worried me." He said, "You are commander's table at nine o'clock." I front up and I explain everything and Harries said, "That is a story alright, but I understand, but you were still not in the dress of the day," he said. "Five days number eleven," that was the general order of if they didn't like what you were doing,

14:00 you were charged with being, contrary to naval regulations in discipline number eleven. That afternoon we are in close to Manus and Seeadler Harbour and the Japanese naval guns had been tormenting the troops, trying to land, we had to knock them out, so Shropshire goes first and Phoenix and Nashville behind us. I am in the shell room pumping

14:30 shells around while we are doing the bombardment and we fired about eight or ten broadsides and did a good job apparently, "Cease fire," I said, "Four o'clock," I said, "No men under punishment today, it is the start of the first dog watch but we are at action stations." Little did I know such and such a watch close up,

15:00 men under punishment fall into port waste, open space down aft. We're given rifles and you've got to do this punching rifles in one hand hard up and down, holding on sling to the other arm and backwards and forwards and the petty officer bloke was making us work like niggers because we are men under punishment and while we are doing this men under punishment drill, a few yards or a couple of cables behind us is the Phoenix, still carrying on

15:30 with the bombardment, thump, bang, bang, bang. Here we are watching this war going on while we are doing men under punishment. Back to Flinders.

**A question about that discipline, you mentioned that in some cases it was extremely important to be taught that discipline, can you explain to me why?**

16:00 **What the importance of discipline is when it is relevant?**

Let's jump onto a scene a couple of years later, we are in Lingayen Gulf, MacArthur's greatest assault, moves on and the recapture of Manila, January 1945. We had been sent from the Royal Navy a most remarkable man who I could talk about for hours by the name of Godfrey Nichols.

16:30 We all thought, "We are going to be in trouble, here is a Royal Naval captain coming out, he has never been to the Pacific before," the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] was short of captains, we lost a lot of people and we were still a young navy, and Nichols arrives and he is a medium-sized, almost small, quiet-mannered man, we were expecting the

17:00 book to be thrown at us like Royal Naval captains do, because Royal Naval captains are second cousins to God. This bloke turned out to be the most remarkable man, he took us right through the Philippines campaign which we survived without a scratch. After Leyte, the Battle of Surigao Straits, and all the kamikaze activity

17:30 in that area, a couple of months later we are heading for Lingayen Gulf where we knew the kamikazes were in full force, they had perfected their tactics and there was hundreds of them and we were to go into Lingayen Gulf three days before the main force arrived and soften the thing up. Nichols asked us in a speech

18:00 just one thing, he said, “We expect the whole of the weight of the Japanese air force to be thrown at us, but they will be coming straight at us, if you are in the guns crew that they are coming at, don’t falter, that might be the end but that last

18:30 shot you fire might save the ship.” It went on for three days before the main force arrived. We weren’t hit, everything around us was hit, we were near-missed several times, not one man ever left his gun, that’s discipline. I might add another thing about Nichols, this was very moving,

19:00 he told us lookouts and the messengers and the signalmen on the compass platform and even the officers on watch and others, he said, “When I give the order, you race for cover, I will take over.” He would stand by himself on the bridge. It was the bridge that the Japs would aim for because that was your control point. It only happened once, fortunately, but that was the sort of man he was. But that’s another story too.

19:30 **Having such an amazing man give you a bolster on the guns, is it easier in those circumstances to maintain discipline or is it something that is so built into you?**

A combination of both. It was built into us, as you say,

20:00 that is a good term. I suppose you could say that there are certain people who can say that to you and you will do it.

**What kind of a person is that?**

A bloke like Captain Godfrey Nichols.

**What was it about him that inspired people to follow him?**

20:30 I was on the compass platform doing these watches backwards and forwards and I have seen him there plus our other officers for hundreds of hours, I never once heard him raise his voice, he never had to shout an order or yell at people or complain about this or that, he went quietly in his own way

21:00 but he had an air of authority about him. I can’t explain it, there are people like that, they can walk in here and say things to you and tell you things and you know straight away that they know what they are about. You have come across that before, haven’t you, in real life and Nichols was like that. He was a very humble man despite his

21:30 elevation to captaincy of the Royal Navy and when some of our commodores and admirals were wounded and had to go away he was the task force commander, the senior commander of the whole task force, but he did things in a small way which touched people’s hearts. A friend of mine who comes to our functions here on the Gold Coast,

22:00 Jock, was a bandsman at the time and he was in the line at lunch time to go into the cafeteria. Shropshire was equipped with a cafeteria mess deck, the first one of its kind in the Royal Australian Navy, instead of what they called messing it was one big area that they

22:30 put aside, you stepped through a steel bulkhead and there was on the side the bain marie and all that sort of thing and then long tables and benches and things so you get your tray and pick your stuff up and down you went and there was always a queue, the passageway was only about that wide with naval gear and all that stuff around and you stepped across the door into the next compartment.

23:00 Jock said he was standing there this day and he realised someone had come behind him and he looked around and there was Nichols, he was by himself, he didn’t have an aide or his flag lieutenant or the corporal of the gangway, and Jock said, “I was embarrassed,” he said, “I didn’t know what to do.” He said, “I said, ‘Sorry sir, are you wanting to come through?’ and he said, ‘It is alright, bandsman, I think I will join you for lunch’.”

23:30 All his officers, stewards, were back aft and he could be waited on hand and foot and they chatted away for awhile and then he stepped out with his tray and had a bit of lunch then. Jock said, “Would you like to go first?” He said, “No, I will be in the line, that will do.” A simple little story but that is the sort of bloke he was. Everybody in

24:00 Shropshire has some little incident that they can tell you about Godfrey Nichols. After my book was published somehow or other Beth Nichols, the widow of Godfrey, who died some years ago heard about it. I got a letter and then

24:30 because I talked about him in the book she wanted to read the book so I sent a couple of copies, I had a call from Nichols’ granddaughters husband, Rob Rowe from London, and after numerous phone calls and emails and that sort of thing I said, “We celebrate the Philippines Campaign and your grandfather’s great service with us every year here on the Gold Coast,

25:00 do you ever go for a holiday overseas?" They came, his eldest daughter and her eldest daughter and her husband and two other cousins from Sydney who are living here, they all came up for our big show last year. The interesting thing about this is that Sue Twallin is her name, Sue

25:30 wrote to me and has since said to me, we correspond and talk and we ring each other up all the time now, she lives in a place called Otford just out of London, the Tunbridge Wells area, she said, "You know, our home was very much a naval family and my father was always the naval captain, but we never knew what he did in Australia or much about

26:00 his career." She said, "Since reading your book and talking to you," she said, "I have learnt more about my father than I ever knew as a girl, as a young woman." They had no idea what he did out here. Perhaps while we are talking about Godfrey Nichols,

26:30 the thing that would have motivated him more than anything else to service and service for his fellow man and his relationships with his ship's company, he was a devout Christian.

**Would he ever bring this up on the ship?**

In those days in the navy, every Sunday morning,

27:00 not at sea but in port, in a harbour like Milne Bay or Seeadler Harbour at Manus, where we were refitting, cleaning up, getting ready for the next show, was Sunday morning divisions, when the four divisions of forecastlemen, I was a forecastleman, they were still named after the old names of the sailing ships, main top, fore top and quarter deck. We all lined up in our places

27:30 of the divisions, usually the captain himself would come along and march up and down inspecting everybody to see we were all okay and dressed in the proper dress of the day, which in those days was only shorts and sandals anyway and then hands to the quarter deck for service. Shropshire had a permanent chaplain so we had a naval divine service after which the communion [was] celebrated in

28:00 the ward room for those who wanted to go. In those days the naval, the navy was very much linked to its Christian background.

28:30 That had been a thread through the Royal Navy for hundreds of years. [Sir Francis] Drake was a very devout Christian. Have you ever read Nelson's prayer to the fleet before the Battle of Trafalgar? All these things played a very important part in the life of the navy even though we might have been scallywags and roustabouts most of the time,

29:00 the background was there all the time. I can't remember the words Nichols said, a little prayer before we went into the Lingayen Gulf. Because At that stage we were expecting heavy casualties and how we got missed is another story, amazing.

**How did your faith help you?**

29:30 The essence of Christianity is salvation through God's grace throughout our life and after death and therefore we should never be afraid. That doesn't mean that we got concerned or worried or a bit upset sometimes, thinking crikey

30:00 "What is going to happen to us now?" but ultimately when you thought about it that was the answer.

**Was there any particular part of the Bible or verse or something that you would come back to or think about in times?**

No, not really. Before the Battle of Surigao Strait, that will come up in detail later on probably,

30:30 there was a Japanese force of battleships and cruisers which we knew we had to face and had to stop. There had been this build up all through the previous day and the first watches, through the night coming. I did my trick up on the compass platform on the bearing indicator, my action station I was actually in A turret

31:00 when the guns were firing, that is where I was. The order was given, "It is action stations now, everybody get ready." It was still about half an hour or three quarters of an hour to go and I went down onto the shell handling room, there was a vacant spot on the deck and I thought, "I will just lie down here for awhile,

31:30 I won't be needed, machinery running and noise and I will just lay there for awhile," and I thought, "What I heard up there, I know what is coming." All my mates around me in the gun turret and the shelter, they would not have known at this stage, we all knew there was Japanese coming but they wouldn't have known much detail and I thought to myself, "Well, this could be it. We have gone through

32:00 so many operations already and have come through without harm, this might be it. What do I do? What do I think?" I just laid there with my eyes closed for awhile and I thought, "What does it matter, for a start, if where we are in the lower quarters the turret gets hit, bang,

32:30 nobody is going to know anything about it. The magazines and shells would blow up, we wouldn't even know." Secondly, I prayed the Lord's Prayer because if you look at if carefully and think about it,

everything is there in that one passage, that is all you need.

33:00 **Did this, after about half an hour or so, how would you describe the change in your state of mind?**

Probably didn't think about it for too long,

33:30 there was activity going on and it had increased and it was a case of getting into your position. At that stage I was responsible for working a set of grabs on wires that ran backwards and forwards across a quick action grab that fastened over the shell

34:00 and an eight inch shell is a pretty heavy lump of steel. Another bloke was my offsider, he had to clamp the arms down and secure the grabs so that I could operate with the lever and lift the shell over and swing it into the tray which carried it on up further into the gun turret. All the machinery is running it's noisy,

34:30 stinking hot, all your air is cut off because you have to preserve the water tight integrity of the ship so you can't have any open ducts and things going from [the] place to place, it all has to be closed off, all the doors are closed and clamped down. The hydraulic oil lines that work a lot of the machinery always drip oil

35:00 and smells like hot hydraulic oil all the time. You have got it on your body, down below, contrary to rules, we never wore our gear, our dress for action stations, you only had that if you went upstairs. The next thing we can hear, we heard,

35:30 "Thump!" "Thump!" and the petty officer bloke in charge of us was screaming like mad, "The Yanks have opened fire, why aren't we opening fire?" He had been a survivor of [HMAS] Canberra so he was a bit on the bloodthirsty side, he wanted to hit back wherever the Japs were. He said, "The Yanks are going to get all the glory!"

36:00 or whatever, I can't remember the exact words. The next thing, "Bang!" when eight inch guns on a cruiser fire together the whole thing shudders, it goes bank and bang and thump and we are into it. You haven't got time to think about anything. In the next fifteen minutes or

36:30 so Shropshire fired just on 30 broadsides, that means that the shells are heading for a Japanese battleship, the Yamashiro over there our target, would be two or three flights of shells in the air at once with the whole of these things exploding, bang, on the Jap. Stan Nicholls, not Captain Nichols,

37:00 was another lookout, he wrote the definitive history of HMAS Shropshire, he makes the claim which his research would be pretty right, there is no occasion in naval history where an eight inch gun cruiser fired shells so rapidly. Our broadsides

37:30 were going in eleven seconds. To understand that it is a very cumbersome set of machinery, an eight inch gun, they are huge pieces of material, you have got the rammers, have to ram a shell in and the next lot takes over with the cordite and your cordite bags go, your breach is closed and secured and then it goes, you will hear the fire gong if you are out in the open, it is a tinkle sound, ding, ding,

38:00 and that means you are ready to fire, bang.

**Who rings the gong?**

You have got me, I am pretty sure it comes form the direct delayer, the system from up top who controls the whole lot, he pulls a pistol lever that fires the lot, he has all the range finders that are controlling all guns together.

38:30 From one broadside being fired until the next fire gong was eleven seconds, it was unbelievable. The result by the way was that the Yamashiro, which was the flagship at 35,000 ton battleship, was being fired on by a lot of people but it was mainly Shropshire fire that was hitting her

39:00 and everything was ablaze in the Japanese quarters segment and the American battleship [USS] Admiral who were supposed to be in charge of the lot, they were miles away up further on a defensive line, called out, "Cease fire," it was supposed to be cease fire and we were going so fast we still fired one or two broadsides

39:30 extra and ours was the last broadside to hit the Yamashiro, she was tilting and on fire and she turned over and sank. We say perhaps a little bit with tongue in cheek that it was Shropshire that sunk the Yamashiro, we were the last time, it was our shot that hit her last. In actual fact she had been hit by everything for quite awhile.

# Tape 5

00:37 **After training, when did you hear the news that you were gong to be posted overseas?**

There was an interval we were sent off to HMAS Lonsdale which is the Port Melbourne depot, I did a brief period

01:00 about a week down at Queenscliff where there was a mine train being loaded and off Queenscliff in the bay is Swan Island, that was the navy mine place and we had to guard the train, the mines were brought on trolleys and loaded in the trucks of the train, the siding ran along the foreshore so we had to guard the train overnight

01:30 from knock-off time when the workers went home until when they came back the next morning. Do you want to hear a funny story? It is cold and bleak and miserable as it can only be down in that southern part of the world with the wind blowing off the southern ocean, we are bored stiff marching up and down with a .303 rifle on our backs, there was about four of us,

02:00 between the railway lines and the foreshore was a wide stretch of tussock grass and the usual stuff you see on the foreshore before you got to the little bit of a sand beach and then the water. And I could hear a lot of noise about ten or eleven o'clock at night and I said to my friend who was with me, we were patrolling up and down, "The train, there is something down there,

02:30 we had better have a look." We moved down, started to gingerly feel our way through the tussocks and whatever and up jumps a half a dozen cows that were grazing there. Obviously some farmer had let them loose and they were feeding there. The next night we are doing the same thing and I could hear some noises again and I said to my friend,

03:00 "I reckon its those cows again but I am sick and tired of this, we may as well liven the place up," so I went down on one knee I said, "I am going to shoot one of these bastards just for fun," put the bullet in the breach and uncocked the rifle and then I thought, I will yell out, "Who goes there?" and a voice yells out from amongst the tussocks, "Don't shoot mate, it is me."

03:30 There is a bloke down there who was at army barracks at Queenscliff and there is a bloke from the army barracks and an AWAS, an AWAS is an Australian Women's Army Service. I said, "Well get out of there," and he said, "Sorry," but I had frightened the life out of them. Part of the night was

04:00 spent, we always used to have a few bottles of beer from the pub and we had a drum with a lot of timber in it, it was burning to keep us warm when we weren't marching up and down the train so we all had a few beers and had a good laugh about the story. Then I was sent down to Port War signal station at Portsea where the signallers and signalmen and the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] challenged every ship coming through Port Phillip Heads

04:30 and I spent a week or so down there. The old officer in charge was a reserve officer, very kind old bloke and apart from doing a few jobs around the place cleaning up, he said, "The WRANS here live under the army rules at the Queenscliff, at the Point Nepean Barracks," he said, "They live a hell of a life, I want you to take them up to the town to the pictures or any dances or

05:00 anything that was going on in the evenings because that gives them a bit of a break." That was probably one of the most delightful evenings in our lives in the navy. I was called up to the bridge one night where the signal station and I was told that they have just had a signal a message form Port Lonsdale or from HMAS Lonsdale, Port Melbourne, that I have been drafted to Shropshire

05:30 and everybody said, "You lucky bloke!" The Shropshire had just arrived from England or not long since arrived from England and she was considered to be one of the frontline ships in the campaign to drive the Japanese back. Five of us caught the train which I got back to Melbourne next morning

06:00 on the bus and there were five of us, Peter Mayor and myself, a leading stoker by the name of Doll, who is still alive in Melbourne, and another bloke, I can't remember his name he was a bandsman. We were taken to Spencer Street Station to catch the troop train to Sydney. When we got to Sydney after fourteen or fifteen hours' travel the

06:30 RTO, Rail Transport Officer [said], "We don't know anything about you, we don't know about the Shropshire, we don't know why you are here, you had better get on the train and we will keep sending you north." We got to Newcastle a couple of hours later, "We don't know anything about you, we don't know anything about the Shropshire," [so we] jumped back on the train and, "We will send you further north," so we get to Brisbane and the same thing happened at Brisbane. We stayed in Brisbane over the weekend, locked away,

07:00 we weren't allowed any leave passes, the locals had gone home, nobody there, the place was deserted. All I could do was look from that old place along the river across at the gardens and look at all the nice people going past. Monday morning, another train to Townsville, Townsville doesn't know anything about us either so we, they said, "Just make yourselves at home, hang around,"

07:30 and we had a look at Townsville for a few days and then about four o'clock one morning there would be in a room half this size about fifteen blokes sleeping on tables on the floor anywhere, a chap comes in and he is tumbling over everybody, curses and loud shouts, "Hey, the blokes for Shropshire, get your bag and your hammock, you are going out to the airport

08:00 at Townsville." It is still an air force base, we go out there and it is still half light and the truck takes us

out to the end of a runway and we are told to get on a DC3 or a Dakota and there is about 20 or 30 Yanks, “Where are we going?” “We are going to Milne Bay.”

08:30 Milne Bay was a pretty horrific place, it was famous for the battle there, sometime before it was a malarial, it was a hotbed of malaria, there wasn’t anybody there that didn’t have malaria, the mosquitoes bite them all. We flew off through a thunderstorm, shorts, shirt and sandals, that is all we had.

09:00 The aircraft bouncing around for a couple of hours all over the place, thunderstorm, lightning, pouring rain, we didn’t know where we were going or what we were doing. The skies cleared and we landed at Milne Bay, We get to the depot at Milne Bay. After wondering how to get there and there is a jeep and a Yank says, “Where are you going?” and we said, “There is an Australian navy depot down further, we believe we have got to get there,” he said,

09:30 “Hop in the back.” We hop in the back of the jeep, halfway there he said, “This is where I stop, I have got a job to do here,” he said, “what will we do” “If you can drive a jeep just keep going.” We took the jeep and off we went and we got there.

**What were you meant to do with the jeep after you finished with it?**

There were so many jeeps about, you just drove one and left it and somebody else would pick it up and drove it again. The commander comes out

10:00 and has an apoplectic fit, he said, “I have got, the place is full of malaria,” he said, “Where is your long pants, your long sleeve shirt?” he said. “We don’t have ‘em.” “Where is your gear?” “Back in Townsville.” He couldn’t believe it, we said, “Where is Shropshire, we are supposed to join Shropshire,” he said, “I don’t know where Shropshire is. It’s not here.” He said, “While you are here you have got to do something useful,” so he had us digging trenches, foundations

10:30 for more huts and things like that.

**How did this kind of mix up, being assigned to the Shropshire, happen?**

I don’t know to this day but the way things were operating so fast, people moving backwards and forwards all over the place, I presume that half the time the left hand didn’t know what the right hand was doing. He has no accommodation for us,

11:00 but he finds out the writer, the clerk in the office, finds out there is an old planter’s hut up in the hills somewhere that’s vacant, so a jeep takes us up there and we sleep the night. No mosquito nets, nothing. After dark we could hear some noises down in the valley further, where the bay was, and there is guns firing and a few flashes and we thought, “This must be the start of the war, we are into it at last.”

11:30 A couple of days later the writer comes out where we are working and said, “Shropshire has just arrived in the bay.” We get our gear and off we go down to, there was a jetty there called Gili Gili, a famous place in army history where the battles were fought with the Japs and sure enough, there is a boat there from Shropshire and we all get aboard and

12:00 it takes us out to Shropshire. Once again, it is one of those memories you never forget, this great big three funnelled cruiser, and we get on to the Mediterranean ladder on the quarter deck, get our gear and start scrambling up and there we were aboard this famous ship. A junior officer, a sub-lieutenant, he

12:30 said, “I have got the papers, you are drafted here, I will take you round and show you where your living quarters are,” I was taken down to the forecastle. “You will be in A turret and you have got to do this and that, here is a few of the fellows, Scrub Knuckey, James Grace, Hughie Mitchell,” I still remember them all. Alec Perry, Pop Ramsay. “G’day.” He is eyeing off the officer, “Who is this bloke come aboard now?” Most of them were

13:00 from HMAS Canberra when she was sunk, they were survivors of Canberra so they knew a lot of stuff and they had been over to England to pick her up. We settled down, we were alright. I was very wary because I thought to myself, “Do I make a fool of myself by doing something silly amongst all these old blokes?” When I say old, I was 18, they were 21, 22, 23 some of them

13:30 looked real old, I was a bit apprehensive for awhile until we got on together, they liked me and I liked them, formed some friendships that have lasted all our lives. We settled down to the routine. A sailor’s life when he is not at sea on operations consists of one endless day after day of

14:00 chipping hammers, scraping paint, cleaning off rust and then painting over it again, that is what you do. We did scrubbing down decks in the morning and all that sort of stuff. We didn’t have to work more than until lunchtime, dinner time in the navy, midday dinner, and afterwards was what was called make and mend,

14:30 where you could do sewing, ironing, washing your clothes, all that sort of stuff. In the tropics with a cruiser that was built for the North Sea and Mediterranean climate the oppressive conditions with the humidity and the heat, it was just too much, they couldn’t ask the fellows to work an eight hour or ten

hour day except that if you were a watch keeper, you had to do your watches.

15:00 As I mentioned before, I was allotted to a lookout team and the lookout team's job in harbour was to provide the upper deck sentries at night. You were armed with a Manchester submachine gun type thing, a machine pistol, and there were two of you up forward on the forecastle and two of you back aft on the quarter deck and your job was supposedly patrol up and down

15:30 because there had been cases of Japanese swimming out to ships in harbours and throwing hand grenades through portholes and things like that. I must confess, when we got used to it and got a bit blasé, we would sit up on the capstan or bollards up forward and spend most of the evening smoking or chatting about whatever. This routine went on

16:00 for awhile while I was settling down and getting used to it when we knew that something was happening and off we went to Cape Gloucester.

**That feeling you had when you first come down and see the ship there?**

I suppose one of awe, Shropshire was a big ship.

16:30 County class cruisers, in Shropshire's case, 633 feet from bow to stern. Her original displacement weight was just under 10,000 tons and she finished up with all the extra gear, armament and radar, up to nearly 13,000, I think.

17:00 A ship that size, 633 feet, 68 foot beam, and when you start getting around it and exploring it, it is just one little compartment and passageways and ladders everywhere. You get lost, it takes you awhile to get acclimatised. I suppose The thing to do

17:30 and this is what I would have done was just to do as you were told. There would always be somebody in charge that says, "Go and do this, do that," at so and so time we mustered to do this and do that and then you did it, stayed out of trouble by and large and just fitted in.

**Was there any kind of welcoming ceremony or even slight initiation?**

No. Everybody was too busy for that.

18:00 The sub-lieutenant showed me A turret and then took me up on deck and showed me how an Oerlikon works, the anti aircraft Oerlikon gun worked, at that stage I was nothing, I was a non-entity, it wasn't until I got later got jobs in the lookout team which was in the next few days or so that I started to explore around and find out what saw the things I would be

18:30 doing.

**Was it intimidating at all to be with these experienced sailors?**

No, generally speaking they were very kind and understanding. Some very interesting characters amongst them as you can imagine. One bloke was an insurance agent from Perth,

19:00 another started in the police force, Bluey [Albert] Child was our leading seaman, very kind bloke, quietly spoken, he was equivalent to about a sergeant. They were the blokes who actually ran the thing and if you had a good leading seaman or kellick in the navy,

19:30 if you were fortunate in having a good one, everybody got on well together and he was terrific. I had Bluey up here on the Gold Coast after many years [of] not seeing him, I found out where he was, rang him up in Sydney and said, "You have got to come up to our national reunion, we are running it here, I am president of the association," and Bluey came up and very moving,

20:00 very moving experience. He was obviously not a well man and he was some years older than I am but we had a wonderful time together and shortly afterwards I got a ring form Alec Perry, one of his close mates as well as mine, he said, "Bluey has gone. Passed away." I had the chance of seeing him for a few days and spending some time with him not long before he passed on.

20:30 **What was some of the best pieces of advice you received in those early weeks from those experienced men?**

I think the best piece of advice I had from at any time was at the end of our class time at Flinders, our petty officer, a bloke named Fosdick, quietly spoken but had everything

21:00 at his fingertips. When our class was officially over and we had all been told that we are passed out and we would be ready for draft, he used to just take us for walks around the place because one went here and one went there and he sat us all down on the grass one sunny morning and he said, "Now look, I have told you as much as I can tell you

21:30 from the point of view of being in a naval depot on land, you are all going to go all over the place, but when you get out onto a ship, if you are on operations you can virtually forget most of the things I have told you," he said, "That is where the learning process really starts, when you get into the practical side of it." I never forgot that and he was right. I suppose I learnt most

22:00 by just watching and being alert and watching the other fellows and listening. Not on many occasions did anybody come along and say, “Do this or do that or don’t do that,” but by observing all around you, you soon got into the way of things.

**How does a professional sailor conduct himself, what kind of things do you notice as a fresh sailor?**

22:30 You are aware that most of them knew what they were doing I think, that is the key to it. You just watched and copied, sometimes you would ask what to do

23:00 and in a ship that size with so many men there were always enough people, if there was a gang of you, there was always the opportunity to watch what somebody else was doing first. A lot of the jobs were relatively simple as long as you did them the right way. Hoisting in the anchor,

23:30 the cable holders would be turn and the forecastleman would be out there with hoses and scrubbers. In retrospect you wouldn't say it was a difficult job but it was a job you had to do properly. The officer in charge would be watching the cable coming in and we would be scrubbing, some of us would have a hose off over the side to get all the mud off before it came up and dirtied your deck,

24:00 relatively simple, I suppose, but if you all worked as a team it went off smoothly.

**How many men were there?**

Shropshire finished up with a thousand men. We were everywhere on a ship designed for 600 plus. I remember Naomi [interviewer] asking me a long time ago

24:30 about a hammock, once I left Flinders Naval Depot I never slept in a hammock, never once slept in a hammock. First of all it would have been too hot in Shropshire, there was the odd bloke who slung a hammock but I never did, I chucked the hammock in the bin

25:00 And that is where it was when I picked it up and I left years later. The fellows slept in little spots and posies all over the place. I used to have a bit of canvas mat that I slept on, there were benches at the tables in the mess deck, they were padded, about that wide, a foot wide,

25:30 about twelve or fourteen inches wide, but the old hands, had that that was something soft to sleep on, I slept on the steel deck a lot of the time. When you are an upper deck sentry in harbour the blokes who were doing the watchkeeping had to sleep in a certain place because a bloke came around with a torch

26:00 a the start of each watch and he would shake you by the shoulder, “Okay, time to go,” so the two or four of us or how many were required, ten till twelve, we would do the middle watch, start at twelve, off we would go. We would be all sleeping there in a pile with one brushing the other or somebody’s head on someone’s feet.

26:30 **were you able to get to know everyone on a ship that big?**

I was there nearly 3 years, 2½ years on Shropshire, for another interesting reason. I can go over the list of names which we’ve got who served while Shropshire was on active service, I have a book with the name of every person who went to war in her. I can go over them and find out a

27:00 surprising number of names of people I know and still remember. You wouldn’t know them all intimately but you would know he is a cook, that is Charlie or whatever his name is, he is a stoker, his mess deck is below yours, you see him going up and down, the ladder, that is Ron, or whoever. When I go through the list now I can tick off dozens and dozens of names that I would still remember quite well.

27:30 **Who do you befriend on a big ship, who do you get to know well?**

Primarily the forecastlemen, the divisions that I mentioned before, stayed fairly close together. We had a mess deck probably no bigger than this garage, not as big as this garage with about four tables coming out from the side fixed to the side of the ship there and benches and there was a number of lockers there for people to stow their gear, there would have been 60 people that used that area, not there all at once, because you are coming and going on watches or shifts all the time. Most men

28:00 had to have their gear stowed in what was called a kit locker flat which was down below in a specified area and they were just rows of lockers stacked one on top of the other, side by side. They were hell holes because there was no ventilation and it was just a place to store things. Okay if the ship was in the North Sea or the North Atlantic but not on the equator.

28:30 That is where I had to put my gear first because the old hands had the good lockers up on top but I had befriended a much older bloke by the name of Doug Grey, Dolly Grey, and he was over on the other side on the port ship which was the foretop division. Not my division at all but I talked to this bloke and he took a fancy to me and he

29:00 Said to me one day, he said, “Look, would you like to put your important gear, your towels, your shaving gear, your immediate change of clothes and things, in my locker? The stuff that I don’t use I will put down in the kit locker flat so we can share this locker so you don’t have to go up and down into the hell

hole below all the time." I did that then for a long, long time, Dolly was a

29:30 good friend.

**Were there lots of favours like this on board? Is this a common type of example of forming a team on ship?**

Very much so because if

30:00 you didn't work in a team you didn't work at all. When you think of 60 or so men manning the turret which goes from the gun house up top down below to the system where all the ammunition and the cordite is passed through stages to the guns to make the guns fire. If that wasn't working smoothly, with every bloke along the line doing his job, the whole thing didn't work.

30:30 **Was there any cases of anybody who wouldn't work well as a team that you can remember?**

There was only one bloke in all that time, he was a newcomer, I was already an old hand and he was sent into A Turret as his action station.

31:00 He was a weirdo, how they ever passed him to go to a fighting ship on operations I don't know, he was a PT [physical training] fanatic and sometimes in the middle of the night if I was out on watch on the deck this bloke, I won't mention his name would be running up and down doing his daily dozens, showing off his biceps and his muscles and doing

31:30 his dozens. He didn't like it, being in the A Turret, he complained and whinged all the time, but he only did that for a week or so and then he went to the gunnery officer, no, he went to the sick bay and complained to one of the medical staff that he suffered from claustrophobia and they shifted him, thank goodness.

32:00 **How was he a weirdo?**

Today he would be branded as a psycho. We didn't know the meaning of the word, we didn't use it then, he is probably alright, I don't know what happened to him after the war.

**Was it a good ship in terms of crew?**

One of our

32:30 highly respected young officers whose name is Mackenzie Gregory – Mac – and I have become friendly with him in the post-war years, he was an officer and I was a seaman then, he was often officer of the watch when I was on watch on the compass platform, we always nodded and we reported things to each other,

33:00 he was up here visiting us some years ago and we were talking about this he had a permanent naval career, he went through the naval college, stayed on after the war. During the 50s and 60s he was the governor general's aide de camp and a very capable bloke. Mac was saying,

33:30 "In all the ships and installations I have been in the navy, I have never ever found again anything that had the camaraderie and the efficiency and leadership of Shropshire." He said, "It was an efficient, happy team and there was a spirit about us, we did, we had an aura about us without any shadow of a doubt."

34:00 Why it was, there are various theories, but Mac says there was leadership not only from the very top but right down to the bottom. Through the chief petty officers, petty officers to the leading seaman and the old AB [able seaman] hands, they all sort of knew their job and they were prepared to take the initiative and do things as required.

34:30 A lot of it has got to do of the training of Captain, later Vice Admiral Sir John Collins, after whom the Collins class submarines are named, he was our first captain, a brilliant gunnery officer, a disciplinarian, very much different to the more gentle type of bloke as Godfrey Nichols. I got on well with him, when I say I got on well with him

35:00 I'm am an able seaman, he is a captain, but he sits there beside us when we are on the compass platform expecting us to report to him what we see or to the officer of the watch and I found that he was always correct, polite, he was a sort of captain who would come up and say good morning, he didn't have to, some of them didn't,

35:30 he did something, we will jump a couple of steps further. I was already what I thought, a fully accomplished lookout and operator of the EBI [evershed bearings indicator], and we had done an operation further up, I think it was towards Aitape or Dutch New Guinea, we were sailing back in waters that were now relatively secure and safe,

36:00 on the right hand side there is the Finisterre Ranges of New Guinea, in the not too distant future on the starboard side and we are coming down to an area known as Vitiaz Straits, with New Britain on the other side, it was an area where you watch things closely because the water is narrow. Through these binoculars you can see beyond the horizon if anything is sticking up over there, that is how good they were.

36:30 I see something and I yell out, port evershed officer of the watch, the officer of the watch happened to be one of the least popular officers, a rather rude phlegmatic type of bloke who was known as Chuckles because nobody ever saw him smile or laugh, he picked up the binoculars from around his neck which were that size,

37:00 that wouldn't show him very good, [and he said] "Very good, lookout, carry on," and the ship turned port and this object, whatever it was, was on the starboard side. I didn't see it for 20 minutes as we zigzagged when we came back onto that earlier course, I could see it closer, it could have been a palm tree floating in the water it was still miles and miles away it could have been a

37:30 wreckage of a boat with a mast or something and I thought, "You miserable old coot, I will fix you." I yelled out, "Port evershed officer of the watch, bearing so and so!" And I reported it exactly as we were told we had to report it, object unidentified.

# Tape 6

00:39 This object was now closer, not certain of its identity but it looked pretty harmless, but Chuckles had been talking to a junior officer about social things on his last leave, he wasn't

01:00 paying much attention much to my surprise, so I thought if he ignored my last call this one was going to be a very positive one, so I yelled out in quite a loud voice, bearing in mind he is only standing a few feet away at the binnacle, "Previously reported object bearing so and so, distance approximately so and so, still unidentified."

01:30 This bloke turns around and he looks at me and he says, "It's alright, lookout, I heard you the first time." Captain Collins had been doing his morning constitutional on the rim of the bridge on the port side and had heard everything that had been said over the last 20 minutes or so and he bounded up onto the compass platform only a couple of steps and he dressed this bloke down in front of everybody something like with words to the

02:00 effect [that] when a seaman reports to you in the correct seaman like manner he shall be replied in the correct seaman like manner. It is not always the most diplomatic thing to do, to dress another officer down in front of an ordinary member of the ship's company but I would imagine Collins was exercising his right to make sure

02:30 everybody was on the ball all the time regardless, they had to do their job efficiently or not at all. That was that but I can tell you what, I kept well clear of that bloke for the rest of my naval career because he looked daggers at me as much as to say, "You bastard, you got me into trouble."

**What was the object?**

It was a log of a palm tree with some fronds sticking up,

03:00 when we got close enough to identify it.

**Did you ever have any problems, like some sailors they were seasick?**

Never was sick, I have never been seasick. We did have

03:30 one blokes though, forecastlemen with our team, we would be hosing down with the anchor, the chain, as it is coming up through the horse pipe, and once you got enough weight off the bottom of the seabed and the engines are turning slowly you would see the water starting to drift past you there is motion there, you were starting to move, poor old Jenkins would run for the

04:00 heads, he would be seasick. I don't think he had been seasick in a gale or a storm but that first movement of the water upset him a bit. He did that once or twice but I was never seasick.

**In your first few months on the Shropshire, we spoke about you dreamed about being in the navy or at least about going to sea when you were quite young,**

04:30 **in your first few months did it live up to its expectations, the life at sea?**

At sea, yes, when I say sea I mean, when we were on operations or cruising. It was a pretty tedious, boring existence if we got stuck in a harbour for sometimes two weeks.

05:00 This introduces a very important part of the subject which we mentioned before. After the Solomons and Bougainville campaign the Australian army was bogged down in New Guinea or was left there but MacArthur was now strong enough and the 7th Fleet [United States Navy] had built up to five cruisers and numerous number of destroyers and

05:30 the time was ripe to start the island hopping campaign across the Pacific. We went from Milne Bay,

Cape Gloucester, Admiralty Islands, Manus, but Seeadler Harbour is a magnificently enclosed stretch of water about eight or nine miles long by three or four miles wide, we were there,

06:00 it became our base. That was our base for a long time, we would do an operation, the army would be ready to do another big jump and we would have to go ahead and do the bombarding, soften the place up, the army would land, we would stay around for awhile in case we were needed and then we would go back to the base at Seeadler Harbour. If another operation wasn't ready

06:30 for another week or two we would be sitting there at anchor, they were the boring periods, they were terrible, they really were. Hot Sweaty, nobody allowed ashore. Occasionally the lucky ones might be sent ashore as a store party to go ashore and pick up some stuff, there were lots of my friends who never set foot on dry land month after month.

07:00 They were terrible but then you would get that little air of excitement because somebody knew that something was happening, it might have been some work being done in the engine room before sailing. It could be, I can remember on one occasion the sick bay, people went around checking the life rafts to make sure there was medicines and blood plasma and all that stuff around so you knew something was happening.

07:30 Then the boredom decreased and finally when it was the case of sea going duty, men to do this and that to get ready to take the ship to sea. Perhaps usually in the late afternoon we would leave, everybody would breathe a sigh of relief, there would be fresh air through the ship again and we would be off on an operation.

08:00 Once that happened and I was doing my watches, bearing in mind there were three teams, you would do one watch, two watches off, and then another watch and then you would be back for the third watch, you felt that you were doing something of importance, you were achieving something. I can truthfully say that being on watch on the

08:30 Compass platform was an enjoyable task. It required a lot of concentration if you did the job properly, [you] had to be alert. Looking through those evershed binoculars, they were enormous things, was a strain, you could only do it for an hour at a time, you had to have a spell and then do an hour again. It was interesting

09:00 even at that stage when I was only 18 and 19, watching all these great convoys and landing ships ready to land, they were heading off to a place and that is where they landed, we would be patrolling up and down watching them ashore and perhaps firing sometimes to assist them if they had trouble, a target had to be destroyed. I used to think to myself, "Here I am, I am seeing history

09:30 unfolding before my eyes." I don't know whether anybody else thought like that, possibly they didn't, my imagination was running wild. I felt that way that we were making history and it so happened we were.

**How did it feel to be a part of this?**

A good feeling. We were already starting

10:00 hearing stories of Japanese brutality and the conditions that their prisoners of war were experiencing, little snippets of this and that.

**Where would you hear these stories from?**

Newspapers, ABC, the ABC short-wave we used to hear every morning, it would be broadcast over the ship's speakers. Chaps who had brothers or relations who were prisoners of war, they

10:30 would get messages in the mail to say that it was the lack of messages, the story was we just don't know, we are not being told anything what is happening to our men. We knew of Japanese atrocities in New Guinea at the Solomons, at the Guadalcanal, these things were being told to us all the time.

11:00 A lot of it was public, in the news and on the radio.

**What sort of stories would you hear?**

The sort of thing that I mentioned, brutality. There were stories, I am pretty sure this happened, I think we heard the story of the airman who was beheaded

11:30 in New Guinea, things like that. Occasionally you would run into American soldiers, I used to get ashore on a few times on little odd work details, jobs to go and do this or that, and you would talk to the American infantry men and just once or twice, not more than once or twice,

12:00 they mentioned the things they found on battle fields and we knew that we were fighting a vicious, bloodthirsty enemy. I think that was common in Australia, I think everybody knew that.

**Where would you get to come ashore occasionally for odd jobs?**

12:30 At Manus, the little township which is now the capital of that area, Lorengau, the Americans had a huge

base and approximately one million men went through that area onto the further operations and food, clothing supplies, shoes. I remember going ashore to get something and there was an American

13:00 quartermaster with thousands of shoes and boots and I remember buying a pair of shoes because they were dirt cheap, we could buy them for nothing, little things like that. Later on, after we had been at sea for a long time and they realised that something had to be done to give the fellows a break, we went ashore a couple of times and not everybody, but quite a few of us [had]

13:30 the privilege of going ashore to a little island at the entrance to the harbour which the Americans had turned into a recreation island. Huge underground refrigerators and ice containers, ice cream manufacturing plants and endless supply of American

14:00 beer and we were allowed to go there. They would take, a few of our ship's boats could go there, they would fill them up and they would drop us there in the morning and we could do whatever we liked, swim, lie in the sun. Sometimes they took cricket bats and balls and played cricket or just drink booze all day long and we would or most of us would be half blotto,

14:30 they would pick us up and take us back to Shropshire again. I did that a couple of times, I don't know how many other men ever had the privilege but quite a few of us did. That was in the period from about June '44 to March '45, there was that period of ten months that we were at sea on one tour and never stopped. I mentioned before

15:00 the significance of the naval campaign, the island hopping campaign. Once the Americans had built up this huge base at Seeadler Harbour we jumped to Aitape, Hollandia, which then was the capital of Dutch New Guinea, Humboldt Bay, a magnificent bay, Tanah Merah, these are all landings where MacArthur landed

15:30 large numbers of men, occupied the area, forgot about the Japs in between because they [are] now impotent and you just keep jumping from one to another and that was his strategy and it worked because we had control of the sea and the air. There was no need to fight a vicious campaign in the jungle anymore. There was – you were fighting but not all the way from one point to the other. Then we went to Sarmi Peninsula,

16:00 Wakde Island, Biak, the island of Biak, a big Japanese base at Biak. The Japanese fought back at Biak. After the bombardment and the troops had landed we were cruising up and down waiting for targets of opportunity

16:30 and the next thing we know, I was right up the forecastle, I didn't feel much but all my friends who were from about amidships aft and particularly those on the upper deck guns all of a sudden were thrown all over the place. A flight of American liberators [aircraft] had been coming in across our path to bomb targets on land and one bloke dropped a thousand pound bomb which landed a few feet from our stern and lifted the whole ship up and down

17:00 again. Geoffrey Lund, who now lives up at Tewantin, he still has a piece of shrapnel that he picked up out of one of the boats where the shrapnel from the bomb had blown landed all over the stern of the ship. Biak, funny story. I am on the port evershed bearing indicator, as always,

17:30 it is about between four and five o'clock in the morning, pitch dark no moon, still dead night and there is HMAS Australia, Shropshire, the [USS] Phoenix, which was the flagship and carried the admiral on this operation and we are all creeping through a long, a big area of fairly shallow water to take the Japs

18:00 by surprise. I am staring very intently at these times when we are getting close, you have got to be watching very carefully, I couldn't believe my eyes, I shook my head and looked again and I could see twinkling lights on the shore which I had never seen before when we were approaching a target because everything would be blacked out, the Japs weren't that silly [but]

18:30 they were this time. I look again and I can see some of the lights moving and then my eyes became accustomed to the shoreline and the background of it and I could see there was an area along the beach relatively flat and then there were hills or a sharp incline defined behind it and there was obviously a road running along the foreshore and Japanese camps and there were moving lights

19:00 with trucks and these lights were obviously the cooking fires that the Japanese cooks were getting ready for breakfast at dawn. The usual call, "Bearing so and so, dead ahead and I reported it." I think it was Bracegirdle, the gunnery officer, "Let me have a look," so he has a look. "Good, well done, thank you," and he calls a signal

19:30 to the bloke on the talk between ships, "Advise flagship, whatever the code name was by plain language, lights visible at etc, etc." The Phoenix replies, "Thank you, advance bombardment time 30 minutes," in other words, let's get into them now while they were not suspecting anything, they don't know

20:00 we are here. The gunnery officer turned around to a bloke named Ellicott, he was the bugler, so he goes over to the back of the bulkhead at the back of the compass platform, switches on the loud speaker system and goes tap tap which you could hear all over the ship and then he stands there and he blows action stations.

20:30 My position is jutting forward, you are inclined to be a bit out over the water or over the deck in the open and I could hear this echoing thing wafting across the water and the next thing the lights are going out, the Japs must have heard it. Even though it was several miles away, the Phoenix yells out, “Who blew that bugle?” “The Shropshire,” the code name was porthole,

21:00 it was us. It was a mad, a scramble to get to action stations straight away, I often have a good laugh about that because even in wartime you have to see the funny side, here are all these poor little Japs getting ready to have their breakfast and they didn’t know we were there until the bugle sounds. From Biak we went –

**What was the result of the bombardment at Biak?**

The Japs got ashore alright,

21:30 they fanned out where the land flattened out a little bit on the port side, to the left or the west there were several airstrips and the Japs had quite a few aircraft there and they all tried to take off, make a nuisance of themselves in attacking us. The army didn’t take on in mopping them up, from the navy point of view everything went roughly according to plan but

22:00 the Japs fought back hard, that was one place where the army did fight back hard because up until now they were waiting, they knew as MacArthur extended his lines the time would come when we would be so far away from home bases that they could strike. The Philippines was the place where they were going to do it. At Biak,

22:30 some days before that incident, we had hit something in the water and Horton Slatter, who was the chief ERA [Engine Room Artificer], a good friend of mine, now he was telling me, he said, “We still don’t know what happened but the shaft and propeller was hit and we stopped it straight away so it wouldn’t do any damage so we were on three

23:00 screws instead of four,” so as soon as Biak was secured at the end of that day Captain Showers, who was briefly our captain, announced that, “I have got some happy news for you all, we are not required here now, the operation has gone alright, we are proceeding to Sydney,” so three or four days later we were back in Sydney.

23:30 We were there long enough to get home leave, that was the first time I saw my mother and father at Mortoua for about a year. When we went back there was the Halmaheras, the Morotai operation. Once again, that was a fizzer a big operation and the Japs quietly faded away,

24:00 but we were starting to have cholera injections and the sick bay people were loading up tons of blood plasma etc and we all knew that cholera, we are moving into Asia proper, that is where you get cholera. We were told about the arrival of Godfrey Nichols.

24:30 **I was wondering at this point if you can explain for me, walk me through the gunnery turret that we spoke about, just describe the way it worked and the different positions the men were in.**

A gun turret. If you look at the picture of a ship you see on deck, a gun house

25:00 with guns sticking out of it and from the gun house right down below to the lower quarters is a steel trunk which fences it off from everything else and at the bottom of it there are the shell rooms and magazines. There is a special shell handling room half way up to

25:30 sort the shells out and put them in their right order and they are all going up on hydraulically controlled hoists into the gun house, where the shell is tipped over, rammed into the breach of the gun followed by the cordite, breach closed bang, it is fired. All along there you have got teams of men doing all these jobs.

26:00 I wouldn’t know the exact number but I would think to man the whole unit from top to bottom there would be 60 people working in that enclosed space. From the time you what we call closed up at our stations, all the doors, regardless of their value in

26:30 security because some of them were blue openings and some were red openings, the red ones had to be closed at all times, the blue ones could be opened to allow people to come backwards and forwards, they had dogs on them all the way round, you closed the door and they all got clamped down and you were locked there inside, you couldn’t get out, it doesn’t matter what happened. If you were lucky you could, someone might have opened the door for you. The bloke who was

27:00 in charge of opening the main that locked us in, another interesting character, John Hordern, the Hordern stores in Sydney, the forerunners of the Myers and Coles people, John was a supply assistant, that was his job at action stations, to clamp that down and make sure the water tight integrity of the ship was in order.

27:30 **You mentioned that you were under the water line earlier, can you explain that in relation to what you have explained?**

The lower quarters of the ship, the most dangerous part which was where you had your magazines and your shells, they were, the ship was constructed so that they were below the water line.

28:00 **Why exactly?**

You would have to ask a naval designer or engineer but I think the obvious answer is that a shell, an enemy shell, can be fired at you and hit lots of parts of the ship causing a lot of damage and havoc but not destroying the thing,

28:30 whereas if a shell landed in a magazine, that was boom. The safest place was below the water line, I think, that is the reasoning of the naval designers.

**Can you tell me about the first action that the Shropshire went in with you on it? What were your personal feelings of that first action?**

29:00 We sailed from Milne Bay up the coast of New Guinea, the first marine division was already at sea and their landing craft but they could only travel slowly so we overtook them when they were about halfway up, perhaps two thirds of the way up, to the destination.

29:30 I was still just what you call a bridge lookout on the starboard side the night before the morning of the action and I can clearly remember thinking, “Well, this might be the first time I have ever done this but I have to be on the ball and watch everything and be careful.”

30:00 The important part of the job was to see where all the other ships around you were so you had them in their right positions, the whole task force is turning left and right, zig-zagging. Everybody had to go together otherwise there is chaos and collisions and things which nearly happened once later on. By this time I am used to the pattern and it would have been

30:30 three or four o’clock in the morning and I see a ship, “Hello, there is not normally a ship on that bearing,” and she is travelling faster than the rest of the convoy or the rest of the taskforce, she is making headway and overtaking us and I thought, “What do I do?” I thought, “There is only one thing to do, you have got to yell out and report it.” I thought, “I hope I am not making a fool of myself,”

31:00 so I yelled out the proper call, “Starboard!” [The] lookout officer of the watch [said], “Yes, what is it?” “Bearing so and so, moving right to left,” I had learnt proper lingo by now, “Unidentified ship not normally in that position.” The officer of the watch comes over and he is looking through his glasses

31:30 and there is a bit of conversation going on in the compass platform, they are obviously checking things out to make sure and the next thing I hear, “Okay, lookout, carry on, all in order.” Obviously one of the American destroyers was changing position or the skipper had decided to do something else or had been sent to a different position without us knowing.

32:00 That only took five or ten minutes but afterwards I thought to myself, “That is what I was there, for you have done the right thing.” I must have done the right thing because I don’t know whether there was any connection because after that operation I was called again to report to the gunnery office, they were the people who allotted all these places,

32:30 this bloke to do that job etc., etc. I was told, “We are taking you away from that position, you will be manning the port evershed bearing indicator on the compass platform.” I think I don’t know how naval minds work but I presumed that because I was on the ball and done the right thing they must have said, “Oh well, there is a place up there, we will put him there,” where I got that position which I occupied then for a long

33:00 time.

**Was there anything particular about the water in the tropics or in the Pacific, the way the ocean works?**

Yes, interesting question. Do you know the answer?

**I am not sure, tell me and I will let you know.**

In the tropics,

33:30 and I have never been in a ship other than in the tropics down to Tasmania, but I have never noticed it there, it was after the war, any disturbance in the water has a phosphorescent glow about it, what causes that I am not sure.

**What does it look like?**

It is whitish with a slightly

34:00 phosphorescent glow, I can’t describe it as anything else but …

**Is this all the time?**

Yes, whenever the water is being disturbed. Is it all the time I couldn’t say for sure, you would have to ask a marine scientist that one. I have been aware of it many times, many hours during watch keeping

when you see these things happen.

**Is it**

34:30 **not having ever been a watch keeper does it alert you to something seeing?**

If it is just the bow wave you don't worry or the stern of a ship ahead of you. You introduce another interesting story that I had forgotten about. After the Halmahera-Morotai operation

35:00 we go back to Humboldt Bay. We went back to Manus first, refueled and re-ammunitioned, Godfrey Nichols had come from England and had only been with us a month or so but he settled in very quickly as our captain, he had no or very little idea of

35:30 how the American Pacific fleets operated and what sort of war we were in but I found out recently that he had been seconded to the planning staff of the Normandy landings in London and he was there for a long time before coming out to the Pacific, so he must have had a good strategic brain and known the world scene far more than we thought a person would know,

36:00 he ordered huge stocks of armour-piercing eight inch shells. There are basically two type of shells, high explosive which can touch something and burst, and anti-material, anti-personnel type explosions which we would use always in bombarding Japanese installations and land

36:30 places, the armour piercing stuff has got a steel cone which is designed to penetrate steel plate which you use against other ships. I mentioned that now because I thought of it where ammunitioning the ship with a lot of high explosive stuff coming aboard,

37:00 we found out later that Nichols did this for a very special reason but we were also loading up the blood plasma, all the carley rafts are being checked, all our anti-flash gear is being soaked in, an antiinflammatory material or whatnot so we knew something big was happening, although now it is the job of corvettes and destroyers to sweep mines, not big ships like county class cruisers.

37:30 Shropshire was equipped with mine sweeping equipment, which means steel wires going out to power veins on either side of the ship, and we did a couple of test runs outside of the Seeadler Harbour to see if they were still working, they had never used it before. That is interesting, why would they make us do that? We leave, we then went to Humboldt Bay,

38:00 refuelled again as it was 300 miles further up the New Guinea coast and that was going to be the main 7th Fleet's take off point to hit the Philippines which was now 900 or 1000 miles away, it was an enormous operation and we had a few adventures on the way, nothing to worry about,

38:30 we were all aware that this was a big thing and it so happened that Leyte Gulf was the biggest naval operation and sea battle that had ever been fought in man's history. It was the linchpin that destroyed the Japanese navy and the Japanese empire after that they were gone. We are going slowly because we have got troop ships and

39:00 landing ships for miles and we have got to protect them. I think it took five or six days, a long trip, going slowly, about ten or twelve knots. On the afternoon of the 19th, the skipper orders stream power veins, so that means getting out the gear that attaches the steel

39:30 ropes, wires to the bow of the ship and dropping the power veins in, they have a rudder and the steel wire is designed that if you hit a mine that is anchored by its cable to the bottom of the sea that will take the steel cable of the mine along to the power vein which has got serrated jaws on it and the wire will be thrust into those and cut, separated so,

40:00 the mine bobs to the surface. Most of these mines are set below so you can't see them. I have got the watch about midnight, it must have been the early middle watch between midnight and one o'clock, dead quiet ships all around us, everything quiet we move the straits and open water which is going to take us

40:30 into Leyte Gulf. No need for the glasses, I am leaning on the rail watching the phosphorescent glow, there is a steel wire is a clear line in the water that you can see the power vein shape under the water is a big cigar shaped thing, you can see it quite clearly, cause of this phosphorescent glow. It is travelling along all right

41:00 and I look again and the power vein is bouncing up and down. "Officer of the watch, our port power vein is not tracking true." Bracegirdle, the gunnery officer, was there too because they getting ready for the big bombardment in a few hours time, he walks over, he said, "Well done lad that's good, thanks for letting us know.

41:30 We had better see what is going on," and the next thing the Yankee submarine detecting people that are right down in the deep with their echo sounding device, they report they have got a ping.

# Tape 7

00:38 **You just told us about the power vein but you said something along the lines that the people, the submarine guys, heard a ping.**

The Asdic dome, the anti-submarine detection people, said they had reported up to the bridge that they got an echo at an angle,

01:00 A they gave the bearing and I think we all realised straight away that echo that they were getting was at that angle where the power vein was that was bobbing up and down and we all realised straight away there is a mine fouled in that. The gunnery officer called the captain because the captain has his own sea cabin near the bridge and he came up in a dressing gown looked around

01:30 and asked what we had done or what had happened. Cool as a cucumber, he said, “There is nothing I can do, call me well before dawn and we will have a look,” so back he went he went, back to sleep. My watch finished, I went down below and had a bit of a sleep for an hour or so before action stations before dawn, and sure enough when it was light everybody could see that was a mine

02:00 Fouled in that power vein. What do they do about it? It was decided, the decision was made that they would have to try and retrieve it, rig the derricks on the deck, the ship slowed down, which means the power vein would come slowly, come in closer to the ship’s side and try and hook it up and bring it out.

02:30 Our divisional officer, Guy Griffiths, who we still have a chat to every now and again, he is now a rear admiral in Sydney, retired, he said to me and ‘Pop’ Ramsay, our locker man, “Lash a couple of boat hooks together.” We said, “What for?” He said, “Stand on the ship’s side and if that mine starts swinging, you push it away from the ship’s side.” We said, “Cut it out.” He said, “Yes, go on.”

03:00 We went back inside to the locker room and we were doing the job and all of a sudden there is a cheer, the mine had freed itself and it just bobbed down a few feet away from the ship’s side, all the length of the ship. If it had of exploded it would have come right close to the side of the ship, anything could have happened.

03:30 That was that. The bombardment at Leyte was horrendous. By this time the battleships that had been damaged at Pearl Harbour had been remodernised and resurrected and they were back with us as part of the 7th Fleet, the troops got ashore all right and MacArthur landed. You have heard the famous speech he made,

04:00 “I have returned,” and we thought things would settle down to normal now. That night, the Japs struck back and hit the [USS] Honolulu with a torpedo just before dusk, the next morning a Jap came running at us, a few Japs in the air. There is some controversy [about]

04:30 what actually happened but she went down between the Australia and us, turned and came back, and tended to head for us, the port four inch guns were well on the ball and got good shots at her and she flipped to one side away from us and headed for the Australia, hit the Australia on the top director and four controls and killed a lot of people, killed the captain and

05:00 wounded what was now Commodore Collins, and after that it was such a mess that the Australia and the Honolulu had to get back to Manus for repairs and clean up and bury the dead and all that sort of stuff. We just carried on.

**Did you see this happen directly?**

No I was in the turret, the gun turret, you have got to remember that when you are in a gun turret like that

05:30 or particularly in the lower quarters, all you can do is hear things occasionally that are happening, but you don’t you are not aware of what is going on, you can’t see it.

**What does that sound like, do you remember the sound?**

When the guns are firing you are too busy, you don’t worry about it. If we were there for any length of time with nothing happening we had an officer on the bridge who gave a running

06:00 commentary about what was happening so that we would all know. He did a good job, he was formerly our torpedo officer and he did a good job. I had the morning watch and this happened while we were at action stations because we always went to action stations at dusk and at dawn for about an hour because they were the dangerous times

06:30 but after the Australia was hit they called the lookout teams back to the compass platform, the one I was on duty on, and I simply watched and they were putting out the fires and hoses were running everywhere and blokes were dashing about and the whole area was blackened and damaged. The mast was still in one piece, I think,

07:00 or at an angle. Generally speaking you could see it was a mess. Once they tidied it all up and resumed something like normal operations the American admiral in charge, I think it was Oldendorf, he ordered

the

07:30 Honolulu and the Australia back because we can't afford to keep damaged ships here, they would be a hindrance rather than a help. Unfortunately for the Warramunga blokes, the Warramunga was sent off as one of their destroyer escorts. That left the Shropshire and the Arunta, the Arunta and Warramunga were two sister ships, tribal class destroyers.

08:00 There was considerable activity for the next few days, hot air attacks and alerts all the time and then on about the middle of 24th October we start to hear rumours, a lot of activity buzzers and signals running round. The Japanese had come out in a three pronged attack but what was

08:30 virtually left of the navy, a third of it come down from Japan down to Luzon, the other two main forces had been based, some on Japan, but mostly in Singapore and they had moved up to Borneo and now they were ready to come as a three pronged attack to surround Leyte Gulf and destroy the landing and they consisted of all the Japanese latest battleships and cruisers as well as their older battleships

09:00 and during the afternoon of the 24th the aircraft were flying over all the time, the third fleet under Halsey had been on the attack all the time and they managed to sink one battleship and a cruiser in the Labuan Sea, the Japs turned away, Halsey heard about the third force coming down

09:30 from the north from Japan and they were a decoy force which at times actually spoke in plain language to let Halsey know they were there. Halsey was one of these people famous for many other things, but a bull-at-the-gate bloke. He turned all the fleet, all the new frontline battleships and the fleet carriers with most of the aircraft, north to get what he thought was

10:00 the Japanese fleet coming from Japan. As soon as he did that the Japanese came round the north of Leyte and Samar, San Bernardino, and then straight out into the Pacific. We were trapped. We didn't know at the time because during the night and the early hours of the morning we fought the battle of Surigao Straits with Shropshire's gun fire

10:30 on our particular target was the battleship Yamashiro. At dawn, Leyte Gulf, the southern end had smoke and wrecks and everything and it looked pretty grim, we thought, "That is over, we have got through that bit alright," and the next thing we are steaming north to the northern end of Leyte Gulf where MacArthur's landings were and all the transports were

11:00 and there is panic, some of our light escort carriers that provided our air cover are under attack by a huge Japanese force, this is the other force that had come through on the north side of Samar. [Admiral Thomas] Kinkaid was signalling, we didn't know this at the time but we know now, Kinkaid was making urgent signals to Halsey to break radio silence

11:30 and tell us where he is, he was supposed to be there guarding San Bernardino Strait, he was gone and the Japs came through unscathed. Eventually Nimitz at Pearl Harbour sent a signal to demand where the third fleet was they didn't know, normally at sea you would never break radio silence otherwise you let other people know where you are. Halsey was told [to] get back there fast, the whole of the operation at Leyte Gulf

12:00 was in jeopardy. Kinkaid, commanding the 7th Fleet, put together the ships that had armour-piercing supplies. Some of the American battleships had been given instructions that their role was to be purely army support, bombardment stuff,

12:30 but three of them and I can't remember exactly which one still had ample supplies or some supplies of armour-piercing shells and they could be sacrificed, who else had all the armour-piercing stuff and plenty of fuel? Shropshire. We understand that we were sent first with the others to follow because we were in a better position. All that morning we are biting our finger nails,

13:00 "What is going to happen?" We weren't even sure what the size of the Japanese force was. We didn't know what had happened to our escort carriers some of them were sunk and quite a few of their escort destroyers were sunk but they had no heavy stuff to protect themselves with. You can't protect an aircraft carrier from a battle ships gunfire. The aircraft that were in the air and the destroyers

13:30 escorting those carriers put up such a show that they forced Kurita, the Japanese admiral, to change course and split his force and he got scattered. By the time he regrouped it was about eleven o'clock in the morning and he was still heading on a roughly south-westerly course for the entrance to Leyte Gulf where we were supposed to be protecting the thing

14:00 and something made him turn around and he turned around and went north again, not knowing for sure what he was up against. He had been at sea and under American aircraft attack for several days, he hadn't had any sleep he was dog tired, he had no proper communications with Japan headquarters and this is a very important point because signalling

14:30 and signalling efficiency and communications is one of the secrets of an efficient organisation, when that starts to break down you know your organisation is not going to run properly. He turned, went back through San Bernadino Strait, which we didn't know until late that day. All afternoon we cruised up and down there. I was doing the afternoon watch by this time, wondering, "What happens if I sight these things coming over

15:00 the horizon?" We never saw them, they had gone.

**How was the crew feeling about facing this potential – ?**

Just another job.

**It would have been a big job, though.**

Just another job, that is what we were trained for, that is what we were there for.

**There must have been some kind of trepidation, or fear, or – ?**

No, I was not aware of any at all. Tensions, there is a certain amount of

15:30 tenseness, but you have got to remember too that on a cruiser that size with 1000 men, a lot of them would be going around their ordinary day-to-day chores and wouldn't even be knowing for sure what was happening except when they were called to action stations or whatever. I would be, I don't say this in a boasting fashion, I would be one of a limited number of blokes who had a rough

16:00 idea of what was going on, only because I had that job up on the compass platform and the other lookouts would have known the same thing. We lived to tell the tale.

**Talking about that first up, when you first get on the ship and you find out they want you to look out, how did you feel about getting that job in the very first place when you first got on board?**

16:30 I didn't know much about it, I didn't know what it entailed and it was just a case of watching what other people did and doing what you were told, if anything, and keeping your eyes and ears open and learning. We had learnt at Flinders there is the bows, I could box the compass, I knew bearings and directions,

17:00 although as a matter of interest we never used magnetic bearings like north and north east on the ship, it was always gyro bearings, your compass, or whatever gave you the numbers, zero was due north, 90 if your needle said 90 you were on a course heading due east, 180 south and whatever, and all the numbers in between.

17:30 As a lookout, instead of if you weren't in a position to report a bearing accurately or you were doing it quickly, you would simply say, "Approximately fifteen degrees off the port bow," so whoever was listening to you knew, there is our port bow straight ahead and fifteen degrees is out there, where the target is or the

18:00 object in sight. You soon learnt that, you soon picked it up, it was a matter of concentration, eyesight, you couldn't afford to be slack. You had to be watching all the time.

**Did it feel good to have this role?**

I personally found it very satisfying.

**Could you**

18:30 **tell us about the first few days when you were doing it, what was it like, what were you learning?**

I think we have already covered that, really, that was the first operation from Milne Bay up the coast of New Guinea up the coast of Cape Gloucester. We are going back to the very start of my career, at the end of 1943.

19:00 There was one interesting thing that I notice which surprised me, I didn't know for sure at the time but I later found it to be true. I think it would have been on the way back from Cape Gloucester, we were told to retire because the landing was under control and if you look at a map of New Guinea and New Britain, you'll see that in the middle of the Vitiaz Strait between the two

19:30 land mass, there is an island called Rooke Island, Umboi in the native language, and it is a very interesting place with almost perfect sides, like a volcano, mountainous, and the first time I saw it, which was probably on the way back from Cape Gloucester late in the afternoon, I thought, "That is familiar," we would have passed it in the middle

20:00 of the night on the way, getting ready to go and do our bombardment the previous night and morning, I didn't know why and then I found out later it was Rooke Island and Rooke Island was a very important establishment, a mission establishment run by the Lutheran Church, they were the only white people

20:30 on the, Australian people on the island and the bloke who ran it was a Lutheran pastor by the name of Harry Freund. I knew him from the boyhood days when he was home on holidays he went around to the different places showing slides of his work and asking for donations and all that sort of stuff. That is why I reckon I know that place, I have seen the pictures

21:00 of it before. Another funny story, there is a bloke here on the Gold Coast, his name is Lionel Seal, he has written a number of books, he was in AIB, the Australian Intelligence Bureau, he was a good soldier, very capable man, he is well into his eighties now and he, with a party I think, he was a sergeant at the time and he, with a party, was told to go and

21:30 check out Rook Island, the Japs were moving back, we had them on the run, you have to land there and see whether you find any Japanese presence, whether we need to send a force to knock them off or whatever, Lionel gets there with a boat or landing craft and a little squad of soldiers and he finds the place alright, the Japanese have left, the islanders are running well, he couldn't believe

22:00 how the islanders have looked after themselves and preserved themselves and kept their social and local government and church operations going even under Japanese occupation, what a remarkable bunch of people they were and who had taught them? He found amongst the gear and stuff lying about the trunks marked Harry Freund. He was telling me

22:30 this one day, I said, "You are joking," I said, "I know Harry, I see him occasionally when I go down to Adelaide and he has long since retired." "I was the bloke who found all his gear. I often wondered who he was and where he finished up." I said, "There you are, here is his phone number and address, get in touch with him," and they corresponded.

**That brings to mind a question on how you would interact with other services**

23:00 **of the navy, was there very much interaction?**

We were strictly on our own, no interaction, there was no need for it. On a high-level, planning joint operations, but not on our level.

**What about your interactions with the American command?**

The American 7th Fleet, we were a task-

23:30 force of the 7th Fleet, [they] treated us right royally. I think we can claim that our gunnery efficiency and our radar efficiency had the Yanks beaten. Out here at Cape Island there is a famous fellow by the name of Rear Admiral Bryan Castles, he was our gunnery officer. I have got to know him,

24:00 we have been friends since we have been up here. He was in England when the Shropshire was commissioned, he had been a radar officer, he had learnt British radar which was the head of the world [in] '41 and '42. Because Shropshire became Australian he was drafted back to the Australian navy and he managed to put together a lot of modern equipment which was just being invented, the very latest of

24:30 gear, and he was the gunnery officer brace who put together a gunnery control system based on radar of which I don't know the details, superior to virtually anything else known at this time. The task force 77 would virtually go nowhere where there were likely to be problems without Shropshire as their radar and

25:00 fighter control ship. We could put on our plot, our radar operators would put on our plot 80 to 100 aircraft in the air at the one time and tell you where they all were, where they were going and what they were doing, this was vital information, particularly if the Japs were close by, you would want to know who was where and what. After the Leyte campaign we were there for a month or two and being knocked around a bit

25:30 by the attach by the kamikazes, they were getting pretty warmed up by now and we went back to Manus and the question was raised about our anti-aircraft fire being heavy enough to combat kamikazes because you just didn't hit them and get out of trouble, they had to be blown out of the sky because once they had your trajectory on you they just kept going. Bang!

26:00 After some considerable discussions and signals about more Bofors guns, we had only two Bofors at the time but a lot of Oerlikons, the 20 mm quick firing gun, not good enough. Our gunnery officer talked to the ordnance people in Seeadler Harbour where they had huge supplies of everything, he invited a couple of the ordnance blokes out

26:30 for dinner to the ward room and showed them around and they had a few bottles of scotch or whatnot because the Yank navy never had any liquor, they weren't allowed to have liquor, we didn't at sea but at home, yes. The arrangements were made, if they had been sending signals back to Canberra we would still be waiting for our Bofors. Next morning out comes a whole lot of lighters, welding gear, machinery by the ton

27:00 and they come on board, they start ripping up the decks, they had marked up the decks, they started ripping up decks and everywhere and there were another seventeen Bofors put in, serviced in about eight hours, it was unbelievable, who paid for them nobody knows. The Yanks said, "They are yours, you need them, we don't need them, we have got plenty." That is probably one of the things that saved the day later on in Lingayen Gulf.

27:30 From our point of view, from looking at it from a seaman's point of view, the relationship with the Americans was excellent. I understand that was always the case with our senior officers when they met

their equivalent. The odd times when we did get ashore, particularly later on after the Philippines campaign, you would meet Yank

28:00 sailors from the destroyers that accompanied you. You are from the [USS] Mullany, you are from the Heart of Whatever, I have seen you all the time, we know you, you are Shropshire. We had been sailing for hundreds of thousands of miles across the ocean in company, we could see each other but never talked to each [other], but when you came ashore, you ran into these blokes. It was a good feeling.

**Now that you**

28:30 **mention it, tell us how the Bofors saved you in that battle in Lingayen Gulf.**

Lingayen Gulf is a big expanse of water north of Manila, about 80 miles north of Manila, it has always been the landing area for a force to invade the Philippines, flat open country and a valley running down to Manila Bay.

29:00 The Japs did that in 1940, ’41, ’42, Macarthur did exactly the same thing, the same strategy. By this time the kamikazes were a big force and had been thoroughly indoctrinated and worked out their tactics. At first they were a bit spasmodic but now they were operating efficiently

29:30 they were doing a lot of damage. When we were heading for Lingayen Gulf we knew this is going to be another big operation, dangerous. We were a day and a half out from Leyte Gulf, going through the waste of the Philippines out into the South China Sea, heading north past Manila. By the afternoon of that day and a half,

30:00 action stations again, the Japs are hitting a few ships. What is the first one to get hit, the Australia, she had just come back from after being repaired. Reinforcements, drafts of new blokes to make up for losses from two months before the first one hit is the Australia. I couldn’t believe it

**Did you see it get hit?**

30:30 No I came up on the bridge to do my watch just after it happened and there she was with smoke and everything around her.

**What was that scene like, what did it look like?**

She was a fair way away, she was in another force, the whole force was in several sections and we were in the vanguard of one force and the Australia was out behind in another force. Another American ship was

31:00 ahead of us and she was smoking, she was on fire or had been hit. The next day the Arunta got a near miss and she was sailing around in circles because they damaged her steering gear, they got her going again. One of the Japanese destroyers stayed with her, a very dangerous thing because when you are not moving in the water, you are powerless, but this American captain decided to

31:30 stay with the Arunta and it was late afternoon and they eventually got her going, I think about five or six blokes were killed by the blast on the Arunta and they got her going and everything fine and she joined us later that night, she came back under control. Before we arrived off the entrance to Lingayen Gulf, late in the night or whatever,

32:00 Nichols told us what was happening and he said, “We are up against a savage enemy,” I can’t remember his words, he said, “You might think you have had it or you are the last one in line but don’t stop because what you do might save the rest.” Nobody ever left their gun.

32:30 I may not remember exactly the daily sequence because we were there for 3 days we would come in before dawn, do bombardment schedules, pick out Japanese targets under air attack a lot of the time and then at dusk we would get out into the open sea and have a spell. We would do it again the next day, we did that for three days. Every time somebody got hit we would be saying, oh the Australia got hit again sure enough, five times she got hit,

33:00 couldn’t believe it. The personal aide of Winston Churchill was killed, I didn’t now about that immediately but I was on watch and the [USS] West Virginia [actually the USS New Mexico], this was the second day, the Japs which shot our aircraft plus

33:30 our own ships shot enough down so it wasn’t quite as intense the second day, not as many of them about. I am on my little spot that I like looking around, it is quiet for the moment, no Japs about, and all of a sudden radar said bogey bearing so and so distance, so and so. Sound action stations,

34:00 that would mean I would have to run for my action station in A turret and the bloke to relieve me was slow in coming, I don’t know where he was, in the toilet, could have been anywhere, I am looking around, I could see this thing, ships are starting to pop away and get their range, bang! bang! odd shells going up and at last, I can't remember who it was but he arrived,

34:30 I said, “Godfather, I will have to make a bolt for it now!” Because of the rush to action stations by 1000 men, when it was urgent there were strict rules about traffic forward on the starboard side and up ladders on the port side you went aft and down ladders so that everything is going round like that and

35:00 you weren't colliding into each other. By this time the guns are firing and everybody should be at their action stations no body about and the port ladder going down on the side of the bridge where I was should go down there were blokes there trying to get down, it was blocked, I look over at the starboard side, nobody, I race over and grab the chains and the stanchions on the side and heave myself off to fly through the air and land on all fours at the bottom and

35:30 as I took off Captain Nichols is coming out of his sea cabin and about to mount the first step and I thought, "My godfather, I am going to hit him," which I just twisted and brushed aside and hit him on my shoulder or my shoulder hit him a bit and I fell, I did, to get out [of] the way and it just flashed through my mind, "What trouble am I in for, even touching him, you'd never touch another officer,

36:00 even friendly, you wouldn't pat him on the shoulder or anything, but collide like that, go bang. He looked at me." He knew who I was straight away and he just grinned at me and so, "Go on, get to your action station, quick." and off he went. I thought, "That is alright." I get down out of the super structure where A Turret is on the forecastle, everything is locked up, which it should be, so what do I do now, I am standing out here in the open

36:30 and I am watching this bloke, he is still doing a bit circling around and he comes up not all that high between West Virginia and Shropshire because we were cruising slowly together and he got over there just ahead of us and I thought, "Which way is he going to turn?" His wings were wriggling and he turned port,

37:00 straight down, almost vertical, and smashed into portside of the West Virginia's bridge and I found out later that General Lumsden, who was Churchill's personal aide, was sent out to see how the American fleet was operating and was seconded to the admiral on the West Virginia, had just walked across there with some of his staff and they all got killed,

37:30 blown to bits.

**What is it like, seeing a plane crash into a ship?**

Well it is horrendous I suppose but there is a certain, I suppose the,

38:00 what word can I use to describe it I wouldn't use the word exciting [but] it makes the blood flow. We were lucky because we never got hit, how I would have reacted if we had got hit and had dead bodies lying all

38:30 around I don't know, that is a question I will never know the answer to. Naval warfare is interesting like this because we were never hit, our casualties were sickies and accidents and a few things like that who died. You are either blasted into eternity or you are quite safe

39:00 in lots of cases, which is what we were. The near misses, there was one bad one, it happened so quickly nobody even knew until it was all over, most people didn't know. A kamikaze missed by radar once again port side, it came out of a cloud on the port side and Roy Cazaly, famous

39:30 there for the Up There Cazaly, Aussie Rules, the song was about his father, but he and his father both played for South Melbourne at one time when they were South Melbourne, not the Sydney Swans, Cazaly was captain of the port pom poms and it had been quiet so he was fiddling and he had the pom pom on a bearing and the Jap came out of the sky and he opened fire, no instructions,

40:00 he just said, "Open fire, let's go," and he was accurate enough to clip the wing off the aircraft, or most of it and it got out of control, it went down between B turret and the bridge on the compass platform where I would have normally been standing, I was in A turret, I was down in the shell room at the time but Stan Nicholls, my mate, was on the starboard side and he said

40:30 it came so low and so close to us he said, "I actually looked down on the helmet of the Jap pilot as he was going past, he just missed the guard rails on the side of the ship and plunged into the water where his bomb and engine exploded almost opposite where I was in the shell room, we were under the water line." All the lights went out, shells rolling, gear rolling everywhere, chaos, panic,

41:00 "What will we do now? We are locked here."

# Tape 8

00:00 That particular incident finished okay because no damage was done, how they missed us we will never know. Once again, we all lived to tell the tale.

**What was the general talk amongst the men on the ship about kamikaze,**

01:00 **the mentality of the kamikaze pilots?**

I think the whole thing can be summed up in one word, we heard that these Japanese people were

prepared to commit suicide in their aircraft and they were named after the Japanese divine wind kamikaze, that is what the word means. Some wag on the ship christened them a zombie

01:30 and we always referred to them as zombies. I think that sums the whole attitude of the ship's company up precisely.

**Can you explain that a bit more?**

What is a zombie, how would you define a zombie? With evil intent, mad

02:00 off his rocker. We just thought they were hopeless and I found out later on after the war, talking to a friend of mine who had been a captain of one of the little frigates or something up there at the time, he said, "Our instructions were very clear, it was

02:30 relatively simple once an aircraft at as many thousand feet sets itself on a course to hit a target down below, the closer he gets to it the pilot can only see across the top of his engine, he can't see down below what he is aiming at or beneath that," the tactic was, particularly with a small ship that was very manoeuverable, once you knew they were headed for you, you just turned in and under them, it was simple.

03:00 How many times they did that successfully [I don't know], but it was the obvious answer. The other thing about Shropshire was that Brian Castles' radar system was also controlled not only the quick firing anti-aircraft guns but also the eight inch guns and we had a system whereby we could put a high explosive shell in one of the guns

03:30 on the turret, you could do two if you like but you had one with a high explosive shell and these were fuses were set at 5000 yards or 2000 yards or 1500 yards and once the aircraft came straight on a straight course at you, you could fire, they had a control system where they could fire the shell and it exploded at that distance

04:00 And we unde stood a shell that size, a high explosive shell exploding, as long as it got within 250 yards of that aircraft it was enough to blow him off course. We shot down quite a few aircraft like that.

**You were involved with the Borneo**

04:30 **Assault, can you tell me about this?**

My thoughts on this are not what you call popular thoughts in official history political correctness. To go into it fully it would pay somebody who was interested to read The Unnecessary War

05:00 by Peter [Charlton], he is now an editor of the Courier Mail, he was in the CMF [Citizens Military Force] officer, probably retired now, a military historian, and he talks about the tragedy of the Labor Government under Curtin sending troops to Bougainville

05:30 and to Borneo. If you look at the map, these terrible incidents and the historic incidents that I am talking are happening in Leyte, Mindanao, Lingayen Gulf and by this time the central Pacific forces are attacking Okinawa and Iwo Jima, getting close to the Japanese homeland. Borneo was

06:00 a thousand kilometres to the south of us, why send good infantry men and sacrifice their lives in a campaign for what? I don't pretend to know all the answers but my reading of the history and of the government and the people and the naval histories and army histories

06:30 suggest to me that there were simply political motives for post-war positioning to have Australian forces in those areas.

**What was your personal involvement in this?**

The same, Shropshire went to Labuan and did bombardments, we went to Balikpapan and did bombardments. Contrary to the tense

07:00 atmosphere of the bombardments as we went across the Pacific in the island hopping campaign and in the Philippines, Balikpapan was, we were there five or seven days before the landings, the Japanese had no aircraft or ships, I think a couple of Jap scout planes flew over a couple of times, hopeless. We sat there

07:30 and bombarded and we bombarded. Somebody would say, "There is a likely target, that building over there," and bang it. The Shell Company owned the refinery and all the works there, an enormous area along the crest of the sea front where there was a crest of a long line of hills and ridges and at the back was a huge range of farm tanks,

08:00 huge numbers of tanks, they were set on fire either by aircraft bombing or our shell fire. I was on watch by this time, I was in the ADP, Aircraft Defence Position, for the last few months of the war and I was up there with our team, there was six of us, three on each side. This is at the very top of the ship

08:30 above the compass platform and the super structure and the name says aircraft defence position,

responsible for picking up aircraft overhead and all this sort of stuff. There was also a point there which you controlled the smaller arms, the four inch guns, one on the starboard side, and you are sitting there with the binoculars and two other blokes there and

09:00 Lieutenant Osborne was a good bloke, everybody liked him, a reserve bloke, not a permanent bloke, he answers the telephone, he says, “I have got to go, I will be back in about a quarter of an hour or 20 minutes,” he said, “Mattiske, you take the headphones and direct them, here is the map,” he was directing a bombardment. I have got this map of all these Dutch establishments and homes and positions all along the foreshore and whatnot,

09:30 here I am having a lot of fun, “Right, one up, 500, shoot,” bang! “Where will we try this?” and I am looking at all these places on the map, we are having a ball, it was a joke. There was an American aircraft in the pipe coming spotting out before the shot and I could hear him, he was hooked into our system as well as the guns and we were all talking to each other and he is laughing like mad. He said, “Hey, what’s wrong, what are you

10:00 laughing for?” He said, “You have just landed a few four inch shells on the governor’s tennis court,” a big building there which was the governor’s summer residence, he lived there in the wet season and at the back there was a tennis court and I had managed to land a couple of shells right on the tennis court. Terrible stuff. Sadly, the 7th Division landed there, they did an

10:30 absolutely fantastic job as infantry men.

**How does a ship like the Shropshire interact with a landing and for this mainly?**

On all these operations I am talking about we would line up, usually before dawn, and we would all get into our positions, perhaps a line cruising along the coast or whatever, slowly. Our targets would be selected

11:00 to bombard away. Tear up all the beaches and any fortifications or strong points, and while this was going on, the landing ship’s infantry, and I should mention the [HMAS] Manoora, the [HMAS] Kanimbla and the [HMAS] Westralia here because the Americans thought that they were the most proficient landing ship’s infantry in the whole Pacific, they were fantastic the way they got things organised.

11:30 The marines or the infantry would be poured into these landing craft and then they would run to the beach, our job was to make sure that we lifted our fire or fired ahead of them so they weren’t hurt when they did the landing. Simple as all that but it required a lot of coordination, a lot of planning.

12:00 **How long did you spend around Borneo?**

Only a couple of weeks, then we were called back to Manila, Subic Bay. We did a couple of runs out into the South China Sea on occasions because there was talk, intelligence information, that the Japanese were, the few of their remaining ships and warships were, sailing up the

12:30 Indochina and Chinese coast, hugging the coast. We did one run out there which everybody reckoned we were going to run into a couple of Japanese cruisers and off we went in the middle of the night, about twenty four hours later the signal came back, “It’s all right There is nothing there, turn round and go home again.” We were in

13:00 that famous Subic Bay which had been the original base of the United States 7th Fleet for generations. One midday or so, by about midday, late in the morning, there is a buzz going round the ship, something interesting has happened, I don’t know who it was but somebody announced over the loud speaker system, we were all out there chipping paint

13:30 and doing jobs the usual things in harbour, that there was a special type bomb dropped on a place in Japan. Little more information, it was an atomic bomb, one bomb and it destroyed a city, that is not bad going, we liked that.

14:00 If you think we are callous about killing 60, 70 or 80,000 Japanese or whatever it was, you have got to remember this, Shropshire has been going now for a long time, right across that Pacific campaign, all around you ships were being hit and we hadn’t been hit. In the Lingayen Gulf, of all

14:30 the battleships and cruisers in there for the three days before the landing, only four ships, Shropshire was only one of them that wasn’t hit and we had plenty of near misses and I think we were at the stage where we were saying to ourselves, “It is only a matter of time in percentages,” and we had been talking to the fellows ashore in Manila when we used to get an occasional run into Manila or Subic Bay to stretch our legs

15:00 and there was one mob, the First Cavalry Division, and we covered a number of their landings and if ever we saw any of these blokes we would say, “Hello,were Shropshire you are so and so.” We said, “What are you blokes doing, what is up, where are you going next?” and they said, “We have been issued with our winter clothing, there was only one place, it couldn’t be anywhere else, Japan.”

15:30 We were also being told that Japan was going to fight like demons if we hit their home soil, they were in big trouble. Since at the time, now I remember talking to some of the blokes in the signal division and whatnot, I don’t know whether they knew anything for sure but the word got around that Shropshire

and the older ships of the 7th Fleet would be used to do the first

16:00 bombardments for the landings on, not Honshu, Hokkaido is the northern island, the one on the west, that is where they were going to hit first. We were the oldest ships, not like the new 3rd Fleet and 5th Fleet that the Americans had built in recent years and we were expendable, this is the story that went around, so we were to be used first.

16:30 Already at Iwo Jima the casualty percentage was very high and at Okinawa too, not at Okinawa until they got ashore, but at Iwo Jima it was pretty rough. They were talking about 60, 70 80 per cent casualties in the first wave. You can imagine our feelings,

17:00 when the 2nd bomb was dropped and we were told that the Japanese could be settling for peace.

**What was your aside from your thoughts on the war and where you might be going next, what was the talk about a bomb that was this powerful?**

At that stage

17:30 nobody knew much about it except that I think we were told that two masses of uranium meeting would cause this nuclear explosion and that was it. We didn't know any more than that.

**What about the size of the**

18:00 **destruction that it caused, did it cause any questions to be asked just in casual conversation?**

No.

**This must have been a new weapon and being working with weaponry, was it a talking point, the power of this?**

I don't think it was discussed a great deal, I don't think so.

18:30 Having been told its destructive powers, naturally our first thoughts were, "Well, if that is the end that is a good thing, we will all be going home, the war will be over." Another interesting little side thought on the end of the war. It was announced on 15th August that Japan had surrendered.

19:00 It depends on the way you look at it. When it was arranged for a delegation to come to Manila to sign a cease fire and that is all it was, it was to be a cease fire, MacArthur had to send our fighter aircraft, somebody had to send, it mightn't have been MacArthur, our fighter aircraft had to go over towards the

19:30 coast of Japan and escort the aircraft bringing that delegation because they were frightened that they would be shot down by their own Japanese fighters because at that stage the men who controlled the Japanese government, mainly army generals, had refused to surrender and they weren't going to surrender. It was only after

20:00 a lot of pushing and shoving and even an assault by a battalion on the Imperial Palace which had fortunately kept under control that the Emperor was able to make his speech saying it is now not to surrender he said, "The war has not gone well for Japan and it must cease." After

20:30 the second bomb we get told to get prepared to go to sea and our task group is going to sail to Tokyo Bay. Shropshire was flag ship by this time because Australia, having been hit many times at Lingayen was taken home, was sent to England for repairs. Our first people to go ashore, we arrived two days before the signing of the surrender on the [USS] Missouri,

21:00 the 2nd September, we were there on 29th August, we got there. All these things can be checked up as fact. Not long afterwards, some of our people started to go ashore to American headquarters where they were setting up communications and things like that.

**What was the scene like, what were you seeing as you arrived there, what was the physical place like?**

We arrived

21:30 in weather that was overcast, humid and dull, oppressive, still quite hot. Naturally I used to get back up to my old spot where the big binoculars were and I would be gazing along the shoreline looking for activity and people and what was happening amongst the wreckage, there was obviously a lot of buildings that were damaged and destroyed.

**What was the destruction**

22:00 **around the place like?**

After the surrender things started to settle down fairly quickly and we got asked, there was a notice on the ship's notice board to report to the ship's office and there was 30 names which most of them I have written on a special card in there. We report, "What is going on?"

22:30 "We've picked you blokes," probably mostly because we were a fair size tall blokes and we had been on

the ship for quite a long time, no new chums, “There is going to be the official hoisting of the flag at the British Embassy and you blokes are to be part of the guard.” Fine, that is a beauty, a day ashore.

23:00 “But hang on, we are going to send, you are all going over to the KG5, that is the biggest battleship, the King George V, because they have deigned to allow some colonials to be there and you are it but you are not going to be in your khaki shorts and shirts like you dress on board our ships, your going to get pommie gear.” We go over to the KG V and they issue us with

23:30 Bombay bloomers, the white ones, black socks, knee length socks, “We are not going to wear that stuff,” “That is it, you have got to wear that or else.” We all go back to Shropshire and there was a number of blokes who were competent with needle and thread and some of them had sewing machines they used to do tailoring for the people, that was their side job, so we all get these blokes, “Here, cut those legs off, make them decent like Australian shorts,”

24:00 and we tiddled things up and the next day we get the duty destroyer comes along, a British destroyer comes alongside and we all climb aboard over the rails and we are heading off into the wharf at Tokyo. She is slowly pulling into a wharf, there is burnt out warehouses and damaged things everywhere,

24:30 we don’t have to do anything, the other poor sailors they are getting all their lines ready to throw overboard fore and aft to tie the ship up so we can get ashore and there is activity, little Japs running everywhere and in front of one bit of warehouse there was still a dais with steps leading up into a door into the warehouse, this bloke gets on it and yells out something,

25:00 They all spring to attention and he salutes as all navy people salute each other, ships as they come along the side or whatever, and there we are. A funny thought hit me,

25:30 Shropshire had been all the way from New Guinea, had done sixteen or seventeen major operations, our bombardments and actions had killed thousands of Japanese and that was the first Jap I had ever seen. Unbelievable, isn’t it?

**Did that thought hit you hard?**

26:00 I found it peculiar, interesting.

**How did that make you feel, that thought?**

My first thought to this bloke, and I never spoke to him, I only saw him in the distance, but my first thoughts were, “The navies around the world are funny, aren’t they, friend or enemy there is a code to follow.”

26:30 He was saluting us as we were coming alongside, just like we would have saluted an American or British or Australian ship that sailed past.

**Did it seem strange to have hated a faceless enemy?**

No, I don’t think any thoughts like that ever went through my mind, they were simply the enemy. They were the people who

27:00 had attacked us. Several interesting things about this little expedition ashore. We were given very strict instructions in the orders of the day, we were each given a sheet of paper, not just told about it, the Japanese are still not to be trusted,

27:30 under no circumstances were you to accept any food or drink that was offered to you, you weren’t to buy or try and get anything. If you were accosted or spoken to by a Japanese, first you had to stay in a group, if you were accosted or spoken to by a Japanese you immediately form a circle facing outwards because they were concerned about sabotage or knife attacks, whatever, I don’t know.

28:00 The Japanese people were still in that sort of twilight zone between war and peace. How were we going to be received, we were the enemy that had just destroyed them and there was still that army kamikaze influence there? We get aboard, some American army trucks, the army is pouring ashore, they are going pretty well, they are pretty well organised and they drive us through down-

28:30 town Tokyo, through the city, past the famous Imperial Hotel which was built by Frank Lloyd Wright, the American architect, after the earthquakes in 1923, a famous building. We get to the big boulevard that goes round the Imperial Palace, huge grounds, moat, wall,

29:00 we think, “This is pretty dirty, grubby, they have obviously been under conditions where they can’t keep things right.” Before we got to that area we passed some sort of inner suburban areas and I was horrified. The Manila we were used to we saw buildings knocked over and rubble and they were cleaning them up again,

29:30 basements or ground floors were being organised to put shops in and things like that, in these areas of the city there were nothing, just cinders and ashes, acres of it. People, women and kids, pottering around, poking around it with sticks. What had happened, some months before the American super forces had done a number of fire incendiary raids, fire raids because of the Japanese type of

construction

30:00 so they set it alight and then another wave, we were told this afterwards, we didn't know at the time, then a wave of bombers with high explosives to scatter the fires again and then more incendiaries. I don't think even to this day anybody knows how many people were killed on those nights of those raids. I heard stories that people were killed,

30:30 the fires were so intense that they jumped into ponds and things and they were killed because the water was boiling. We passed the Dite building, you still see it on TV when the Japanese are having a political crisis, still there, exactly the same, not painted, very grubby, run down and scungy, and we get to the Embassy

31:00 so they line us up a great big driveway in front of the long building and in the centre was the door and a flagpole, flag mask, we colonials were put way out on the end where we couldn't interfere or disgrace ourselves and Blamey arrived, Admiral Collins, Collins was back with us as our flag, Captain Nicholls, MacArthur arrived,

31:30 Lord Fraser, Admiral Lord Frazer they all arrived and they hoisted the flag and played God Save the King and the Stars and Stripes.

**Was this emotional?**

No.

**Why not?**

Because we were put out there and the flags were being raised there in the middle so the blokes on the end of our line, there were about 30 The blokes right on the end couldn't see, so they moved out a bit to look down the roadway and then we formed a little bit of a bow to

32:00 spoiled the whole operation. I don't think the English, our English officers and petty officers in charge of the parade, appreciated it at all.

**How did you feel about being the colonials at the end of the line when Australia had actually fought more of the Japanese than the British?**

Somewhat hostile,

32:30 but we didn't mind because we had been with the Americans for so long. This is an interesting point Shropshire was part of the 7th Fleet, our task force with other American ships, several fleets stayed in Manila and Subic Bay and our task force was sent to Tokyo and we became under the operational command of the 3rd Fleet. When Lord

33:00 Fraser and the British Pacific Fleet arrived he apparently made noises to the effect that we were to be taken over by him or his staff. Our people said no, that had a funny consequence because after swinging around the anchor in Tokyo Bay for awhile and only occasionally getting ashore

33:30 they said, "We want to go for a cruise or two now and enjoy the fruits of victory," so we heard that we were going to go for a trip to visit China, Shanghai, Hong Kong and whatnot and then come back to Tokyo Bay. Lord Fraser is reputed – and I say this carefully and you would have to check other history books about this, the buzz went around the ship and I understand it [to be] true,

34:00 I was in the signals office at this time and heard a lot of these things, he said, "As Shropshire is not under my operational command she is not allowed to be in any ports under my command." The Americans turned around and said, "Well, send Shropshire down to Wakayama," which is a port on the Inland Sea. We went for a cruise down there for about a week and had a bit of fun down there.

**What did you do down there?**

34:30 Nothing. Went ashore a few times. There were two or three of us, three of us, Kevin [Francis] Day was one. We went ashore, a city of 200,000 people, it is a well known textile place, Japanese textile industry, I said,

35:00 "We don't want to go into the city, let's go exploring." So we broke away from the wharf area and we went up along the beaches along the foreshore and we left the city and we were going through little settlements, Japanese fishing villages. Two important things that stand in my mind, the frightful smell of salted dried fish

35:30 they would hang, catch the fish, bring them in and hang them up like clothes pegs on lines and let them dry out. The smell is frightful.

**What was the attitude of the people like to you?**

Interesting question. We had already found in Tokyo that they virtually ignored you. We

36:00 were just another appendage on the scene. If you got in their way or did something in a shopping degencer [?UNCLEAR] that was not the correct thing and I am not talking about shop lifting or being

violent or aggressive, but just not doing the thing according to the way the Japanese wanted it, you would be told straight away.

36:30 We were up the foreshore walking along this coast for an hour or two and we come to this slightly bigger little settlement with a few houses and village around, I said, “Hey fellows, there is an interesting building, it is a temple, presuming a Shinto temple.” So we walk up, a chap comes out, he has got a robe on, he is obviously the priest and he knows just enough English to say hello or yes and no,

37:00 “Can we come in?” “Yes,” we get up on the first step, “No, back,” one of my friends [said], “What is this bloke up about?” and I woke up, I said, “Hey, this is a temple we’ve got our shoes on, so we took our shoes off and he allowed us to come in.

37:30 But because it was fishing village a lot of the lads had joined the navy and there was on the altar was little photographs of some sailors’ uniforms, blokes who had never come home.

**What was your reaction to seeing this?**

Humble, I suppose. It made you aware of

38:00 the price of war, the cost. These little people, poor, very much lower-class fishermen, just living off catching a few fish and things, I don’t know whether they grew any other products inland, inside the village, outside the village, I thought to myself, “Here are these people, they wouldn't have a clue of what is going on in the world, their sons have gone off and we have killed them.”

38:30 They would [be] just as hurt and upset about it as if I had been killed and my mother was upset.

**What sort of thoughts did it stir up about the purpose of war?**

At that stage probably none, I wouldn’t have been old enough to think too much about it.

**Only in later years?**

39:00 I think there comes a time in every nation’s life where you have got to be prepared to fight and die for certain things. The reasons will never be right but we are not to know the reasons,

39:30 we are just the little people, but we are the ones who are going to suffer the most if we lose or get trampled on. Eventually the time comes when you have got to decide and make a decision, will we fight for what we have got or – does that make sense? A nation survives.

# Tape 9

00:41 **Continuing on from that, what is your view that you were about to express?**

Not always my views but there are a lot of interesting views about this. We have recently gone all through this business about whether the war was a just war or not

01:00 over Iraq and Afghanistan. If you read history over a thousand years you will find out there are movements of people all the time and there will be one society that will get into their heads, their minds, their spirits, to expand to impose their will on someone else. When that happens, what do you do?

01:30 A society will be under attack and at some stage along the line it has to say to itself, “ No..This is what we stand for and we are not going to give that away, we are gong to fight for it.” It might be our land, it might be our spiritual beliefs, it might be our families, our homes, or our political system

02:00 or whatever, but the time comes when that happens. The guilt lies with the people who cause that situation. I am quite satisfied that the guilt doesn’t lie with me or my fellow ex-servicemen, we fired off explosives that killed thousands of people, that is not on my conscience.

02:30 I think I can say I did it without any malice, I did it because we wanted to be efficient and we wanted to win. The navy was in that situation because the army laughed at us and said we are long range snipers, which we are. To fight as an infantry man, across no man’s land in Flanders or Piccadilly

03:00 or in the jungles of New Guinea could be another story, I might have a different attitude to it all totally to that, something else might happen to shape your ideas. Although I don’t think so. Perhaps we will move onto the defence of the nation when this occurs.

03:30 How does a nation uphold what it wants to uphold and defend itself? Britain has had to do this for a thousand years or more. I read an interesting comment a week ago that the Anglo-Saxon system of politics and justice that came through the [UNCLEAR ?Britain]

04:00 common law and handed down to the colonies and Commonwealth as the empire expanded is quite different to, say, to Europe. Certainly so vastly different to Asia and Africa that it doesn't matter. Liberty, a fair go

04:30 and justice, these are the things that have been ingrained into the English speaking world now for a long time and we can't afford to lose it. I will get out my little crystal ball, I don't think anybody who thinks about it can have any doubt that the Middle East and Asian world are now on the rise,

05:00 they see us with everything that we have got and they have got a lot of reasons to be either envious of us or want a better deal, I can understand that, but the long term result would be the imposition on Australia and the English speaking world and America as well and that is why

05:30 we are allied to America, and [the reason] Blair brought Britain into this Iraq business was because we can not afford to lose those things that have made us what we are. Irrespective of the rights of other people. The big question is, having seen a little bit of war, and I didn't see all that

06:00 much of it, having seen some of it and then watch the nation go the way it is, you look on the question of how do you defend yourself? I mentioned the RSL before, I gradually got kicked up the line from being president of a club that we founded that has become a big club in Melbourne, one of the biggest and the best, I was president I was only 23 or 24 years

06:30 of age when a lot of young fellows said, "We are going to do something about this, we are going to stick together and start something going." I finished up on the state executive and the president, Sir William Hall, who was a well known figure in Australia, he allocates the executive members their committees and sub-committees they have to work on and he put me on the defence committee, among other things.

07:00 We didn't do much but we used to meet and discuss things, three or four of us, and make suggestions that went through conferences through agendas to governments and things like that. Out of all that I am convinced that the first line of defence of any nation who is being threatened by anything, whether it be by economics or by military means, it doesn't matter

07:30 the first line of defence is the spirit of the nation. The ships and the aircraft and the bombs and the guns come a very second, second because if you don't have a united, homogeneous society that knows where they are going and what they want you will soon be subverted.

08:00 You don't have to have an enemy land on the shores and kill everybody, they just take you over because you don't have the will to resist because you are fragmented. I can be pessimistic and say I don't think Australia has that will anymore unless there is some major things happen to us.

08:30 I don't like any of the political parties in their defence of upholding Australian tradition but at least for the moment you have got a mob, whatever their other political virtues or disadvantages, have been prepared to stand up and say [that] we have got to go back to a sound type of

09:00 defence of the country. They are only going halfway because they can spend all the money they like on their armies and it doesn't mean a thing if you haven't got the people who are willing to use them.

09:30 To some extent Britain and the following Empire and the Commonwealth were always a little bit mixed up, Britain will always encourage people to come into it but they came in under certain conditions and terms that weren't written but the unwritten requirement was that they absorbed into the

10:00 community and adopted the philosophy and attitudes of the country and worked for it and did whatever they can for it and sadly we are getting to the stage where that is not happening here any more. There are far too many groups of people whose loyalties still lie elsewhere, their philosophies and their religions still lie elsewhere

10:30 and that is not the way to build a strong nation. I am not going to see the end result, I hope that things turn around so it is a good result, sometimes I fear for my grandchildren because after all we went through, I'm not trying to make myself a big fellow or a hero who won the war, but we did have a tough time,

11:00 we were prepared to do it, we faced it and we succeeded. I only hope and pray we are breeding the same sort of people who will do the same thing again.

**What is it about those people which you think they had from what you mentioned before, what kind of character?**

Talking a long time ago,

11:30 we talked about, 'I will honour the flag and serve the King and chiefly obey my parents, teachers and the laws.' You think about that. From time to time we will have families here, real estate agents might have something to rent and they will bring families into this nice complex. We have seen it quite often,

12:00 you see it outside the complex up at Runaway Bay Shopping Centre, you see it on the news all the time, there is no respect for law and order, there is a complete defiance for what we call doing the right

thing, there is a lack of understanding

12:30 of how things succeed because the show, the organisation or the group or whatever, is bigger than the individual. I don't know, perhaps I am not right on this but I think that we have got to that stage where there are too many people in the community who don't

13:00 understand this philosophy.

**I will be a devil's advocate and raise a point which doesn't apply to Anglo-Saxon societies but maybe applies to Germany or Japan during the war, where people did follow one kind of goal but that goal was not for good. Could this be**

13:30 **a result of people who followed that one philosophy?**

If you examine the philosophies and object of Hitler and the Nazi Government and compare it with Baldwin, Chamberlain as prime ministers and then Churchill

14:00 who fought the war, you will find there was a terrible lot of things that were done bad on both sides if you analyse it carefully and come to that dividing line and say, which side had the better right to do what they did, you must say that we did.

**That wasn't the point I was making.**

14:30 **The point I was making [was] the idea of people follow the King and the laws of the land in Germany at the time, they did this, they followed the law of the land and they followed that person but what if that person has the wrong ideas? That was a homogeneous society in a way. Is there a possibility that this could happen?**

15:00 It is always a possibility that this could happen, history shows that, doesn't it? You could debate the motive and the long term results of the French Revolution which to some extent are still with us, was that a good thing or a bad thing? Were those people right? Does it come back to what I said before about the individual?

15:30 A French soldier in some of those divisions that won those great victories under Napoleon, you have got to admire them. You might think that Napoleon was wrong, those German divisions that fought in Africa against the Australians or in Europe in France and in Russia, there were many examples of

16:00 magnificent organisations so on the one level you have got blokes performing magnificently in the best way that human beings can perform and then on the other level you have got the direction and the command which you say this has been set off incorrectly in the wrong direction.

**On that point, having fought the Japanese,**

16:30 **maybe not the commanders, but do you admire any of the Japanese?**

Good question. I don't have to think about it a lot because I don't know many Japanese. I will give you an example, I can get on alright with people regardless. Some years ago

17:00 I got a message through the Lutheran Church that there was a young lady who was going to be boarding up here in Bayview Street, Japanese family with a Lutheran background, there is quite a few Lutherans in Japan, so I went to visit them. This girl, sixteen, seventeen year old girl, was staying with an Australian lady who had helped run an English

17:30 academy in Toyota City, she had been there for many years and come backwards and forwards to Australia. She is retired now and all the kids she taught, when they came on holidays they came to stay with her and visit her because they loved her so much. I got to know those kids very well through this girl that we were told about. We got on famously, there were some lovely kids there,

18:00 I used to take them down to our home and play mah-jong with them, bring them down to our swimming pool because this lady didn't have a swimming pool, we got on all right so there was, no, I think the answer to your question, there was no personal animosity.

**I had better ask some questions about returning home.**

18:30 **Just tell us about coming home from your wartime service.**

We sailed back into Sydney just in time for Christmas 1945. We went home had leave, came back

19:00 short leave, I can remember, I don't remember Christmas, I remember spending New Year's Eve with the Webb family out at Roseville. We were settling down to a peacetime routine by this time, I was pretty cunning and knew my way about for the last few months of the war, I had a job, which was called the signals distribution office messenger,

19:30 I had one of those pads and as the signals come in from the signal office on the flag deck the PO [petty officer] bloke would type them out and take them to whatever and I would run around the ship giving these messages, some days you had nothing to do and I did 24 hours on and 48 hours off, so at midday I

said, “Bye-bye, I am off,” and didn’t come back for two days.

20:00 We were in Sydney Harbour and I would be out at Roseville or wherever. They took us down to Melbourne, did a parade through the city which I refused to march in, because I reckoned I was past the marching stage, obeying that sort of orders, all the new recruits were pouring aboard. We went to Hobart and had a wonderful week, 10 days in Hobart, hospitality fantastic, back to Sydney

20:30 and I thought to myself, “The newspapers were saying demobilisation is going to take six or nine months, twelve months before the whole thing is wound up.” I was a young bloke, just 21, hadn’t been in the navy all that long, no dependants, I will be here forever. When we get back to Sydney, Saturday morning, as though it happened yesterday, “The following ratings

21:00 are to report to the ship’s office for draft ashore.” Forget about that, that won’t be my name coming up, all the old hands, all me old mates who had been there for years, “Hey, hang on, there is some names who joined the ship long after I did whats going on here,” the next thing my name comes up. “Go down, report to so and so, you can get your transfer rail vouchers, there is a troop train tonight, report to Port Lonsdale,

21:30 to HMAS Lonsdale, Port Melbourne, when you get there,” and off we went. “You little beauty, goodbye navy, goodbye discipline, goodbye paint, goodbye rust, goodbye everything, we are going home.” We were stupid. Not long later the Melbourne Herald comes out with the headlines ‘Shropshire to take victory contingents to London’.

22:00 For the Victory celebrations in London, and I thought, “You rotten bastards.” Here we have borne the brunt of the whole thing and here are all the recruits coming off from Flinders and never seen salt water in their lives and they are going off to be feted as the victors. Terrible. That was it. They had to give us jobs to keep us occupied,

22:30 they sent me and two of my mates up to the Flinders Lane, we said, “What is at Flinders Lane? What has Flinders Lane got to do with the navy?” “Here is the bus tickets, go up there and report to warrant officer,” and off we go, naval patrol. I said, “We are not going to become cops, screws, at this time of our lives.”

23:00 “Go on, just put your name down for a job, otherwise I am in trouble.” I said, “Alright, we will go,” he said, “If you don’t like it come back.” So off we go. Warrant officer comes out, it is the father of Johnny, he didn’t know whether to say Dad, sir or what, he was the warrant officer in charge of the naval patrol. The naval patrol is the blokes who keeps order for the sailors on leave.

23:30 He told us what we were expected to do and I said, “Fair enough, we just drive around in the paddy wagon and if anybody is in trouble we just get them out of the way and take them back to the depot, we don’t want to [be] arresting old sailors at this time of life, okay.” He said, “You will be in a team, I will bring you in to meet the bloke who will be the leading seaman who will be in your team.” We go out the back where there is a mess and bunks and a kitchen and everything

24:00 for us to live there, real good setup and our boss is the leading seaman Johnny Kumm, Johnny lives over here, we have been friends all our lives. We spent a few weeks going around Melbourne, we would walk around with our gaiters on and our side belts and looking like very official people. All the sheilas in the

24:30 picture theatres would ask us to come in because we said, “If anybody causes any trouble just tell us and will take them out.” “Thank you very much, would you like a free ticket to come and see the show?” That sort of stuff, we had a ball.

**Did you meet any sheilas?**

No, didn’t meet any. Then we get told we are going out to Royal Park and we were demobilised. There we were free at last.

**How did you meet your wife?**

25:00 I was married first not long after the war, not successful, not much to tell about it. I had a good career in the Shell Company but decided to go into business myself, I got into hospital where I met Dee

25:30 and that was good, that was fine, so we have been together now for 30 odd years.

**Tell us about that, you went to hospital, how long were you in?**

I am a pretty stubborn sort of a bloke, I had a big operation on an abyss and cyst on my back, it was considered due to war causes but they didn’t worry about that in those days,

26:00 we were well off and didn’t have to worry about asking for benefits, I never asked for benefits from the Repatriation Department and so I went to hospital, they operated and cut this thing out, it immobilised me for awhile but I wanted to go to the toilet so I got out and went myself and collapsed. The next thing I know this figure rushes in and she is ordering, “Get a wheel chair,”

26:30 and I am wheeled back to my bed. The same thing happened the next day and she said, “I am sick of you,” and I think the matron said, “That bloke there has been in trouble a couple of times, you look after

him." She was a widow, she had married a much older man just after the war who died and she was a young girl as a widow.

27:00 One thing led to another and she told me about her problems as a war widow and I was on the state executive of the RSL, I helped her through all sorts of things at that stage, not thinking much except she was a nice person and eventually we got together, simple as all that. We bought a pub up in Werrimull. Werrimull is a little dusty town in the Mallee. Then we acquired the

27:30 major interest in the paddle steamer the Avoca on the Murray, that was more or less a floating licensed restaurant, entertainment floating up and down the river, magnificent.

**Was part of your reason for buying that because you have been in the navy?**

No, it was in bad trouble and one of the well known identities in Mildura, whom I knew quite well, and he knew

28:00 we had sold the pub, he had a number of bakery shops and businesses right through that area and he put some money into the Avoca just as an investment but it was going bad and he said to me, "If you have nothing to do would you like to take this over?" I said, "What control do I have?" He said, "It has a mortgage on it and if you pay,

28:30 take over the mortgage you have got the lot," so I did. I turned it around into a profit making enterprise almost straight away because it was losing money and we were going well but in those little town companies there is always a lot of jealousy and back biting. I said, "Listen, you find the money to buy me out and I am off," so they did that and we bought the

29:00 hotel /motel at this place called Kilcunda near Phillip Island, down where the penguins are. Down there we ran everything. The shire was a little country shire with farmers only and they came to me, "Can you help us do things?" and I said, "What do you want to do?"

29:30 They said, one bloke said, "I am the shire's representative on the Melbourne Tourist Authority, you have had experience in hotels," and they knew about the paddle steamer and all that sort of stuff and I had been a candidate for the Liberal Party in Mildura and nearly won the seat of the Country Party and they said, "We want somebody new with a few ideas, would you be the shire's representative?" So I was. For quite a few years I was

30:00 the Bass Shire representative on the Melbourne Tourist Authority. Another bloke and I, who was a retired colonel out of the army, we put together a master plan and all that sort of stuff, what happened to it I am not sure but it was the foundation of the tourist industry down there. We sold out eventually with a good price and came up here.

30:30 **What do you feel that you gained benefits you gained form your wartime experience?**

I think the ones have already been mentioned discipline, knowing how to stick to a plan, knowing how to be tolerant with people you are living cheek by jowl with. Knowing how to

31:00 accept an order and obey it, but I must admit by the end of the war we were browned off and any petty instruction was resented and you couldn't do much about it. From a purely practical point of view about handling machinery and guns and all that sort of thing, nothing ever applied after the war. Technically

31:30 We were all still in the naval reserve, we were never discharged, we were only demobilised but I get notices occasionally about what was happening in the reserves but I never became active in it. Some of my friends did but I was living at that stage in the Ringwood Croydon area, 20 miles inland from the city and I wasn't going to go down to the naval depot of a night

32:00 to get further instructions or whatever. I got involved in the RSL where there were no navy people. Ringwood was a little market garden orchard place at the time.

32:30 **How important is Anzac Day to you?**

Most important, absolutely most important. It is the foundation of the nation, it was the building and putting together of the soul of the nation. After some of my pessimistic remarks before I must say there is great optimism

33:00 here because, as you know, every year thousands and thousands of young people flock to Gallipoli. It is a magnificent place, scenically it is beautiful and an awe-inspiring place, but the man who put the thing together for the Australian government after the war was Dr Charles Bean and his ideas were both sensible and brilliant.

33:30 He was commissioned in 1919 to go back with a commission to the battlefields and search and find out things. Instead of building vast memorials and cenotaphs and things, he said as he went around he found little groups of bodies of the battalion who had done action and been killed on that night or day or whatever and so instead of getting them all together he organised the party, presumably

34:00 mostly Turkish labourers and peasants that were hired to do the manual work, to dig the graves and put what was left of the bodies and their equipment all together where they fell. As you go round Gallipoli

now you see all these little spots, some with only 25 or 30 graves in it and it is touching. It is absolutely touching.

34:30 If you can go to Gallipoli and read the inscription right on the Anzac Beach by Kemal Ataturk and don't have tears in your eyes, [if you don't,] there is something wrong with you. It is unbelievable. Whether the politicians and the new people coming to Australia understand it or believe it or not is beside the point, that is where the soul of Australia was made.

35:00 It started there and then it continued in Flanders, in Gallipoli, my school teachers, Uncle David Smith, other people that I know, some distant members of the family, they all fought there. Surprisingly enough, people don't believe this, they think it might be Australians skiting, but the AIF in France was

35:30 the most important body of men, of infantry men, probably that the world has ever seen. There are lots of quotes and British generals and brigadiers who are on [Sir Douglas] Haig's staff and other people planning things and whatnot eventually wrote their memoirs

36:00 and they said a number of things, the action at Villiers-Bretonneux, alone and we can't go into the details it was probably the most amazing piece of infantry work of the whole war on either side and the same thing happened at Péronne a few months later.

36:30 **Can I ask you to bring it back to you, how you feel a part of this tradition?**

Because the spirit of the Anzac was infused into all the services in the Second World War and we thought of ourselves as Anzacs or as descendants of the Anzacs, I did anyway, I don't know what the others felt but that is the way I felt.

**How did this help you?**

Never give in, keep going,

37:00 stick by your friends and your mates. Just harking back to the AIF again, I know we are trying to make a record for asara [?UNCLEAR], I have been to France a few times and I know that battle field area pretty well I have been to quite a few places there. The AIF eventually combined together

37:30 as five divisions and one army from the early 1916 to the end of the war in 1918 were opposed at different times to twenty-six German divisions including the Imperial Guards. They were never beaten, they never lost an engagement and six of the German divisions they opposed were disbanded after the actions because they were written off.

38:00 That is how efficient our people were and we must never forget that they were highly trained, disciplined people, sadly too many stories go around about the Australians being wild hoohahs, boozed up half the time, shouting and yelling and making a nuisance of themselves and just being good fighters outside the pub after six o'clock at night. That is so wrong,

38:30 the infantry in France and in Libya and Syria and Greece in the Second World War were disciplined, cool, calm under fire, they knew their trade, they knew their stuff and what's more, they were prepared to accept their losses when they occur.

39:00 **In relation to you, would you like any final words or thoughts to your service, your wartime service?**

I think I am better off from knowing people on the lower deck, my mates, I think I am better off for knowing people like Captain Collins, later Admiral and certainly Godfrey Nichols, these are

39:30 people you never forget and that in turn led me into the RSL where I became reasonably well know to Sir George Holland the National President, he used to take me aside to suggest little things to me because he could see I wanted to do things. He never told me, he encouraged me. He was the sort of a bloke like Godfrey Nichols, he never ordered me to do something, he must have seen there was a light in my eye that wanted to do something and he pushed me down that path, and I'd do it

40:00 whether I would have always been like that I don't know, but I think the naval service had a lot to do with it.

**INTERVIEW ENDS**