Australians at War Film Archive

Alfred Johnson (Gordon) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 8th October 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1080

Tape 1

00:58 **Gordon thanks very much for talking to**

01:00 **us this morning on behalf of the Archive and everyone involved I express our appreciation. Perhaps we could start with the summary and start with where you were born and when.**

Yes I was born in North Adelaide in South Australia on the 2nd March 1923. And I have an older brother, there's only the two of us.

What did your dad do?

My father was in a company called Goldsborough Mort & Company

01:30 and he was a departmental manager for them up until his death actually.

Where did you go to school?

Well I went to school initially at Walkerville Primary School. We lived in Walkerville and then I went from there to the Stapleton Technical Boys High School and that's the school I left to join the navy.

When did you join up?

I joined on the 26th February 1940, just a few days before my

02:00 17th birthday.

Where did you join up?

Yes I joined - what actually happened there was an ad for people to join, to train as telegraphists and - that was in the Sunday paper - on the Monday I went down to Birkenhead Naval Depot near Port Adelaide, obtained the papers. My father etc signed them and I was on my way to the navy within about 10 days of signing the papers.

Where did you do most of your training?

Yes my

02:30 training was - all of my initial training and subsequent courses were carried out at HMAS Cerberus or Flinders Naval Depot in Victoria as we called it.

And what was the first ship you were posted to?

My first ship was the six inch cruiser HMAS Hobart.

And can you take us through your service on HMAS Hobart without going into any details at this stage. The major areas you ...

Yes. Yeah I can do that fairly briefly. I joined the ship in

03:00 1941 in Sydney, I think it was May. Shortly after I joined we sailed for the Mediterranean. We served in the Mediterranean Fleet operating as the 7th Cruiser Squadron. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 the ship sailed two days later for Singapore and we were then in Singapore, Java area. After all

03:30 of the action there, (UNCLEAR) we then came back to Australia very short leave and the next event was the Coral Sea Action. And after Coral Sea we had the invasion of Guadalcanal. When, in 1943 after two years on Hobart I did leave the ship and did a course. I then joined HMAS Moresby.

What course was that?

That was leading telegraphist, what we call

04:00 “WT3” in those days.

And up to this time what had been your role on the Hobart?

Yes I was a telegraphist on the Hobart and I joined her as an ordinary tel [telegraphist] and we were of course the radio communicators of the ship.

And after your course, after you left Hobart you did the course, where were you posted?

Well I was promoted then to leading telegraphist and posted to Moresby and I operated, ran the WT [Wireless Telegraphy] Department on Moresby.

04:30 We were doing escort and anti-submarine work in Australian waters for a short period and then we went to Papua New Guinea. She went up there as the hydrographic vessel surveying the harbours as the Japanese were pushed out from Milne Bay right through, Buna Gona, Madang etc. Then after my stint on Moresby, and the Japanese were certainly retreating, I came back

05:00 to Australia to the naval shore Wireless Station in Townsville.

When was that?

Oh geez, that would have been just before the end of the war. I was in Townsville when the atomic bomb was dropped in 1945. And after that back to - while I had a short stint on the corvette Townsville, what we called a peer head jump, they needed a leading tel

05:30 on her urgently to go to Rabaul for the mine sweeping so that the larger ships could get into take the POW’s [Prisoners of War] off. I was only on her for about six weeks. I was then promoted to Petty Officer telegraphist, back to Flinders as an instructor.

Sorry what’s a peer head jump?

A peer head jump is when unexpectedly you’re just given orders that you’ve got to join the ship immediately. She happened to be in Townsville so you pack

06:00 your kit and off you go. And it’s an unplanned, unexpected situation.

And after that period of time?

After the instructing and I was instructing in the naval depot until about 1948 I was then sent to the UK [United Kingdom]. By then I was Petty Officer Wireless Instructor and we were very short of telegraphists in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] at the time. And

06:30 I had to set up a training school in Devonport to retrain the ex-RN [Royal Navy] telegraphists who had been recruited to serve for 6 years in the RAN. I retrained those fellows and then the ship commissioned.

Can you take us through to your retirement from the navy?

Retirement. Yes when I - I actually did encounter fairly major

07:00 health problems which started when I was in England. And I finished up in hospital for quite a stretch. And I was discharged from the navy at the end of 1949. I’d completed almost ten years and when I recovered I worked for civil aviation and in fact they sent me out to Cocos Island in 1952 as the senior communications officer to set up the

07:30 the - communications facility for the operation of the air service to South Africa and I spent two very enjoyable years at Cocos.

Before we leave or gallop too much forward I just want to go back and pick up a couple of details in summary. Can you take us through the major engagements that you were in the Mediterranean?

Yes. In the Med [Mediterranean] the - as soon as we arrived in Port Taufiq before we

08:00 entered the canal we were subjected to a very heavy - our first ever air raid, my first war experience. We were raided for several hours and the Cunard liner which was operating as a transport called the Georgic was hit and set on fire. She was very close to us and our ship did bring some of the survivors over to our sick bay. We then entered the Med. The canal was a fairly tricky

08:30 passage because the Germans had dropped acoustic and magnetic mines in the canal and the spotters, army spotters, put flags on the side of the canal and as you approached these the silence was piped [called] and all machinery stopped and you had to glide over these areas. And then we joined the Med fleet and in the Med we were operating with the fleet the sweeps which

09:00 were undertaken to try and bring the Italian ships to action but we were heavily bombed and attacked by torpedo bombers. And then as the 7th Cruiser Squadron ship we then carried out bombardments of the enemy on the north African coast and Bardia and on Halfaya Pass and Tobruk etc. And then of course when the Japs attacked we were out of there. We arrived in Singapore about

09:30 a month before Singapore surrendered. The two capital ships, the [HMS] Repulse and [HMS] Prince of Wales had been sunk off the Malay Coast about 26 days before we arrived there. We then did escort work because supplies were still being brought into the island. But when we arrived back there a fortnight before the surrender when we tied up again, the situation was absolutely chaotic.

We'll come

10:00 **into that into some detail when we go through the story. The, in the Pacific, just the major battles that you were in?**

The major action in the Pacific was the Coral Sea with the Americans and again, at Guadalcanal where the Battle of Savo took place and HMAS Canberra was lost with other American ships.

Okay. We'll go back to the Cocos Islands and perhaps

10:30 **if you could just sweep us through your civilian life?**

Probably the two most interesting enjoyable years of my entire career. The air force, No. 5 Aircraft Construction Squadron were the contractors to the department to build the airfield. There was an old war time press steel matting runway there and some war time huts. I flew out in a Lancaster aircraft which was used in those days

11:00 by Qantas for pilot training and we landed on the old PSB matting strip. I messed with the air force officers. The CO [Commanding Officer] was a man named Nobby Lins, Wing Commander. And I had to operate radio equipment for what we called a courier service which came in about every fortnight while the field was being built and establishing communication

11:30 links with the stations that we had to operate with which included Mauritius and Jakarta etc and Perth. And when the air service commissioned we settled down to a normal air radio service and had a staff of three other people.

And after the Cocos Islands?

Well I came back to Australia and I then - Civil Aviation wanted to send me off to remote areas again and I was still single and I didn't want to do that so I

12:00 resigned and I entered industry and I became the - or started as the assistant commercial manager with the telecommunications division of the Phillips Electrical Company in Adelaide. I stayed with them for, oh a couple of years. Then decided that my future as a career was to be in technical administration. I had pretty good good technical background and I learnt a lot about the commercial world in

12:30 my job at Phillips. So I entered the public service. And had a pretty interesting career there.

And what department did you work in in the public service?

Well I rejoined Department of Civil Aviation and they sent me out to Darwin to - there were major changes in the department and Northern Territory had been disbanded as a separate region and merged with South Australia. I was sent up there to reorganise the store

13:00 supply procurement etc. etc. Then from Civil Aviation when I finished that. I got married while I was there. Married an Adelaide girl.

How long were you in Darwin for?

About nearly 3 years and after Darwin I was then promoted to the Civil Aviation Flying Unit which was in Melbourne. That was an admin job there running the administration, we were based at Essendon.

13:30 From there I was promoted then to the Aeronautical Research Laboratories as the administrative officer of that establishment. These were all promotions. From there I was transferred on promotion to Canberra to the Aircraft and Guided Weapons Divisions as the principal executive officer. And I remained in Canberra, I've been here about 32, 33 years.

Children?

Yes I have two sons. My eldest son,

14:00 Mark, married and he's currently living in Darwin. He was with the rural press for about 11 years. Left them to join a new radio network, he's been up there about 9 months. They have no children. My second son Christopher, who's 8 years younger than Mark, he had a very bright career at university. And he started with Arthur Anderson, the consultants and then joined the American company PeopleSoft - he's a senior

14:30 consultant for them. He's spent quite a lot of time overseas.

Very good, very good summary thank you.

Okay.

We'll go back. Gordon can you tell us a little bit about growing up in Adelaide and your

childhood.

Yes.

15:00 I had a very happy childhood although I lived through the depression years my father was always in full employment. Whilst other members of the family weren't so fortunate. And we - as we got older we become boy cubs and the cub movement. We didn't have television in those days to entertain us. We played in the area of Walkerville where I lived. There was still a lot of open space and we had

15:30 we put down cricket pitches and we used to play quite a lot of cricket with you know, generating teams between the locals and an adjoining suburb. And in the summer you know that was pretty interesting. We did some, did lots of things to amuse ourselves. We used to make stilts when it was wet to walk through the rain and I know children today laugh when I tell them that some of the stilts we made we would get empty jam tins

16:00 tip them upside down, punch a couple of holes with a nail and tie strings, put them under your feet so you could hold the strings and walk with them. We did simple things and it was pretty good. School was interesting. I then got involved in baseball when I went to Thebarton, Thebarton Tech and played for the school team and I also played before I left school with the Prospect Colts, a baseball team

16:30 I became pretty enthusiastic about baseball.

How did you get involved in baseball?

Well when I went to Thebarton they had a pretty good baseball team and I thought it was a pretty interesting sort of a game. And I was asked to hop in at lunchtime. It finished up I was the catcher for the team. And we did pretty well in the school competitions.

Not a usual game to play in Australia?

17:00 Well perhaps not. It has American origins. But yeah there was quite a lot played in South Australia, against South Aust and lots of the district teams like Prospect and Goodwood and so on, they were quite significant competitions in those days. It was a pretty good life. And we had our hobbies. Stamp collections, postcards, I've still got those actually but that's how we amused ourselves. I then because quite an enthusiast

17:30 at about age 13 for radio and I was encouraged, my father used to dabble in this a bit when he was younger. And I made single valve battery operated radio receivers. Short wave and long wave. And by the time I left school - well at Thebarton - I'll just go back a little bit we had a radio club there. We had all sorts of clubs. And the school did have

18:00 its own amateur transmitter. It was 5TT in those days. I belonged to the radio club and that fired my imagination and I learnt Morse code [communication code]. And when I joined the navy I could actually operate a (UNCLEAR) and send and receive at about 22 words a minute. And I was building multi-valve short wave radio sets by that time.

How much encouragement did you get from your family?

My father

18:30 in particular because he had an engineering background although he was a departmental manager, he had a big involvement in the automotive areas. And as a young man he was a hobbyist and built single cylinder petrol engine when he as about 18 years of age. I've still got one or two of the bits that belong to that. And various other things so he was always very helpful and enthusiastic.

What was your dad's

19:00 **background?**

Well he was born in Willaston near Gawler in South Australia. And they were - his grandparents were pioneer farmers actually in a place called Sheoak Log. And he didn't - he was apprenticed in those days in Gawler in what they called tin smithing and metal work and so forth and, then he

19:30 expanded his knowledge by self correspondence courses into the electrical field and so forth. And before he joined Goldsborough Mort he had various jobs in the Gawler area at the local power house, assistant to the engineer and things like that. So, my father was a pretty good technical resource to be quite honest.

What was his involvement during the First World War?

He

20:00 did try to join the army as a transport driver but was rejected because of eye sight problems and he didn't get into the First World War.

Did he ever discuss that with you?

No he didn't actually. But, I've developed an interest in the family history and I have found papers

where an uncle who was a chaplain in the First World War, Presbyterian Chaplain

20:30 recommended him as a transport driver and so forth, so there was quite a genuine and serious attempt to enlist but no we never spoke about it. But other, other relatives were in the First World War.

How close were those relatives?

Well my uncles mainly.

What did you know of their service?

Well one in particular, who went to France when he was 16, which was pretty young, he survived

21:00 the war but he was troubled very much by you know, shell shock and things like that after the war.

What did you know of that?

Well he used to, he used to talk to me a little bit. He was very proud of the fact that my brother and I both joined the navy. My brother actually went to Adelaide University and joined the navy on completion of what he was doing there. And he came in with a commission as a sub-lieutenant. And "Uncle Glen" as we called him

21:30 used to come in and visit us quite a bit. He'd always have a bit of a chat with us. He had some pretty horrendous experiences on the Solomon's and so forth.

What about on your mum's side?

On my mother's side she - her father was a mariner and spent a good many years at sea before the (UNCLEAR). He'd sailed around the Cape Horn on more than one occasion. He retired to Port

22:00 Broughton in South Australia and had a farm there. And my mother was born in Port Broughton. And then when grandfather retired from that he came to Wallaroo. And I used to spend a lot of holidays, school holidays up there and he was quite a big influence on me about the sea. One of my uncles, one of his sons was the superintendent for Patrick's, the stevedore company at Wallaroo, so I had pretty easy access

22:30 to the ships that were loading and, you know as a 13 year old, I was down that wharf time and time again. And used to sit down and talk to my grandfather quite a lot.

What did he tell you of the sea?

Oh well he was an interesting old fellow, he really was. As boys up there, I used to like to go fishing and crabbing and of course, we were always short of rope for our crabbing nets and we'd scrounge pieces here there and everywhere particularly down

23:00 around the jetty. And come back and grandfather would go down to his sheds, sit on his toolbox with his Marlin spike and splice these pieces of rope together and sing us sea shanties. So he was a - really was an interesting and hardworking individual. And he lived until he was about 89 I think it was. They were all a long living family. My mother in fact lived until she was 101 and three months which was quite a big innings.

That's a very good

23:30 **innings. Did you develop a love of knots and rope?**

Not really. When I joined the navy the initial training we had to spend three months of seamanship type training. Learning to do simple things with knots. Tie bowlines and reef knots and things like that. We were taken out to sail and

24:00 to row. Rifle drill of course but it was just an elementary exposure to seamanship.. Physical training became a major part of that. Where you had to skite up ropes in the gym to the ceiling and tip yourself upside down and come down upside down, all those sorts of tricks on ropes. But that was I suppose necessary in the event that you're in difficulties at sea. You might have to scramble down the side of a ship

24:30 or climb up and things like that.

When you were growing up did you ever get a chance to go out to sea?

No. Except in fishing boat. At Wallaroo there were you know, short excursions for a couple of hours fishing. But no not on a ship. I know I did become very friendly with the son of the captain of a Danish ship that came to Wallaroo, that was the motor ship Olympic.

25:00 Olympia I beg your pardon. And he was there for several days. We continued to communicate by letter for a long time after. And I know I stayed down the jetty that night. I was about 15, stayed down there until about midnight to watch her sail. And my mother and grandmother were convinced I'd stowed and I'd gone. But I didn't of course. Yes I really was mad keen to

25:30 to go to sea.

How did you enjoy school?

Oh pretty good actually. I think I was an above average student. I got involved in all of the school activities and we had debating clubs and things like that. And at the technical school you're also encouraged to stage lunchtime lectures on a subject and I remember, the one that I put on using an epidiascope to illustrate. It

26:00 was how the electric light globe was manufactured. Yeah school was - I enjoyed school.

And technical college, what did you study at tech?

Well, on the practical side you had quite a few options. You could do woodwork, blacksmithing or sheet metal work. I did wood work and sheet metal work as the practicals. On the other side, the academic side you had science, you had all

26:30 of the various areas of mathematics, English and geography. And some drawing subjects.

What were your impressions of the depression?

Yes I do have pretty clear recall of it. I used to see the gangs of unemployed men working in the street, including our street, cleaning up weeds and sweeping. And it was my understanding that they

27:00 had to do that to be able to get what they called ration tickets to be able to get food for their families. And there were boys at, particularly at the primary school which was the depression years when I was there. Boys and girls of families that were unemployed and, I used to also take a cut lunch and would share sometimes with a boy who didn't have anything. It was pretty obvious, things were very difficult for a lot of families.

27:30 But you know, touch wood, we were pretty comfortable.

How aware were you of the empire?

Very. I was asked that question recently by a naval officer when I was making a presentation at the staff college, "Did we ever think we would be beaten?" This was after Singapore. And the answer to that was no, in fact it did make me think. And the answer really was that

28:00 we were very very Empire conscious and very British in our outlook. At school particularly at the Walkerville School, at assembly every morning the Union Jack, not the Australian flag and we had to stand there and a little recitation about, I salute my flag the Union Jack and some expression of loyalty to King George V who was the king. So we were very British. When

28:30 you did your geography lessons the maps of the world, they were almost totally red [colour of countries of the British Empire]. The Empire was everywhere. And you never ever believed it would be otherwise in those days. And Empire Day, I remember this quite vividly. In grade 6 this particular year, the morning used to be devoted to Empire type activities in this classroom which was fairly large. There were strings strung across

29:00 with hand made flags of all of the Empire countries. And the flag of the part of Empire that you represented was above you and everybody in turn from that country had to make a little statement. And I remember I represented Malta on that occasion. So yes we were very very Empire conscious and very loyal in that sense. A bit different from what it is today.

29:30 **What did you know of the Anzac tradition?**

Yes. In one or two of the houses of my relatives they had pictures, they were prints of the landings at Gallipoli, at Anzac Cove. Showing the boats going in and the soldiers and so forth. I don't think we were really taught very much about it. We were aware of it and I was fairly

30:00 conscious of it, what happened there. I think there has been a lot more emphasis in recent times.

How big a part did religion play in your upbringing?

Well my father was Presbyterian and my mother was a Methodist. And my brother and I went to Methodist Sunday School in Walkerville where we lived. In fact when I joined the navy they gave me a farewell and I still have the wallet they presented me with.

30:30 It wasn't a major issue with me. But after the war I then did change because of the Anglican teachings in the navy and you were either Anglican or Catholic in the services they ran. I then did join the Anglican church and became confirmed in it. I became fairly active here in Canberra in retirement, not

31:00 before. Or even in Melbourne I got involved on the Parish Council and did some work down there to build, or develop a sister church in the area where we lived in Victoria, that was at Rosanna. And here in Canberra I became Rector's Warden at St. Phillip's at O'Connor and chair of the Parish Council. But I haven't been doing that in recent times and I haven't been regular

31:30 attendee in recent years. But it was always there in the background.

Can you describe the cub meeting that you went to in those days?

Yes we had to walk about three quarters of a mile. It was once a week, a week night and I think it was a Friday night. And it was held in a church hall. It was actually - that hall is still there in Walkerville, it was part of the Church of England. And

32:00 there were quite a few boys, I guess about 20 of us, we were ten and nine, that sort of age group. And there was a scout, senior type scout who used to conduct the cub meeting. And apart from going through the cub ritual and I've forgotten that now, it's such a long time ago, we used to play games and that. You know it was an hour or so of good fun.

What did you know of the politics of the day leading up to the

32:30 **Second World War and Australia's entrance to it at that time?**

Well I was very aware of what was happening in Nazi Germany. And with the son of that naval captain that I met, the Danish lad, he used to talk about Hitler [German Chancellor] and to some extent I thought he was a bit of an admirer you know, it was a pretty important figure. So

33:00 yes I was aware. I was also aware of Mussolini and Italy. Certainly didn't anticipate the - that the war would start quite as soon as it did. It was really the last few months with Neville, Neville Chamberlain [British Prime Minister] going to Munich and things like that. Where you know it became pretty obvious that the situation was getting pretty grim. And my brother and I certainly were listening into the radio the night

33:30 Bob Menzies [Robert Menzies, Australian Prime Minister] announced that war had been declared. And I remember we stood up and they played "God Save the King". Again you know it was the tradition I guess, the way we'd been brought up.

Do you recall his words, do you recall the words Menzies that used?

Not exactly no, no. Something about, that "We were at war with Germany as from" whatever the time was.

How did that make you feel?

34:00 Well because I was so keen about going to sea and what have you, I rather anticipated I might have the opportunity to go to sea. And so I kept on with my radio studies and practised Morse code. In fact I set up a little class in my house at Walkerville, or our house, and taught some other boys, I started to teach them Morse code.

34:30 And it was a Sunday morning really when my father was reading the Sunday Mail. And I think he remembered that I'd kicked up a bit of a Jim Dandy [fuss] in the house when I was 13, when I wanted to be allowed to contest entries of midshipman. And that was flatly refused and I know I kicked up a fair sort of a racket over that. And this particularly Sunday he was reading the Sunday Mail and he said

35:00 that "There's an ad in here for boys sixteen and a half or older to join the navy to train as telegraphists". He said, "If you're still interested, you have my permission to enquire". Well I didn't go to school on the Monday, I was on the tram and the train down to Birkenhead which was a fair way away from where we lived. Obtained all the papers, brought them home and they were all duly signed. I had to go back there for a

35:30 medical and an educational test. And I was on my way on the Melbourne express within about 10 days.

So you left home?

I left home.

How was that?

Well going over in the train was rather a bit of a trying experience. There was myself, I won't name the other boys. But there were three other boys, a little bit older than me who joined at the same time and they were going to

36:00 two of them were to be telegraphers, one was a visual signalman.

Did you know them before you joined up?

No I didn't. Anyway the one who was to be the visual signalman just after the train just left Adelaide railway station, pulled his suitcase down off the rack, the luggage rack and opened it and it was full of grog. Had an enormous amount of beer in there and I didn't drink at all. I came from a very much a tea total family.

36:30 And by the time the train got to Bordertown in South Australia, you know 2 or 3 hours down the track these other fellows, these three of them were pretty well inebriated. And then a stiff or sergeant who was with a group of air force fellows in the compartment next door, he heard all this racket and he came in and he grabbed me. He said, "Come on son, out of there." Because it really was unpleasant. And I

spent the rest of the journey to Melbourne

37:00 with these air force fellows who looked after me. ‘Cause you know I was I suppose sixteen and a half and never been away interstate. When we got to Melbourne we pulled in Spencer Street station and the transport officer, a permanent navy lieutenant, met us and he took one look at these other three fellows. He said, “Right you three, into my office.” And he said to me, “Well you can take the rest of the day off.” It was nine o’clock in the morning. He said, “So long as you’re at

37:30 at Flinders Street Station to catch the 5 o’clock train to Crib Point.” Which was the nearest station to the naval depot. So I amused myself. And my father had told me before I went to Melbourne about the cable cars. So I went for a ride on the cable car out to Clifton Hill which was a bit of fun. And then I had to find, get some lunch so I wandered into one of the department stores in Swanson Street area into this restaurant

38:00 and a couple of old ladies there invited me to come and sit with them. You know first time I’d ever been in a restaurant on my own. And it all worked out pretty well. And then I caught the train and that was a bit of a rude awakening arriving there.

Why was that?

Yes I could. Well the train - there were a lot of new recruits on the train from other states etc. And we

38:30 had to march from Crib Point railway station into the depot and down to what they called the regulating office which was quite a distance. After the war the train line was in fact extended into the depot it was different proposition. Although it was February it was fairly cold down at Western Point Bay. We were taken to a store, we were issued with a hammock, a bar of very common washing soap and a white towel. Then

39:00 taken up to what was called B Block, which was the new entry block. And other boys who had been in the navy a short time showed us how to put the hammock together and then we were taken to a mess. And I can remember that very first meal, it was pretty poor. It was almost cold curried sausages and boiled rice and a mug of tea. And all these two week old sailors around us saying, “You’ll be sorry” and

39:30 so forth. So it was a bit of a shock actually I might say. It was a bit of a shock. But within a week you settled down. The first couple of weeks were, it took a bit of getting used to. The very first day there, I was still in civilian clothes before I was kitted up, I was ordered by an old, crusty

40:00 old chief petty officer to get an extension ladder and climb up on the end wall of the - what was then the new entry recreation building with a bucket and a scrubber. And scrub the seagull lime down off the, off this end wall. And I remember this fellow as at the bottom yelling out at me you know, “Get a move on. Put some elbow grease into it.” And I’m muttering to myself, “I’m going to work hard and I’m going to be one of those blokes down the bottom

40:30 doing the yelling”. So it was - and I used to go over to the mess of an evening to write a letter home and I was, in those first ten days fairly emotional I guess. And I would write a page pouring out my heart and the tears, and I wasn’t the only one - and the tears’d be running down. And say you know, “It’s horrible, get me out.” And when I got unburdened I’d tear it all up and write a few lines, you know, “Everything’s beaut”, they never ever knew

41:00 that I went through that sort of trauma. But I settled down and became one of the boys.

Tape 2

00:30 **You mentioned another incident that happened shortly after you arrived at Flinders could you tell us that story?**

Yes, after completing the initial seamanship type training, what we call the new entry training, there’s a tradition in the communications school that you move to a new mess and this mess I moved to was number

01:00 72 and you had to be what they called “cook of the mess” for that first week. So there’s yourself plus one other to help and that meant that you had to draw the food from the galley, set the table up, distribute the food and make sure that everybody got a fair share. There were about 20 boys in these messes and when the meal was over you had to wash up and these galley dishes were

01:30 fairly large baking dishes like grandma used to use for the Sunday roast and they had a brass disc on the end with the mess number, and ours of course had 72, and there were always two of these. And you washed up in the scullery and you had to put all the crockery away and the midday meal was always a rush because you had to get all this completed and get the dishes back to the galley and answer the bugle to fall in to march back to your training school.

02:00 And the routine, you put these two galley dishes, as we called them, into a sort of a drying rack and the last thing you grabbed your dishes and raced to the galley and popped them through the slide window

and fell in. And that evening, what they call evening quarters, when you let the school, the new entry officer was an ex-Royal Navy lieutenant named Jeffries, he had a nickname called “Ginger Jeffries” and the parade was called to

02:30 attention and he yelled out, “The cooks of 72 Mess, out the front”. And of course that was me and the lad I had helping me and we had no idea of what was wrong. And when we got out the front, Chief Thompson was the duty chief petty officer helping at that parade and he said, “What’s wrong lads?” And we said, “I don’t know Chief”. And he said “Well, when Lieutenant Jeffries comes over”, he said “I have to order you to take your

03:00 caps off”. He said, “I do advise you not to say a word, don’t answer him back, don’t offer any excuse, listen to what he’s got to say otherwise you’ll double the punishment”. So he came and bawled us out for not having returned our galley dishes and we knew we’d taken two back and we got two days backward class which was pretty onerous actually. Well, what had happened we didn’t check the numbers on our dishes - we grabbed somebody else’s and that somebody else when they saw

03:30 theirs had gone left ours there so we were in the can for not taking them back. It was a great lesson, always check and make sure you’ve got it right before you act.

What was the punishment on that?

Well two days backward class meant that you had to get up earlier than the rest, arrange for somebody to shake you, and get dressed very quickly, and you were doubled around one of the buildings by a physical training instructor for about a half an hour.

04:00 And then you were allowed to go and shower and have your breakfast and go off to your school. Then the same thing at lunch time, you had to hurry your midday meal and fall in and you were double again. But after evening quarters was the tough part, you had to report to the quarter deck and draw a rifle webbing, gear, a bayonet and gaiters and put the whole caboodle on and you were frog marching around the quarter deck and

04:30 frog-marching is that you hold the 303 rifle and bayonet over your head and you get down and squat and you hop and you had to hop around the perimeter of what we could the quarter deck, an asphalted area, and then you were allowed to – you’d be given an order to stand up and you’d march around a couple of times and then down – you had to do that for an hour and it wasn’t easy.

What other things weren’t you perhaps

05:00 **not prepared for as a very young man entering this environment?**

Well certainly not that sort of disciplinary stuff. I really had no idea that the training would include the things it did such as the extensive amount of physical training. You know, vaulting over horses, I’d never been involved much in a gym – rifle drill and things.

05:30 I thought, well they’d probably teach us to fire a rifle, which they did. I really expected it to be mainly training in radio communications, Morse and things like that. I guess I was a fairly quiet type when I first joined the navy and boys, the more aggressive ones, used to play tricks on you quite a bit. And we had free pictures which were conducted in the drill hall which was down where the quarter deck was

06:00 and of course lights out were at ten o clock at night. And on more than one occasion when I came back to the dormitory I’d find that my hammock had been taken from where I’d slung it and had been tied up in the rafters up in the ceiling. The top floor in these three-storey blocks, the ceilings were incredibly high with a rafter type construction and the lads sort of

06:30 playing these jokes would get up there and tie the hammock, and you had to get up and get it down – if you didn’t you had nowhere to sleep. It was pretty nerve-wracking in the dark trying to scramble up there to get it but that’s the sort of thing that happened. So those were the things that were unexpected I guess.

Other tricks that were played on recruits at that stage?

Not, not

07:00 specifically that I can recall. No, you were too disciplined and watched to get away with very much, that sort of thing after dark. There were a few things, if you – this was a bit later in my time at the depot. After lights out there was always an inspector by whoever the officer of the day was, and he was always accompanied by a chief or a petty officer and

07:30 if there happened to be a lieutenant, particularly this new entry officer Lieutenant Jeffries was on and he was disliked, and these duty officers used to ride bicycles, it was a fairly big area, the depot, and I remember we were on the bottom floor, the ground floor on this particular occasion and when we heard him go up stairs and he was up on the top floor, two or three of us would run out and grab his bicycle

08:00 and there was a flag signal mast just in front of the building on the corner of the parade ground and we’d tie it to the aglets [?] and hoist it to the masthead. So the next morning there was the lieutenant’s bicycle waving in the breeze and of course I hate to think what the punishment would have been had we been caught but we did that once or twice.

How was your treatment at the hands of the older recruits when you arrived?

08:30 There was always the tough guys who would tend to bully the others. I suppose they wanted to dominate and things like that but it wasn't really that bad, you learned to live with it. What I in fact did, I suppose I'd been there a few months and I was in the communication school and there was another lad, his name

09:00 was Bell, he came from Tasmania, we used to call him Dingie, and he was a big boy but he said to me, "Look, why don't we go down to the gym and get some instruction in boxing". There was a PTI down there, a physical training instructor, who was pretty enthusiastic, and that's what we did and we were taught a few you know sparring actions and what have you. We were left alone after that they didn't bother us any more.

09:30 **Can you take us through in a bit of detail about what you were learning there at the time?**

Yes, you were learning about the radio equipment that you were going to encounter when you joined the ship, it was all admiralty patented equipment at that stage and with the technical knowledge that I had and having built my own short-wave sets I thought it was all a bit

10:00 old hat technology, but it was very robust equipment. There were the receivers and the transmitters and we had a book of reference, it was called BR222, this was the technical handbook that had all the information about these sets. So you had to learn as much as you could about them and how to operate them, mainly operating, and the same with a couple of transmitters they had there. And you were shown how to change valves in the transmitters

10:30 so that you knew what to do, differentiate between positives and negatives and things like that. We did school work, we had a school session where we were taught, continued teaching of mathematics and that was pretty good. We learned coding, we had to become familiar with the codes that we could use or that were being used and how to encode and

11:00 decode. We had to learn the procedures, when you were communicating in those days in the navy there were defined procedures that had to be followed and the way that the opening information on the message to indicate whether it was action for this particular authority or ship or information and so forth so you had to learn all of that. You had to be proficient in Morse

11:30 code. We also did do some fundamental work in flag signals which was mainly familiarisation. It was a fairly intensive training period.

Can you give some examples of say the opening information you had to give to identify radio call signs, what that was at the time?

Yes, there were call signs that we used and to repeat a message to an authority the letter W was inserted

12:00 and so forth. I don't think I can recall all the detail, and I had to teach this when I went back there as an instructor after the war, but there was this defined procedure and you became quite familiar with it.

How was your day divided between this technical instruction and the more physical instruction you mentioned before?

Well you started down at the school, I think it was about 8.30 in the morning when your tuition started

12:30 and you would say do a half an hour, three quarters of an hour in the buzzing room, learning Morse code or practising Morse code, then you perhaps would have a session on coding, the procedure sessions, your schoolies and so forth. That was the way it operated. You broke for lunch and then after evening quarters you were encouraged to go back to your scho0ol if you didn't have any other duties to perform

13:00 to practice and you could go into the buzzer room. I did that quite a lot – some of the boys had little battery operated buzzers in the dormitory and because I really could punch a key pretty efficiently they used to get me to give them some practice and so forth.

What about the other forms of training when did they take place?

When you say the other forms do you mean the

13:30 seamanship type thing?

Well you mentioned rifle training for example and drill?

Well that was in the early stage, the initial three months where you did boat work and you went to the rifle range and so forth.

How did they prepare you at that time for being on a ship?

I think that we were reasonably well prepared. The ship itself of course was a strange environment because what you're doing in the

14:00 depot it wasn't a mock-up of a ship or anything like that but the equipment I encountered in the Hobart, most of the receiving equipment we had been trained on so it wasn't that strange. I felt that we were pretty well prepared for what we encountered and when you joined your ship and I was an ordinary, OTs, as they called, Ordinary Telegraphers, you were really still

14:30 being trained and you were not given, you know, seriously important tasks in the radio office initially. You might double up on an experienced operator until you felt confident to take it and for example, when we were in the Mediterranean and in harbour, in Alexandria harbour, we were only required to man what was called the auxiliary

15:00 wave and this was like used for internal communications. And there were practice Morse sessions and so forth and various ships in the fleet were given the duty. And you might have a duty night when you're on when you would transmit what we call the buzzer exercise, the Morse exercise. But you soon became proficient and you had a whole series of examinations that you had to

15:30 pass. When you left the training examination you had passed an examination as an ordinary tel and you then, when you joined your ship, and you were ready, you then sat for an examination for telegraphist and after that you had what we call a trained operator, that was a TOWT [Trained Operator Wireless Telegraph?]. To become a leading telegraphist which was WT3, in my day we had to do the course which was about six or eight weeks at

16:00 Flinders, then the same thing for a petty officer and petty officer wireless instructor rating came in a little bit later.

What preparations were you give for life at sea and seamanship in your time at Flinders?

Well you were issued with a pretty basic life saving device which was a bit like an inflatable rubber tube that went around your waist. All you knew was that you were,

16:30 when you were at action stations you had your blimp with you, as we called it, and your anti flash gear. Protection against burns from flash in the event of a bomb explosion was pretty important so at action stations and on duty you had your anti flash gear on which was a hooded thing with just your eyes and nose area open and your hands were covered and so forth. And you wore long sleeves and long trousers

17:00 because that was pretty important. If you had to abandon ship and jump in, well hopefully you'd have your blimp with you but I never ever had the occasion to test mine, thank goodness, we got pretty close at times.

This what you just described was on the Hobart, the life saving?

Yes.

Before you joined the Hobart though were you given any training on ships?

No not really no we didn't, we

17:30 didn't go aboard any of the ships as part of the training if they were in port or anything like that no, no, just the cutters and the (UNCLEAR) that were part of the Naval depot equipment down at the wharf. But we weren't of course seamen, seamen may have been trained a little different.

This may sound like a silly question but to somebody who knows nothing about naval

18:00 **depots, the different parts of the land establishment are named like a ship?**

Yes.

Does that correspond in any way to the different rules and necessary behaviours in different parts of a ship. Why is that?

I'm not sure that I know necessarily the right answer but all of the establishments are HMA in Australia or HMAS. Some of them well, Cerberus

18:30 for example commemorates the name of what was the colonial ship HMAS Cerberus, her majesty's Victorian ship, Cerberus, and in the naval depot when I was there down on the quarter deck there was a mock-up of the bridge of what was originally the ship for Cerberus, it was the ship called Nelson. She was a gift to the Victorian government back in the

19:00 1890s so there tended to be a tradition I think of transferring names and perpetuating them. And we're seeing that now with some of the ships that are commissioned from time to time.

When did you first get word that you would be joining the Hobart and how did that happen?

Yes, when you complete your training, you're then ready for drafting to whatever the

19:30 ship is. There was myself and another boy who was a bit older and I still communicate with him, his name was Henry Hanson. Henry and I just before our final examination for telegraphist, for ordinary telegraphist, we became appendicitis victims and we finished up in Flinders Naval Depot hospital and we missed our final examination and consequently after we

20:00 recovered form that operation, about a fortnight in those days it was about two or three weeks before you were fit again, we then had to do our examination, the two of us, and we were posted to the Hobart. Now, the boys, the rest of the class who had passed before us and gone to sea, a couple of them went to the [HMAS] Perth and a couple of them went to the [HMAS] Sydney and some of them went to some of the older ships such as the [HMAS] Adelaide. So in many ways

20:30 maybe we were fortunate, had we been with them we might have been a Sydney or Perth draft but we were then drafted to Hobart and you're just simply informed by the administrative area that "Your draft is through, you're going to Hobart", and then you're given the travel warrant and you pack your kit and you catch the train to Sydney and that's how it operates or did then.

In hindsight you were certainly lucky not to join the Perth or the

21:00 **Sydney?**

Very lucky.

But what was the reputation of the Hobart, how did you feel about joining this ship at the time?

Yes, she really was a ship that had an illustrious career there's no question. When I joined her she had been involved in the war in the Red Sea for some considerable time. She was involved in helping to evacuate the troops in Berbera, Eritrea when the Italians were taking over some other land and so forth.

21:30 And she did sterling work in the Red Sea. Harry Howden was her captain then and of course by the time I joined her in Sydney when she'd come back from the Red Sea, he was, you know and a very experienced ship with a well trained crew. In fact that was one of the things that you couldn't help but notice about the Hobart. They tended to leave you there for a couple of years, well they did me, some of them

22:00 longer, so the crew was not only a happy ship and extremely efficient ship, and she really was a good ship.

Can you tell me about your first introduction to the Hobart and the crew on board?

Yes, she was alongside at Garden Island and it was Henry Hanson, who lives in Burnie in Tassie [Tasmania], and myself. We arrived in Sydney and we had the enormous sum of five pounds in our pockets

22:30 each. We had done very well in our course and our examination and we gained what they call two months' time so we got a bonus payment in effect for the qualification. And that very first night in Sydney we decided we would have a wow of a time and we went to Luna Park and we spent our full five pounds on rides at Luna Park which in those days was a fair bit and

23:00 that was our first ever night in Sydney. Then a couple of days later, of course when you join the ship you're given a locker and the mess that you're in, the WT or radio communicators' mess, you're shown where the wireless offices are. And a ship like that, it has the main wireless office which is below decks, it has the second wireless office which is below decks, it has a very small office called the

23:30 auxiliary or third wireless office, they are all below deck and then the other operating position is the remote control office which is immediately under the bridge and in the upper works of the ship. So you have to be able to find your way around because initially it's all a bit mysterious. It's like driving a car around Canberra, when you first come here you get a bit bush but you soon learn.

Can you describe briefly the Hobart for us as she was when you

24:00 **joined?**

Yes, she was a six inch cruiser, she was called a modified Leander-class cruiser. She had been laid down in Britain as HMS Apollo in about 1935, 1936 I think it was. She was sold to the Australian government and commissioned into the RAN as HMAS Hobart I think it was in 1938 so it was just a very short time before the war started.

24:30 She, in trials, she achieved a maximum speed of 32 ½ knots, she mounted 8 six inch guns was her main armament, they were paired in 4 turrets, A and B turrets, forward and X and Y at aft. She had 8 four inch high angle anti aircraft guns. She had other close-range weapons such as multiple point

25:00 5s and she had 8 torpedos, 21 inch torpedo tubes, that's four on either side. And she carried a Walrus, an amphibious aircraft, that's an aircraft with a pusher type propeller, a bi-plane, which was mounted on a catapult. The aircraft was actually taken off the ship before we went to the Med but I did see it operate in the short period before we went to the Med. She

25:30 was powered by four Parsons-geared turbines and she had a shaft horsepower of 72,000 so she really was a fast, light cruiser, and she was a sister ship to Sydney and Perth.

What parts of this ship were you exposed to in the job you were called on to do?

Yes, your action stations were varied form time to time. Initially

26:00 I was in the main wireless office and I was there in certain circumstances. On other occasions I would at action station; be at the second wireless office or the remote control office. The auxiliary office was only manned if you were with the fleet, for example, in the Med and the fleet was going to manoeuvre by radio (and that was a bit of an experience there in the early days) but when you were

26:30 below decks you of course couldn't see what was going on, but you could visualise when you were under attack by aircraft etc. because of the noise. The winding of the ship's turbines as they were reversed, and you know, one side ahead and one astern and so forth, the guns firing, the explosions of the bombs would reverberate through the hull and so forth so you had a pretty good idea of what was going on. You could picture all

27:00 this.

What about your quarters and the other parts of the ship you used when you weren't at action stations?

Fairly cramped. The communications mess deck, it was a long table with stools either side where 20 or so of you, it may be 25, had to eat. You had to sling your hammocks over those tables in that area and you weren't allowed a great deal of space but

27:30 we never really complained about it. You became very used to it really. It hadn't changed a great deal from the very early days in the navy. I haven't been on a ship for a long time, I think it was about 1996 I went aboard the Adelaide in Western Australia to have a look and things had changed a bit then.

What

28:00 **members of the crew were you working closest with?**

With the communicators there are two branches, there's the visual signalmen and the WTs, and you messed together and you had a very close relationship with those people. A lesser contact and involvement with others - you got to know some of them but not,

28:30 when I was in the Hobart she carried about 600 in the crew – you'd know people when you saw them that they belonged to this or that, that they were stokers [looked after the engine room], but you didn't really get to know them. You tended to stay much closer in your own groups and when you went ashore on shore leave you tended to go with an opo [?] from your own branch and so forth.

Who were your closest mates or work mates at that time?

29:00 The chap I mentioned from Burnie, Henry Hanson, Henry and I were very good friends right through our time in the naval depot and in Hobart. Another lad, the same age as me, that I was very friendly with was Max Piermont. Max is still alive, Max lives in Sydney. I guess they were the two that I tended to consider to be reliable and good friends. I used to

29:30 perhaps go ashore far more with Henry than I did with the other. Henry used to like to have a drink and there was more than one occasion when I made sure he got back to the ship safely but that was the way it was.

Was he your age?

Henry was about 18 months older than me. Max and I are within about 6 days of each other in March birthdays.

You were still very young especially by today's standards. Were you a

30:00 **boy or a man at that time?**

You grow up very, very quickly once you're exposed to this environment and you get to a ship. When I joined the navy, yes I was a boy, in fact I was classed as a boy before I turned 18. If you look at my service certificate on entry I was classified as an Ordinary Seaman CB Class 2 (Boy) and that

30:30 remained with me, the boy, until I turned 18. And you were restricted, I had to be in bed by 10 o'clock. I only got two shillings a week pay of which they kept sixpence back in case you lost some kit and you had to replace it and that wasn't very much money, twenty cents a day but once you go to sea and you get involved and particularly when some

31:00 shooting starts, yes, you grow up pretty quickly.

When you say you grow up quickly what happens to the general interests of a boy when you're put in this environment?

I really hadn't given much thought to tat but looking back I had a pretty good camera with me from the day I joined the navy. I had a little Zeiss folding camera and I was pretty keen and took a lot of photographs everywhere I

31:30 went. I used to read a lot, I still had an interest in expanding my technical knowledge in radio and I used to read radio technical books. But when you're at sea and you're in watch keeping you don't have a lot of idle time and when you're off you tend to want to sleep anyway. But on board ship there were, when the conditions permitted it, activities like deck

32:00 hockey and I did play deck hockey with the communicators and that's a pretty vigorous sort of a game on board ship. I think that about sums it up or you had to write letters. You looked forward to mail from home of course so reading your mail and writing letters when you had the opportunity. But in the action situations we did spend very long

32:30 periods at action stations which was very exhausting and consequently the opportunity to catch up on sleep was pretty important. But sight-seeing when you did get a chance ashore, and those opportunities did occur.

You mentioned that the Hobart was a happy ship. What sort of things on board her made it a happy environment?

Very much influenced by the ship's officers. Harry Howden

33:00 as the captain of the ship was a very popular fellow. Popular because he demonstrated absolute brilliance as a cruiser captain and he saved our lives on many occasions. His ability to judge what was going to happen and to manoeuvre the ship and so forth. So that was a big factor and he was a pleasant fellow. You know, if he walked past you on the

33:30 deck, and that didn't happen very often, but he would always nod, you know, he acknowledged everybody. And if you have the opportunity to look at that film that I took when he left the ship after the Coral Sea you'll get a good idea of that. The fact that the ship was pretty efficient because the ship's company had been together for a very long time and some of those ships' officers at that time they had meritorious naval

34:00 careers, our gunnery officer was Lieutenant Richard Peek, now he finished up as Sir Richard Peek and one of the vice admirals in the navy. Morrison who I think was a lieutenant commander when I was on the ship, Morrison was the Torpedo Officer, he finished up at flat rank so you know they were very professional. Also the ship's company were very nearly all permanent navy people when I joined. There weren't too many volunteer

34:30 reservists on there, there were a few but not many so in that sense she had a very professional crew. The food was pretty good – we suffered later when conditions became difficult but she was well-founded in that sense. There was no shortage of water on the Hobart, she had a very good water-making capacity and we were never restricted as far as

35:00 showers and washing and things like that. And I think that all contributes to make a ship a pretty happy one, certainly compared with the HMAS Moresby which I joined much later, which was the exact opposite.

I'll come to that in due course. Can you tell us a little bit about life on board a ship in the navy at that time and what things you had to get used to for the first time?

Yes, sure. When you

35:30 joined the ship you were of course put - in the communications branch and the same would apply to the other branches, the engine room people, the seamen and so forth – we were put into watches and that's four on, four hours on, eight hours off under normal circumstances and consequently you either came on duty, you may come on at midnight of four o clock in the morning and the watch on duty,

36:00 somebody would come to the mess to wake you for the change of watch. So that became a clockwork routine, which ran on for many, many days. Occasionally you would be made what they called a day man and taken out of the watch to operate in normal hourly duties from morning until evening. And that gave you a little bit of a break.

36:30 You had to get used to the conditions if it was rough. Now, a ship like that, and travelling at reasonable speed in rough weather, she ships a lot of water and sometimes safety lines have to be rigged for security on deck for people who have to move across the decks. I've known it to be so rough at times that the

37:00 crockery in our mess locker - at the end of the table mounted on the bulkhead or the ship's hull is an aluminium rack with wires that hold the plates in, and it was so rough on one occasion that the plates were jumping up over the wire rack and crashing, and it can became pretty violent and the ship can pile

37:30 drive and if you're heading into a pretty steep sea and she's rising and falling and she'll bang down and the vibration goes through. So you have to get used to those conditions. The other things that you do on board apart from in the radio room and monitoring, listening to broadcasts etc., you have other duties - at one stage I was

38:00 made the aerial hand which required me to scale the masts and go up onto the yard arms and check the security of the aerials to the yards and so on with the buckles that held them. And sometimes go up

(UNCLEAR) weren't tied on where you might have to check and tighten one of the buckles holding them. Aerials were carried away in some situations

38:30 with shrapnel splinters and so forth and new aerials had to be rigged so you had to maintain the equipment.

I'll get you to talk about that equipment in a little detail in just a moment but with the rough movement of the ship how did you deal with that in the early days?

You develop sea legs pretty quickly. I've fortunately never had a problem with seasickness. When we left Sydney for example the very first time we went out through the heads and we had to

39:00 head south towards Melbourne, we were doing a bit of escort work at the time across the bite, some of the new boys who'd just joined us were pretty sick But it's amazing how you do became fairly accustomed to it.

We'll just stop there, we have to change the tape.

Tape 3

00:38 **Yeah a couple more things just about life on ship? What did you have with you in terms of personal belongings?**

Yes. Well of course you've got your kit. Your personal belongings are my Zeiss camera which I kept for quite a long time. A small album with home photographs,

01:00 family photographs. Of our house and my parents and my brother. That was about it really. You didn't have a lot - you didn't have the room really to carry a lot of stuff. You did of course, when you went ashore in a place like Colombo and so on you bought some souvenirs which you had to stash somewhere. But your lockers weren't very large.

What about your kit, what did that contain?

Well the kit was your

01:30 naval uniform. You had, your navy blue serge uniform which is worn in winter or cool weather. You also have a navy blue jumper to wear under instead of the white shirt in the event, if it's cold. Your cap. An overcoat. You provide your own underwear and you have to have your towel and things like that. Shoes. Socks.

02:00 That's about it.

You were working initially in the main wireless room as your first action station. Can you describe that room for us.

Yes. It's the largest of the radio compartments. It really, when you walked into - you entered the area on the immediate left you had the main transmitter which was an admiralty patent rated

02:30 20 kilowatts. Fairly big rig. You - that was on your left. You continued in front of the transmitter, you then went into what was effectively a room or a lobby type area where there were a couple of desks and voice pipes. And that's where the coding and decoding and any of the - sit at the desk paper work type things and

03:00 where the voice pipes, you could communicate with the bridge if the need arose. Then through another door which if it could be closed it'd create a soundproof compartment. You went in there, that's where the radio receivers were. And they were lined up on either side, not a lot of space. With room for about three people could sit at either side, listening to -

03:30 'cause sometimes you had to monitor more than one channel. So that would be the radio receiver area. If you were on duty in action in the main wireless office and you're in the radio receiving area you had to stay there and keep reading what was coming in. If you were in the other lobby area or near the transmitter in the space, bombs were dropping

04:00 you'd be flat on the deck with your head flash and protective gear on. And you'd sort of claw your way down onto the deck as flat as you could. That's generally the set up.

Firstly how did the voice pipes work?

Well they're just simply a pipe, and they have a lid on them so that you keep them closed so stray speaking doesn't go up there. But in the event that there is an urgent need

04:30 to pass a message to the bridge the voice pipe is opened and you yell whatever the information is into that voice pipe. Oh the other thing that you have in front of you, and it's updated all the time, is the ship's position. In the event - 'cause you're observing radio silence, you don't transmit. But in the event

that something did happen and it was necessary and the order came to

05:00 reveal the ship's position that ship's position was always coded - in my day you coded in what they called Fleet Code which is not a super confidential code but even if you're in the other wireless offices you always had the ship's position consistently updated.

Where did that information come from?

It came from the navigation people - the navigating officers.

Can you describe for us the

05:30 **receiving equipment you were using and how you interfaced with it?**

Yes. It was always earphones not loud speakers. And I can visualise it now. The blue colour sort of powder coated metal fronts on the thing are all metal, very ruggedly constructed. With dials which you - the tuning dials to tune into whatever station you were tuning and listening to. And you had your earphones.

06:00 And the signals were not always that strong. They tended to be a little bit faint. In the Pacific for example we had the monitor Bel's broadcast. And Fox broadcast, which was the American broadcast from Honolulu. They were the two broadcasts on which the ships received information from shore. And then you had in those days when we were fitted with what was called TBS. That's Talk Between Ships on the VHF [Very High Frequency] band, a voice

06:30 system. That was in the remote control office. In action situations if I say, was in the second wireless office, I would have - be monitoring what was going on there - whatever channel I was told to read, and particularly in Java, I had be warmed-up ready to go if we had to transmit.

Can you tell us what you were listening for and what you heard over

07:00 **those headphones?**

Well a Bel's Bel's broadcast which orig - well I presume it's still originating here, is Belconnen. That is a broadcast which goes out on several frequencies in which information from your naval headquarters for your ship is transmitted and in war of course it's all in code. And these can be all sorts of instructions

07:30 that you might get. And you have to listen to it all the time and sometimes there may be quite a lot of traffic for you and you can be kept pretty busy. The period in the Pacific with the Americans was pretty busy radio-wise because we were monitoring the American broadcast as well as the Australian. So yes you're kept occupied.

What about in the Mediterranean?

Well the Mediterranean

08:00 you still monitored the Bel's Broadcast and you had other channels. Dealing with the fleet operations and so on that had to be monitored.

Where were the signals coming in. You mentioned the area was up on the mast. Can you describe how that all worked?

Well it's like you're listening to your ordinary radios at home. The radio transmissions are picked up in the area, come down into your receiver and they're

08:30 converted to the intelligence that you get out of the receiver.

What problems did you have with those aerials?

I think - in my view because of my technical knowledge particularly on the Hobart, the connection of the transmitters to the ship's aerials were less than electronically efficient. The, there was metal trunking, there's

09:00 were are like rectangular metal boxes in which a wire, the aerial wires to get them up through the bowels of the ship were stretched between insulators and ultimately they would connect with the aerials between the masts. Now that's a pretty inefficient way. Enormous losses. So that transmitter that had an alleged output of about 20 kilowatts, you'd be lucky if it

09:30 I think radiated a kilowatt by the time it got up there but that was the technology that was used. Things changed a great deal before I left the navy.

Can you tell us about how the people worked together in the main wireless room and what a normal shift dictated?

Yes well, when you're monitoring any of these broadcasts receiving signals you have to keep a log book and the messages that come in are written on a message

10:00 form. And the coded messages in the main were five digit groups. These were the codes. And the pad that you wrote these on, by hand, we didn't use typewriters in those days. Were divided into squares

where these numbers went in. As soon as the signal was received and you got the whole signal you then passed it out to this adjoining office where whoever was on duty there

10:30 would commence the decoding. Now in the early part of the decoding of it would indicate the classification of it and if it was a high priority, highly confidential, such as top secret or secret or what have you, it would then be passed to whoever the duty officer was in another area of the ship for him to do the decoding. We decoded

11:00 stuff up to a reasonable classification but not the high, the most confidential.

Who were you working with at any one time?

Well whoever your duty watch is, there'd be a leading telegraphist, there'd be a petty officer of the watch. And let's say four or five telegraphists, a couple of trained operators and ordinary tel. And the chief telegraphist

11:30 there was always a chief tel on the cruises, the chief tel was usually in that office, certainly in action stations, all the time. And if you weren't in an action situation, certainly during normal daylight working hours.

What situations would you be able to transmit?

Only in an emergency - I can only recall breaking radio silence with a

12:00 transmitter once in the Indian Ocean in a particular situation and then there was a bit of a hoo haa after as to whether the transmitter should've been used. But you certainly can't willy nilly [randomly] operate the transmitters. You - when silence is imposed you can only operate on instructions. Now, I think a good example of it is, when we were in Java, and the Battle

12:30 of the Java Sea commenced - we didn't participate in it for reasons which we'll discuss later. We were monitoring the transmissions by Perth. She was transmitting when that action commenced and when it finished. We were reading her signals, I was reading her in the second wireless office at the time. So a ship once it's engaged the enemy they know where you are, so the secrecy of your presence is completely lost. And of course in those circumstances

13:00 where the ship is really threatened, its survival is threatened, it's important that a position be known so that we'd have some knowledge of what happened.

Can you tell us about your first journey away from Australia onboard the Hobart?

The first overseas journey?

Well how did it happen? You went from Sydney around to Fremantle on the one journey. Explain that to us.

Yes. Yes. That was

13:30 escort work. Then we returned. And then the ship was sent overseas. The Perth had been damaged by bomb in the evacuation of the troops from Greece and Crete and we actually were sent out as her replacement. So we then sailed to Fremantle again and when we left Fremantle we then headed for the Seychelles Islands that - and we were on our own

14:00 unescorted. We had no destroyers with us. And so that was really the first long adventure in the ship. We arrived at the Seychelles. That was pretty interesting. We didn't get ashore there. One of the ships young signal's got ashore and took a lot of photographs and I got copies of those. But we had the bum boats trading with us with bananas and coconuts and souvenirs made out of coconuts and things like that. So it was

14:30 all a bit exciting. For a youngster like this. And these fellows, these bum boats they knew more about currency than I think the bankers in Australia did. They could convert anything. We refuelled in the Seychelles and then we set sail for Aden.

What did you buy from a bum boat?

Well I bought some bananas which were pretty good. And I did buy a couple of coconuts, things made out of coconuts. But I haven't got then now. They

15:00 were a bit of rubbish. But at the time they seemed interesting.

What was your first impression of a foreign land arriving there?

Well contrary to the rules I did keep some diary entries and I was a bit critical of what I saw. They're a pretty scruffy looking people, they didn't look too clean and so forth. They were a bit like - oh it's a bit hard to describe, okay. I've got

15:30 to be very careful in racist comments.

Oh yeah I mean obviously the times have changed incredibly and that's taken into account.

Well that's sixty odd years ago and we weren't very complimentary. You know these people were a very mixed races in places like that. They're all the colours of the rainbow you might say and whatever their nationalities were, and you strike that in many parts of the world. And so

16:00 to us they were - I suppose we judged them as being somewhat inferior. But you know I wouldn't think - I'd have to be careful about saying that today because I'd be accused of racism but that's the way it was in those days.

Where did you move to after the Seychelles?

Our next port was Aden and we called into Aden and we were able to get ashore there. For short leave and I remember

16:30 buying a blue silk dressing gown there which I thought was pretty cute. And I had that for a good many years. I haven't got it now. Replenished with some film for the camera. Very hot place. Oh it's a dreadful place to look at, it's so barren. And then Aden we were then moving fairly rapidly into the war zone as we headed to Port Tufic

17:00 which is the Port of Suez.

How did your shore leave differ from those of the older sailors going ashore? What did you do differently?

Well I think a lot - not a lot but a good many of the older sailors used to go ashore to visit bars and things like that. I was very interested in the sight seeing and looking in whatever the shops offered and so forth or the traders and so forth. But in those, those places are fairly primitive but surprising that

17:30 they have you know watches and cameras and things like that. Of course we didn't have enough money to buy that sort of thing.

How were you following the events of the war during this period and the period prior to it?

Yes, onboard ship one of the leading telegraphists on board, we used to refer to him as Wombat Sutton. And he had been a telegraphist air gunner at one stage of his career. He used to

18:00 read Morse station that gave world news and would write and we'd get a little printed sheet. So we were able to keep up with it to some extent. When the mail came from home it wasn't uncommon to perhaps get a cutting or even a newspaper might come in which – no, we had a pretty good idea.

How did you feel about the area you were moving into?

Well

18:30 when we moved to - from Aden to go to Port Taufiq to await passage through the canal we realised that we were then entering, you know, a war zone and it proved to be so. And that was my very first war experience. The - when we arrived there there were really a large number of ships that had anchored - we anchored, we weren't tied up alongside. And

19:00 a lot of those ships were waiting for escorted passage south to go back down through the ocean. Others were waiting including war ships for passage through the canal. And so the morning after we arrived we did set about entering the canal. But we'd no sooner entered, just entered than we had to come out again. We had an RN destroyer with us. We both

19:30 had to come out and we went back to anchor. And the reason was that the canal had, you know, there'd been mines that night and they hadn't all been marked properly. And there was risk. And at anchor, back at anchor we were close to this Georgic, this Cunard liner. She had discharged her troops, oh it was about 30,000 tonnes, quite a big ship. And we were, oh a hundred metres or a hundred yards away from her I guess.

20:00 And it was about one or two in the morning when German raiders, air raiders, started and they attacked the ships. Now I - my action station then was the main wireless office. When I arrived in the main wireless office, the chief tel, his name was Tool, Michael Tool. Mick Tool as he was known. He ordered me to go to the remote control office. Now all of the ship's bulkhead

20:30 doors below decks were shut and clipped. And the only way that I could get to the remote control office was to go up into the upper deck and down through the torpedo space, which was - and the deck above the torpedo space was the gun deck where the four inch high angle guns were mounted. And they were firing quite a barrage when I got to this point. Initially I was a bit

21:00 disoriented with all the flashes and the noise and with bombs exploding. And I remember with the adrenaline really rushing, I remember this very vividly because it was my first ever war experience. And I made a very hurried dash and I had to go down that space and then up ladders and across the flag deck up the remote control office. And I certainly felt relieved when I got into what I suppose was the perceived safety of the

21:30 remote control office. The facts were that if a bomb had hit the bridge area it would have been

demolished anyhow. But it was a pretty scary experience for a boy of that age and that - but you eventually got rather used to it.

What did you know about what was going on at the time?

Not very much except that we knew that JU88's [German bombers] were attacking the shipping. And they hit the Georgia, set her on fire. And

22:00 there were two raids. When that one finished and there was a break for a couple of hours and then they started again, there was a second raid. There wasn't really much to know except that the Germans were attacking allied shipping, they were attacking the Suez Canal. They were trying to mine the canal to stop the passage through. 1941 in that area was pretty tense.

22:30 You know we had the Germans had already occupied a fair bit of North Africa and the situation was a fairly grim situation.

You mentioned how frightening that was to be in a war zone for the first time.

Yeah and that experience.

What things were you afraid of? Were there things that stood out, that you didn't want to happen to you?

Well, that's not an easy question to

23:00 answer to be very honest with you. When you're exposed to that sort of hazardous situation, yes you're conscious of the fact that if a bomb hit the ship that you know, there'd be a lot of damage. I never really thought too much about being killed. Certainly aware that you could you know suffer fairly serious burns if you weren't protected because of the flash.

23:30 You just hoped that you would get through it, and we did of course. But you never, you never ceased to feel a high level of tension when you were under attack. It - I suppose it's a natural reaction but the tendency was, you know the stiff upper lip and you never, you never conveyed those feelings to your colleagues

24:00 because there's no doubt we all felt the same. I did see one or two of the older men a bit later in the Java Singapore episode, crack up to the extent that they went into a corner in the radio office and put their hands over their heads and you know saying, "They'd had it, they'd had it", and obviously were reacting to the stress. They weren't disabled. They would've

24:30 been taken to the sick bay and they were back with us and going within a day or two but I only saw it happen to a couple of them. But yeah it was a pretty scary business.

What were your preparations like for being in action stations in action before that point?

Well you knew exactly where you had to go and when the rattlers, the alarm was sounded you got there as quickly as you could and if you happened to be in bed of course you

25:00 threw your clothes on in a hell of a rush. And you got to your action station. You knew as soon as the attack started because the guns would open. One of the most interesting areas of being bombed was probably in harbour in Alexandria. Alexandria was bombed a great deal by both the Germans and the Italians. Now we only had to man what we called the auxiliary wave

25:30 when we were there so there were a lot of us weren't on duty. We were able to sleep. And I can remember on one occasion when I wasn't required on duty and our guns crews would have been closed up, we'd be contributing to the anti-aircraft barrage. And there were search lights and shore batteries going off. I remember going up into the ship's waste and I call it the waste because we still had a bit of deck protection. Particularly with Henry Hanson, we went

26:00 up on more than occasion, we were allowed to to have a look, see what was going on. And to a boy of 18 it was like a super Guy Fawkes night [UK fireworks night] with all this fireworks that was going on. And the reason we stayed with some protection was that shrapnel bits were dropping here there and everywhere and dropping on the ship as well so you didn't want to be hit. And I didn't have a tin hat [helmet] on. But it was, it was pretty exciting to be able to watch. And

26:30 I don't think when we were doing that, we'd come pretty accustomed to it and we didn't too much about if we got hit at that time. But early in the piece you were a bit anxious.

You mentioned the tin hat. What was the place of the tin hat in the navy?

Well some of the people on the upper deck, on close range weapons and so on, wore tin hats to protect themselves.

Were you ever issued with one yourself?

No. No.

27:00 **After the air raid, you proceeded on through the Suez Canal can you in your mind's eye paint**

us a picture of that trip through there?

Yes. Actually it was pretty interesting. The - apart from the gliding over the areas where they'd flagged that mines had been dropped

27:30 there were a lot of the Egyptian fellaheen [peasants] on the banks you know waving, you know you could see some of the local population. And you passed canal stations where you know there were certain controls over the shipping. And then you enter what's called the Bitter Lakes, Great Bitter Lakes. When we arrived in Great Bitter, the ship in fact did stop and they piped, those off duty could swim over the side

28:00 for a short period. And that was a bit of a tension breaker after what had happened.

What's the pipe for that?

Oh just, "Hands could swim over the side", you know they just make an announcement over the speaker system or the Tannoy [Proprietary name of speaker system] as they tend to call it these days. And those who were off duty were able to get into their togs and have a swim over the side, oh for no more than quarter of an hour, twenty minutes. Then we proceeded

28:30 on our way. We passed similar things between the Bitter Lake and Port Said. We didn't stop at Port Said, we were virtually going non-stop to get to Alexandria. But going through Port Said was pretty interesting because - not only the buildings of the Suez Canal company and, a great many - the dowels and felucca's, the local boats in the area and other

29:00 shipping of course. And as you head past those buildings you've got a fairly longish break water that goes out into the Med area. And [Ferdinand] de Lesseps' statue is there. You know the man who was responsible for the building of it.

Just on the Med, sorry when you were in the canal I would have thought it would have been tactical for the Germans to sink a few boats when you were in the

29:30 **Canal. How vulnerable are you if you can't manoeuvre?**

Well yes, you couldn't manoeuvre to any extent because of the width of the canal. There were one or two ships had been hit and sunk in the canal, but fairly small vessels. And we did see some of the wreckage dragged virtually out of the main channel to the side. But certainly it - there must've been some opportunities for them to do that but we were not

30:00 attacked when we were passing through. And - so we - I've got no doubt that the mining of the canal was all aimed at trying to bring about that possibility. But of course it didn't happen. So after passing Port Said we were heading in for Alexandria. And that was very much an eye opener when we arrived there because the fleet was in harbour and it really is

30:30 a - quite a sight to behold. There were three battleships. The three battleships are the HMS Queen Elizabeth, she was the flagship of Sir Andrew Brown Cunningham, or ABC as he was affectionately known around the fleet. the [HMS] Valiant and the [HMS] Barham, they were the three battleships that were there. And many cruisers, not only ourselves, but many other cruisers. Submarines, destroyers. Ships such as

31:00 the [RFA Royal Fleet Auxiliary] Maine, a hospital ship. The [HMS] Medway which was a repair ship for submarines and so forth. The other interesting thing when we arrived in Alexandria was the French battleship Lorraine was in harbour. This happened before we got there but we were told that it was a very tense situation. She was (UNCLEAR) French when she

31:30 came in and apparently there was a standoff between British ships and the French ships until all the playing resulted in her being disarmed, breech box and so forth being taken out of the guns. There were also a couple of French cruisers there. One I remember the name was the Jicanne. And when we went ashore in Alex [Alexandria] the French sailors were ashore from these ships, we didn't fraternise

32:00 with them. In fact there was a bit of a hate attitude towards them because of what they had done and certainly didn't communicate with them at all. Tended to, you know think otherwise. So that was Alex.

Around about what time was this?

Yes that would have been about July 1941. Yes it would have been. We'd arrived in Tufic at the beginning of July and

32:30 that would have been in July that we got there, which of course in Mediterranean time is summer time in the Med. But we became part of the Mediterranean fleet, which was a pretty sizeable fleet of ships. Oh the other vessels which were fairly new to us and interesting were the fast mine laying cruisers. There were three of them. The [HMS] Latona, [HMS] Abdiel and [HMS] Manxman. And they were very fast ships that could

33:00 at top speed were pretty close to 40 knots.

What was your call sign for the Hobart? What did you call yourself?

I really can't tell you, I cant remember. They tended - from memory they were two letter call signs that we used but I really don't remember. That's a good question.

After you arrived and joined up with the fleet from your point of view

33:30 **how did that work, joining the fleet?**

We had to go to sea with the fleet although we were a unit of what was called the 7th Cruiser Squadron. The 7th Cruiser Squadron consisted of - the flagship was the [HMS] Ajax. Now Ajax of course was very famous from her part in the battle of the River Plate against the [German ship] Graf Spee in the very beginning of the war. The other ship

34:00 cruisers in the 7th were, the RN cruiser [HMS] Neptune and the other cruiser [HMS] Galatea. And Neptune and Galatea were two later models than what we were and Hobart so we were four cruisers. I had one experience - the very first time that we went to sea for some exercises and manoeuvring I had to go to the third

34:30 wireless office. The auxiliary wireless office in anticipation that the flag on returning to Alex that day might manoeuvre by radio. And I'm sitting there, listening too, and didn't hear a damn thing. And the next minute one of the leading tells charged through the door, grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and heaved me out of the chair. The fleet had commenced to manoeuvre by radio and of course

35:00 I'd missed the signal and I was still an ordinary telegraphist and, I was severely chastised by the chief. I wasn't put on captain's report or anything. But Hobart disgraced herself because she had failed to respond to the turning and the speed signal until we got our act together so that was, you know just showed you the inexperienced boy in the radio department

35:30 that sort of thing could happen and it did happen. It never happened again I might mention.

What sort of signals are you receiving at that time?

Well when - in those days if you're receiving signals what are called "G". George 10 was a speed signal. If the fleet was say, to increase speed from say, 10 knots to 20, the signal would be "George 20". And then you don't act until they signal

36:00 "Execute". And that's done by radio. But in flag signal it's hoisted, the speed signal, George 10 or George 20 and when the signal is dropped, pulled down, that's the execute, that's when they do it. And a manoeuvring turn of turning 90 degrees of port or starboard was called a "Blue 9" or a "9 Blue". Or whatever the degree of turns was going to be so

36:30 that's how in plain language the fleet was manoeuvred. Radio or visual but mostly by visual signal. And certainly at night it was done by lamps. We rarely, rarely used the radio once we were out on operations. That particular day was the fleet doing some exercises.

Were you with any aircraft carriers as well?

Yes the [HMS] Formidable was

37:00 in the Med at the time. [HMS] Illustrious was there ahead of us and had been badly damaged and she was in Malta undergoing repairs and we never saw her. Although I do have some photographs of Illustrious under attack. But Formidable was there but we, we didn't have the carriers operating with us as a cruiser squadron.

What was your understanding of the role of the Hobart in the fleet and what the fleet was aiming to do at that time?

Well with the -

37:30 when the fleet was out on sweeps and trying to intercept Italian ships, if there were reports that you know, Italian Navy ships had ventured out and the fleet would proceed, the cruisers would be sent ahead because they're fast compared with the battleships, to try and bring them to action. And the Battle of Mattapan occurred before we got there, and some of the Australian ships were involved in that and if you read the narrative of that you read

38:00 how the cruisers and destroyers did start the action till the battlers could catch up and, you know what they do. Because the battleships couldn't travel at the speed. I suppose mac flat out they'd be doing 28 knots, 29 perhaps. That's about all. They're very large vessels. Displace about 29,000 tonnes and 15 inch guns. They're massive warships.

Tape 4

00:34 **Can you describe your first encounter with the opposition force?**

We - in the whole time we were in the Med we did not get involved in a surface action at all. In fact it became a rarity in the Mediterranean. It was almost invariably an onslaught of bomber and torpedo - torpedo

01:00 carrying aircraft. And when we went out either with the fleet in those sweeps or as a cruiser squadron on a particular mission, we were invariably attacked by German and Italian aircraft. And that's either high level bombers, torpedo bombers and so on and dive bombers. So you just have to put up a barrage and you go through you're

01:30 dodging. When things are launched at you and much like any other such action, you just hope you're not going to be hit. But ships were hit.

What's the first thing you hear of an incoming enemy in the radio room?

Well Hobart didn't have radar in that particular period, nor in Java and later. But some of the British did have radar and

02:00 there would be alerts that an air raid or an attack from aircraft was imminent, and that would give you sufficient warning to go to action stations, but on occasions and it did happen on occasions, we were caught without that warning and the first thing you knew was the approach of aircraft and it would commence an attack. Or torpedo bombers would come in low and so forth. But - so they were always detected but the majority of occasions

02:30 they were.

What messages were you sending or receiving at that time in the room?

That would be visual signals, you wouldn't get a radio transmission. There wouldn't be any breaking of radio silence, certainly not in Hobart.

Are you operating the flag yourself?

Oh no, that's the visual signalman of the flag deck and the information is flashed through very quickly, voice pipes and so forth.

What's the voice message you hear down in the telegraphic

03:00 **area?**

Well you hear the - an air raid alarm, it may be a yellow alert which is, you know, "Be prepared" and you go to red when it's imminent, going to happen. And green when it's more clear.

And what do you feel or hear of that?

Well you - if you happen to be off duty when the alert is given of course, you have to get to your action station. The ship will not necessarily close up to first degree of readiness on the

03:30 yellow alert, you may go to second degree. It depends, it varies. But you can be at what we call second degree and then go to first degree and second degree is that you're not necessarily closed up, as tightly as you are.

What's the differences. Can you describe those stages?

Well the ship when it's cruising and it's not under threat but it's in a war zone will be at what they call offence stations. That is lookouts and certain people keeping a pretty sharp

04:00 eye. If you go to second degree, guns crews will close up and if you go to first degree everybody closes up and you're really at, you know the highest level of preparedness to repel the enemy.

Can you describe your action station when you first went to first degree preparedness and what you did?

Well yes, on more than one occasion of course you go straight into action stations at first degree and if I was in the main

04:30 wireless office, if I had to man a receiver I would go to whatever location I had to. If I wasn't on a receiver I'd be in the office to help with coding, decoding or whatever was required. The chief tel or the PO [Petty Officer] tel or the leading tel in those days were the people who generally passed the messages via the voice pipes. The very junior

05:00 fellows, unless you were in a wireless office on your own and - like that manoeuvring situation - what I should've done when the fleet started to manoeuvre was yell it out on the voice pipe and then give the (UNCLEAR) but I didn't. I didn't hear it. But, and you hear - you often feel the ship increase speed 'cause they usually go to about 24 knots when aircraft are going to attack. And of course you then feel the ship manoeuvring

05:30 as she turns and so on.

How far would she heel over at maximum…

She does heel. That was very noticeable in some actions I'll describe in Java. It wasn't quite so vigorous in the Med.

How far will the ship heel over though?

Hobart in situations that occurred to us later with really intense continuous aerial bombardment which occurred in Java

06:00 the ships were cruising, mostly two or three lines with good space between for manoeuvring. We'd be doing 24 knots and to help turn the ship it was a fairly frequent occurrence but in this Java situation that I'll mention, where the port of starboard engines would go from 24 ahead to 24 astern

06:30 to aid the ship turning. And you would hear the whine of the turbines as the reverse of one side or the other occurred and the ship would, you would not only feel it turn but it would heel very steeply in those turns. Quite steeply. But they were pretty good sea ships, the cruisers.

Did you have to hang on?

Oh no, but you, no you don't - oh I don't - have no recall of hanging on.

07:00 You're pretty used to the ship which moves around, she just heels as she goes around.

And in the Med when you went to first degree of (UNCLEAR) you're down in the telegraphic room. What's the situation with your watertight doors?

Well watertight doors are closed and they're all clipped and you can't pass through those passageways below decks. And - but you're all at your action stations

07:30 that's why you've got to get their pretty quickly so that you can otherwise you've got to go up over the deck and down hatchways and so forth.

What's it like closing a watertight door behind you?

Well communicators didn't have to close them. The engine room staff, like stokers and the seamen branch, were the people responsible for that sort of security. One situation in the ship which occurred in the Med. There is one radio position

08:00 called in the TS or the transmitting station - when you've got aircraft spotting your fall of shot which was the case when we were bombarding enemy positions in North Africa, the radio communication link that you have with the aircraft. That is the aircraft are transmitting and you have to receive, you have to man a position in the TS. Now the TS is right down in the lowest possible position

08:30 in the ship below decks. And that's where, what they call a gunnery table is. And this is, well it's a bit hard to describe it, a bit like a slot machine where you're pulling levers but the bandsman of the ship and a couple of others are people who man these tables. And they're winding handles and following pointers. And this is all connected with the laying of the guns and the elevation and what have you. And

09:00 the shots are fired. Now you're battened down in that area and you're in a part of the ship that does have some armour protection but the cruisers like that are very lightly armoured. And the hatch, the ladder that you go down, almost vertical, the hatch is closed and there's a little manhole section in that hatch which you could get through if it was undone. It's fairly heavy thick steel. And when you're

09:30 down there, I was there on one occasion in bombardment, you realise that if the ship hit a mine or anything like that 'cause you're in close, close in shallow waters, your chances of getting out of there wouldn't be very great. 'Cause you've got you know about ten or more men down there and just imagine trying to scramble up and if you could open the damn thing and get out. So that is a fairly tense position to be in.

10:00 But you've got your job to do and you don't have too much time to think about it because when the aircraft are calling in "Unders" or "Overs", you know that you're short or that you've fired over the target and so on. You're receiving those, that message from the aircraft. You've got to report it to the gunnery people and they've got to make their corrections. So you know it's a pretty integrated sort of operation.

Can you take us through that time that you were down there and

10:30 **what you were doing, what the action was involved in, specifically the orders and directions you were given?**

Oh, we knew what we were doing. Yes, we knew the ship was bombarding short targets, and we certainly knew whether we were on the target or not, because we were getting the information.

What target was that?

Yes. Perhaps we should just jump ahead of that. This was a bit later about the end of October, November. And the 7th Cruiser Squadron then started

11:00 bombarding the German or enemy positions in North Africa. And we would sail as a squadron, these four cruisers about 11 o'clock 'till half past 11 at night out of Alexandria Harbour. We'd proceed at high speed to position ourselves off Tobruk or Bardi Salum, Halfaya "Hellfire Pass". And about one, half past one in the morning we would -

11:30 four cruisers in line ahead we would commence the bombardment of the targets that were to be attacked. They'd be motorised columns, troops. On one occasion we also attacked a gun emplacement, which was referred to by the troops as Bardi Bill, which was causing some trouble for them. And so that, and we - I suppose after about 20 minutes

12:00 of shelling, of firing broadside, the four cruisers firing broadsides out of their eight guns. The German shore artillery would then open up to try and hit us and they would illuminate us with star shell. Firing over then and then trying - I was allowed to go up on the upper deck on one occasion and you could see the star shell and you could hear the whistling of the shell going

12:30 over the top of you. But we would withdraw shortly after they commenced that sort of counter [attack] and, in the time that we were there Hobart would've fired probably about 300 shells. The other cruisers probably similar amount and then we would beat a hasty retreat back to Alexandria. And that was pretty tense business because

13:00 the risk of hitting a mine was very very great. The Germans or Italians were doing a lot of mining in those areas. And you just hoped that didn't happen. In those photographs there is a photograph of the Neptune just ahead of us showing her guns going off when she was firing and you could see the flashes. As soon as we left Alex on those missions we knew what we doing and we were travelling at

13:30 25 knots to get there, maybe a bit faster. We certainly had - we were closed up - not at first degree but second degree. We'd go to first degree before we reached the target area and you'd have your blimp with you and yeah, they were periods of considerable tension.

What's a blimp?

Your life jacket. Your little, it was a crazy thing, nothing like what you'd wear today, not a vest or anything. It's just a black rubber inflatable tube

14:00 about four or five inches wide. But, I guess it was something that would keep you afloat for a while.

And what were the signals you were receiving during those shore bombardments. Can you talk us through…

Well the aircraft would give you, there was an abbreviated, I can't recall the detail of it but you had an abbreviated method of passing the information of unders and overs and so on.

14:30 And these would be signals that would be transmitted in Morse code. They weren't voice signals. Practically everything in those days was done by Morse. There wasn't much radiotelephone communication that I can recall. Not until we got - much later in the Pacific war we were fitted with this American TVS - VHF radio thing.

Can you tell us your impression of seeing the cruisers fire off their guns?

Well I wasn't

15:00 on the deck myself when I saw the barrages - the broadsides going off. But by that photograph they'd be pretty spectacular. You know you see eight six inch guns going off in broadside, you know there's a heck of a lot of flash involved in it. One - talking about gunnery, on some exercises on one or two occasions when we went out involved

15:30 in gunnery exercise with the fleet we did become the spotting cruiser - I think it was on two occasions for the battle ships, and that meant that we had to position ourselves towards the target that the battleships would be firing at and the battleships shells would go over the top of us to hit the targets and we would have to report unders and overs to them. Now that sometimes was done

16:00 on auxiliary radio. A lot of time it would be done by visual signal flashing because you could communicate long distances by light. And yes I was on the upper deck when that happened, a couple of times, especially if I was in the remote control office you could get outside the area where you were and have a listen. And you'd hear these 15 inchers going over. Very much like - well what I imagined was

16:30 the noise of standing on a railway station when a really high speed train flashed through. It's you know, quite a rush. And very impressive to see a battleship firing its gun, very impressive. We could only see the flashes because it was a considerable distance away. You know they fire over a range of 14, 15 miles or something like that. But you know these were my impressions. I wasn't a gunnery type. My job was

17:00 communications and it's just the information you pick up when you watch and see and hear.

Well at this stage when did you hear that Sydney had been lost?

Not until several days after the event. Nor did we actually hear that Perth had gone down. We got out of

safely, just slightly ahead of Perth and USS Houston, but it was several days after

17:30 in both cases before we in fact were informed that they had been lost.

Where were you when Sydney was sunk?

Gosh that was 1941. We would have been in the Med I think. I just can't remember exactly remember when she was hit by (Corm… UNCLEAR). But I'm pretty sure we would have been in the Med at that time.

Did you know any…

Yes. In the photograph album there are photographs of two boys there.

18:00 Michael Hogan and Russell Wyndham. They weren't in my WT class, they were in another WT class but they went through at exactly the same time as I did and we were in the same dormitory. And I got to know them, they were two nice lads. They were ordinary telegraphists and that was the ship they were drafted to and they were lost.

'Cause they were on the draft that you missed because of …

Well it's possible, yes it's quite possible.

18:30 Quite possible. That's something we'll never know.

How did that affect you and the ship's…

Well when we knew, when we knew a ship had been lost and there were three ships that we had friends on or associates. There was the Sydney, there was the Perth and when we were in the Med there was the [HMAS] Parramatta. And we did know communicators on those ships that lost their lives. Yes it affects you to the extent that you you think

19:00 you know it was pretty grim that they had lost their lives. Nothing you can do about it. But on Anzac Day, yes it does come to mind. And one particular boy on Perth that I knew very well in the naval depot. His name was Bill Fitzgibbon. We gave him the nickname of Jeep. And Bill had had a pretty tough life as a boy and his grandmother had looked after him and he used to

19:30 help his grandmother with sending money to her and that sort of thing. And he was a good, a good fellow. Well he of course was lost with Perth and I think of Bill pretty well every Anzac Day when it comes up. And the other two or if I go to the memorial. And I don't go that often but, we were there just recently. I like to go down and look in the Hall of Memories and the plate and just look at their names there. And another lad who

20:00 he was an able seaman on the ship and he was a friend of mine and of Max Piermont, the telegraphist who's still alive in Sydney and we communicate. His name was Fred [Frederick] Latham and he was lost when Hobart was torpedoed in 1943, he was killed. And again, you know nice boys, only our age. Yes you think of them.

Can you tell us about the -

20:30 **what did you see of air attacks and can you describe the air attacks in the Med?**

Mainly when we were - my best view of an air attack occurred in the Pacific. I was in the remote control office at the invasion of Guadalcanal. And a fair bit of the time we were operating with the American aircraft carriers in the Pacific and we were subjected to a lot of air attacks. But in Guadalcanal after the invasion commenced

21:00 the Japanese launched a very significant attack with high level bombers and torpedo bombers and we were alerted by the coast watchers and a lot of ships. There was Hobart, [HMAS] Australia and Canberra, the three Australian cruisers. And American cruisers [USS] Chicago, USS Vincenz , [USS] Quincy, the [USS] San Juan and a lot of American destroyers. And we all got under way in

21:30 the Savo Island, Guadalcanal, Tulagi area and these aircraft came in and I was able to step outside the remote control office and watch the torpedo bombers and one of them actually flew very close and came right down on the port side of the ship. And our gunner, gunnery fellows with their (Orl…UNCLEAR) guns were hitting him and he went into the water

22:00 ahead of the ship. And I've - in that movie I've got you can see that aircraft as we steamed towards him. So that's the closest I actually got visually seeing the attacks.

We'll come to the Guadalcanal but just staying in the Med - Can you describe the Mediterranean Sea and that fleet all around you when you're steaming along?

Yeah it's

22:30 certainly an impressive sight. It's one that instilled a great deal of confidence in us. Although reading books that I've read now and I do read a lot on naval history you didn't realise at the time that it was a fairly tense situation. That we were under, or the fleet was under a great deal of pressure. But it's a

tremendously impressive sight to see those

23:00 battleships in line ahead. And there's a very good photograph of them there and the cruisers and destroyers, it's a large number of warships and you know you feel pretty safe actually. It does instil confidence. When you're out there on your own which occasionally we were, not in the Med, but in other theatres, you're much more vulnerable of course. And there's always the risk of being

23:30 torpedoed even with the fleet. Now the day that the Barham, that was one of the battleships out of the three, the day she was sunk, we weren't at sea with the fleet. We had been ordered into dry dock to have our bottom scrapped and that was - dry dock in Alexandria. We heard that afternoon, I think she was torpedoed about 4 o'clock in the afternoon. She was hit by about three or four torpedoes

24:00 by one submarine (UNCLEAR) I think was the man who torpedoed her. And she had a crew of about 1600 and about half of them were killed. I think there were about 800 and something killed. She went down in four minutes. Now we weren't there but we heard quite a few of the stories. For example we heard one story that one of her turrets, 15 inch turrets was actually blown off the ship. And sailed through the air and actually

24:30 went over another cruiser in the close escort before it crashed into the water. Now the next day we were still in Alexandria and in the communications branch we were asked, "If any of us were off duty, would we go to the hospital and offer any blood that we…" - and I went with Henry Hanson but they didn't want any, they didn't need it and so on. But

25:00 that was - it created a nasty feeling when you've lost a ship like that and much earlier when the Parramatta was sunk just off Tobruk and we were in the Med - now she had a crew of 160 or thereabouts and there were only 23 survived. Now I knew one of the signalman who was a survivor, his name was Dusty Miller. And when they brought them back into Alex they came aboard our ship

25:30 and they were given a meal onboard Hobart in Alexandria harbour. And yeah it's an unpleasant feeling when you lose your own ships or even anybody in the fleet. And we did see a lot of very damaged ships from time to time in the Med fleet. Ships coming back after being hit by bombers and so on and a lot of them with a lot of people killed.

Were you ever in action where a ship near you was sunk?

No, never.

26:00 I left the Hobart shortly before she was torpedoed in 1943. And she wasn't sunk, but there were 15 of the ship's company were killed.

Can you tell us the story of Tobruk, your impressions and what happened when you went to Tobruk?

Well we never got ashore there but what was actually happening, with the Australians and other allied forces that were virtually holed up and completely

26:30 surrounded. For them to survive it was necessary that they be supplied food, ammunition etc and any wounded and people were still being wounded or killed there, they had to be evacuated and fresh troops were put in. Now on one of those nights that we were going down to do our bombardment in Bardi Salum area, the fast mine layer Latona was ferrying

27:00 troops to Tobruk and she was, I think about 60 miles or 50 miles astern of us. And the first thing that we heard, there was a radio silence was broken by the flagship that Latona had been torpedoed. And the flagship dispatched, I think it was two of the destroyers from their escort to go to her aid and it was a pretty heavy loss of life.

27:30 The troops, as well as the ship's company. So you never knew when it was going to happen. But that was the price that was being paid to supply and maintain Tobruk. And it was a pretty high price to pay. There are photographs of Tobruk - we didn't go to shore there, it was impossible. And even those ships that - like Parramatta when she was going in and delivering that stuff they wouldn't have got ashore. They'd

28:00 just unload and get out as quickly as possible. And most of that would be done during the dark hours because of the risk of air attack.

How close were you to Tobruk?

Oh, pretty close. We were bombarding in that area so, I guess we'd be three, four miles offshore when we were doing the bombardment. I can't be sure of that. I'd never worried to check. But we would be fairly close in.

What could you see of Tobruk?

Couldn't see anything. It was night.

28:30 At one o'clock in the morning. And of course everything would be in darkness so I really can't inform

you about that. We knew we were in the area.

What's the Mediterranean Sea like?

Well it had its moments of enjoyment. For example in Alexandria in the summer, and if I was off duty there was a pretty good beach for swimming called Stanley

29:00 Bay in Alexandria. And I and another signalman, his name was Robbie Roberts, he and I went to Stanley Bay a couple of times to have a swim. And it was very much like the Bondi sort of situation. The rollers coming in were fairly steep; you could get dumped back on the beach fairly easily. The other thing - we were given the opportunities to rest away from

29:30 the deadly scene of action when we went to Haifa a couple of times and we were tied up alongside in Haifa. And the ship's chaplain who was an Anglican chaplain on this particular Sunday arranged for a bus to take a party of us and it was a bus load and we went to Nazareth and Tiberius, you know the religious, and the Sea of Galilee. And there are some photos of that too.

30:00 And that was a very interesting outing. That was Palestine as it was called then and it was pretty primitive. Very much the sort of thing as a boy at Sunday School. You know you see sketches of donkeys and Arabs in the fields and that's exactly what it was as we drove through these areas, you could see Arabs sifting the chaff, throwing it in the air to

30:30 you know, separate it from the grain and so on. And donkeys were used as a means of transport. I've not been back of course since but I imagine it's vastly different today. But they were interesting sidelines that gave us a break. We also went to Beirut, we were there for a couple of days and were able to get ashore in Beirut. So yeah the Med, I thought it was pretty nice.

What did you do in Beirut?

Well it was again a case of just going

31:00 ashore and sight seeing, looking and seeing if there were any souvenirs. I don't remember buying anything there. But Beirut was a pretty modern city in the Med in those days. Oh and in Haifa. Haifa was a fairly modern place although it was small, and there was an interesting monastery there called Mont Carmel and with another fellow we went there because we'd heard that the mosaic

31:30 work and stuff like that - so I took a bit of an interest in my surroundings.

Souvenir any of the mosaics?

I beg your pardon?

Souvenir any mosaics?

No no.

Back on the sea itself, the Mediterranean, can you describe when you're out at sea what particularly the characteristic of the Mediterranean Sea from a sailor's point of view?

Well winter is winter like it is here.

32:00 It's cold. It's wet, it rains, it's stormy. Can get pretty rough. Summer is fairly pleasant. Summer time in the Med is fairly hot. It's a very typical Australian sort of climatic conditions. But the sea is the sea and I don't know that we whether had much time to take notice of whether it was a different colour or anything. I don't think there was

32:30 anything strikingly different about it.

It didn't feel that you were far away in some exotic location?

Well you knew you were a good way away from home. 'Cause you weren't receiving mail every day of the week or phone calls. But, you know it was a war zone and there was a fair bit of activity going on there. And there was a lot of, a lot of ships being

33:00 sunk and hit and lots of bombing raids and so on. You know it was anything but a pleasure cruise and as a tourist on a Mediterranean cruise through the islands, it wasn't like that.

Are there any incidents that you felt particularly personally threatened or most fearful, that stand out in your mind now?

Not so - well not so much in the Med. When I've -

33:30 after we went from there to Java although the Med had its excitement, it had its period of great tension. There was risk. It was really a bit of a cakewalk compared for what was in store for us later. But on those, those trips to bombard the North African coast you certainly were living in a period of much elevated tension because

34:00 the risk of hitting a mine or being torpedoed by a submarine was pretty great. The, the enemy would've been well aware that you know, ships travelling up there to bombard and it happened you know, several

nights in a row, that they would hopefully try and get you and in fact that did happen after we left. We left there on the 9th December

34:30 1941, two days after Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. And Neptune and Galatea were both sunk by mines shortly after we left. They were two ships in our cruiser squadron. I think Neptune at the time had - I think they formed what they called K Force [Korean force?], for particular operations. And Neptune ran into mines. Reading a lot of later

35:00 history about her she was hit by four mines and there was only one member of the crew survived. Galatea to the best of my knowledge was lost with all hands. That was of concern to myself and Henry Hanson when we learnt that Galatea was lost because we had become very friendly with the signalman on Galatea. He was the same age as me, his name was Billy Reynolds. And we happened to be - slightly younger than me -

35:30 happened to be in the Med in Alexandria when we knew it was Bill's 18th birthday. And Henry and I were perhaps cashed up [wealthy] compared with the RN sailors and we decided we'd give Bill a good run ashore you know, give him a nice outing for his birthday. I could drive a car, I'd had a driver's license since I was 16 and I found a place in Alexandria. It was run by a Jewish proprietor where we could hire a car for the day

36:00 for what was fairly modest cost. And when I said to this fellow - I'd organised this the weekend we were on a previous visit there - how would we get on about the license - he said, "No you just bring photograph." He said, "We'll put that in the license." And I said, "What about the stamp?" He said, "No don't worry about that, put a five peseta note inside the license and if the police stop you, just hand them the licence with the five peseta note." Well when we got there with Bill to pick the car up and it was a

36:30 single sort of coupe with a canvas top of a Pontiac. An American Pontiac. It had a dicky seat. And two of his nieces were there, wanted to come with us. And one of them was a very petite pretty girl and Henry was a bit of a goer for the ladies and he opted to sit in the dicky seat with this rather pretty little girl and, the rather plump one sat between Billy Reynolds

37:00 and myself in the front and she wasn't much fun at all really. And we had a beaut day, beaut afternoon, we weren't stopped by the police and they showed us where to go to look at Faruq's Palace and different things. And then we returned the car without incident and it was left hand drive, first time I'd driven a left hand but we managed. And then we went and had a meal. There was a little café where we could get a reasonable meal and then we took him to the pictures. So

37:30 when Bill lost his life which was after we left the Med it was of concern and I remember when I was in England, Plymouth, for the commissioning of Sydney, Galatea was a Devonport ship, and one of the shops in Plymouth had a memorial in the window, with all their names and there was Billy Reynold's name. But you know that was the war and that's what happened.

When did you found out that ...

After we left the Med on

38:00 route to Singapore we heard that both of those ships had been sunk. So. Okay.

Tape 5

00:38 **What was the closest you came to seeing the enemy during your time in the Mediterranean?**

Yes very close and that was in Haifa. When we were tied up in Haifa a Vichy French [French allied with their German occupiers] hospital ship sought permission to come in and the name of that ship was the Sphinx.

01:00 And she was carrying German wounded from the desert, from North Africa. And she got permission to come in I think it was to get water. We were on one side of the wharf in Haifa and she was on the other. And I took some photographs of her and some of the walking wounded were walking around on the ship but that was really the closest we ever got to it. The only one with the Japs was when that aircraft was shot down, alongside the Hobart, a couple

01:30 of the crew clambered out on the wing but then dropped into the water. But I didn't get them in my movie unfortunately.

Maybe looking at the hospital ship the Sphinx and seeing these people on board, what did you think about your enemy? I mean what did they mean to you at the time?

We disliked them intensely. I can remember amongst ourselves with sort of comments, "Gee we'd like to get amongst them", of course it was impossible and you wouldn't.

02:00 But there was really a very anti attitude towards them. You know, after all they were the reason we

were there and fighting a war so, no they weren't what you'd call very popular.

Was there any difference between the Italians, the Germans, the Vichy French in how they were perceived by you?

We thought the Italians were rather harmless by comparison. The

02:30 Germans were visualised as being aggressive, tenacious and determined. The Italians I know in some of the aircraft attacks they tended to throw it in and turn away and jettison [dump their bombs] and disappear. You got the impression that maybe the Italians didn't really have their heart in it. I think that was evidence not because of our involvement, we never got involved in surface

03:00 action with the Italians, that their fleet tended to avoid wherever it possibly could any action and yet they had very modern fast powerful ships. On the other hand and this happened not long after we left the Med, there were Italians that showed tremendous courage because, Italians riding chariots got into Alexandria

03:30 Harbour and attached explosives to the hulls of the Queen Elizabeth and the Valiant. Of course the Barrum had previously been sunk and they put those two capital ships on the bottom. Now you know that would require an enormous amount of courage to do that and they were Italians and they were apparently pretty good at that sort of underwater work. So it was a bit of a mixed bag.

What did you call them?

04:00 Oh, "Huns" when we referred to the Germans and the Italians got the uncomplimentary name of "Wogs".

You mentioned the Vichy French hospital ship, I know you weren't so involved with them, but what did you know of the French that weren't on the allied side?

We didn't really know much about them. Like I'd mentioned the French battleship Lorraine that had come in - that was in Alexandria and was ultimately disarmed.

04:30 And the two cruisers and one of them was, Chicago I can't remember the name of the other one. We certainly had a concern that they were opposed to us and they were. They hadn't put their resources together with us, had they done so the situation may have been a lot better than it was. We saw them as pretty traitorous to be quite honest.

05:00 The French tend to be pretty unpredictable people you know, what we're evidencing at the moment with their attitude in the United Nations Security Council, they seem to be always wanting to oppose other people. So we didn't think much of them. I have been to France, I've been involved post war in negotiations with French people on the military side of things and we'll talk about that later perhaps.

How

05:30 **tight did supplies get for the Hobart in the Mediterranean?**

No they weren't tight actually. Our food was still very good. Any produce that was produced from local sources the cooks had to be pretty careful with it. I know that vegetables and things like that were washed, I think they used condes crystals or something like that to disinfect, to get rid of any possible bacteria.

06:00 And they were cooked. Ashore I never ate any raw food like tomato or anything like that because the risk of getting a tummy upset was pretty great. But we were fairly well supplied. Hobart was a pretty good ship as far as food. Very occasionally did we have dehydrated potato and stuff like that but that didn't happen very often. Not at that stage anyhow.

06:30 **What medical problems cropped up in that region onboard ship?**

Well venereal disease did occur amongst some of the ship's company because of their, what they did ashore and expose themselves to a risk. But it certainly didn't happen to the majority, just the odd few. Diarrhoea, dysentery upsets did occur. I did in fact have a bout of

07:00 dysentery while I was on the Hobart on one occasion. And that came about probably because of the food, you know that was available to us and I wasn't just an isolated case, there was quite a lot of us had the tummy upset. But Hobart had ample supplies of water so you were never denied the opportunity to shower, wash your clothes that sort of thing. And you know sailors are pretty clean people. And

07:30 so we were never troubled with the sort of things that lack of cleanliness would cause. And the ship was kept clean. In fact the discipline in the navy in cleaning the ship or your accommodation is pretty stringent. You know captains' rounds and it's not uncommon to see an officer doing the rounds to get a white handkerchief and wipe it to see if there's any dust on something. But no I don't think there were any serious problems. We did have

08:00 later in the Java area we had some of the fellows were slightly injured with splinters, people on the upper deck and only one man that I can recall was seriously hurt when he was hit by a splinter which hit him in the chest. But it didn't kill him.

You mentioned VD [venereal disease] which is a perennial problem in any armed forces conflict. What education or ways of dealing with that did the navy have?

08:30 It didn't get any. I cannot remember anybody talking to us as boys when we joined the service of that sort of thing, I can't remember that at all. In fact discussion of sex by the authorities seemed to be pretty taboo. It was when I was at school, it was never spoken of, not like it is today. So I guess that would have been a contributing factor as lack of education.

You were still finding out about these things yourself

09:00 **I'm sure in the navy. What did you know about such matters and what was going on amongst…**

Oh you learn pretty quickly, because it's spoken of a fair bit by a lot of the fellows. Oh I had a reasonable knowledge, rudimentary knowledge when I joined the service. But you learnt a lot more when you joined the service because there were fellows in the naval depot for example, who used to look forward to prostitutes coming into the station

09:30 of a weekend and what have you. But no it wasn't passed on that I participated in.

You mentioned your friend's 18th birthday, what about your own, what happened there?

Well my 17th was in the naval depot, my 18th was in the naval depot. I turned 18 in March and I joined Hobart in May, that was 1941.

10:00 My 19th birthday occurred two days after the Perth was sunk in the Java actually. And nothing happened. I got - eventually the mail caught up from home and you know the necessary greetings etc and I had a couple of occasions parcels which didn't arrive on time but they would include some sweets and perhaps a small cake and things like that. But no, I didn't have the occasion to celebrate those birthdays.

10:30 **What celebrations if any went onboard ship in wartime?**

A little. In the Mediterranean we happened to be in Alexandria on Melbourne Cup day 1941. And there was a bit of frivolity on the ship, some of the fellows dressed up and acted as bookmakers and calling the odds and what have you. And there's a good series of photographs in there.

11:00 I remember that leading telegraphist, his name - we used to call him Wombat. Wombat Sutton. And he was dressed up with a straw boater and striped pants and what have you, he was a bit of a character in many ways. There was a bit of frivolity. There weren't that many opportunities in Hobart. We did, on the

11:30 [HMAS] Moresby which was a later ship, we tended to try and do a bit more. Mainly because it was an unhappy ship and morale was pretty low and we used to try and get some concert parties, you know to try and cheer things up a bit. But that's another story of course.

What about naval traditions? Were there any particular traditions that were always upheld?

Not, not that I was really very aware of in my time in Hobart

12:00 or the Moresby. One of the traditions was at Christmas time was that the officers would come and serve food to you and so on, it didn't happen that I can recall on Hobart. Because we were in a war zone and I guess - nor did we have any celebration in crossing the line when we went to the Med which was my first time across the line [across the equator]. So I didn't have that exposure. The only time that that was celebrated crossing

12:30 the equator was when I went to England in 1948 on the [HMAS] Kanimbla.

You would have crossed the line many times by that stage?

Many many time,s so I wasn't a novice.

Let's go into leading up to Christmas 1941 this was not much time for celebration. The Japanese had just come into the war. What was your first hearing of that news in early December 1941?

We heard the day that

13:00 Japan attacked Pearl Harbour. It was news everywhere in Alexandria. We were in Alex with the Med Fleet. That was 7th December 1941. We left the Mediterranean, we left Alexandria very hurriedly on the 9th, two days later when we were ordered to proceed to Singapore and that did mean a pretty hurried departure. There was an air raid at the time that we left. One of the interesting things.

13:30 We had been fitted with a multiple barrel pompom which was mounted on the ship and it was given to us and installed while we were in the Med because we had to augment our close range weaponry. We had for example, captured Italian breeder guns, mounted around here and there. We were apparently, I didn't know until after, but we were apparently told to take the pompom off before we left but we didn't and

14:00 it stayed with us and a good job it did, it helped us. And we made a very hurried trip down through the

Red Sea, Aden and then we were diverted to Minicoy Island in the Laccadive Group before we got to Colombo. There had been some sort of a problem there. Might have been a native uprising, I was never too sure of what happened and an armed party was sent ashore in the ship's (p... UNCLEAR).

14:30 And we were there for, not that long while the party went ashore and parleyed and sorted it out. We then called into Colombo, refuelled and we spent Christmas Day at sea after we'd left Colombo. That was Christmas Day in 1941. It was a fairly sombre affair, we had a few extras of course for the meal and we decorated our mess with a few flags from the flag deck but we'd been away for a good long time.

15:00 We knew we weren't going home and we were heading to Singapore where obviously, we were facing problems, because Prince of Wales and Repulse had been sunk and it was 26 days before we actually got there. So we were not going to a barbecue picnic that was for sure.

How did the atmosphere change when you firstly got the news of Pearl Harbour and when the orders came to turn back to the Pacific?

Well certainly

15:30 there was concern and apprehension that - but we'd never really visualised that the Japanese would be as tenacious or as good as they proved to be. There were common stories of, "Oh they can't fly, they haven't got good eye sight, they can't shoot at night" - all those sorts of things. They were, they were seen as pretty inferior people militarily. Well they proved

16:00 how wrong we were because it was the exact opposite. And when we - will I go ahead to when we arrived in Singapore.

Yes, what date was that?

That was, that would have been about the end of January, the first couple days in February we arrived in Singapore. And when we arrived there were a lot of ships in what we call Singapore Roads, or "the Roads" and we tied up in Keppel Harbour.

16:30 It was a bit deceiving, the scene of the shipping there - it seemed peaceful enough but Singapore was being bombed intermittently and there were leaflet raids. And we were then quickly turned around to carry out escort work. Because troops and supplies were still being brought to the island and, when we tied up again

17:00 about a fortnight later and this was about a fortnight, 14 days, 14, 15 days before Singapore surrendered. Singapore surrendered on the 15th February that year - when we tied up in Keppel again, the scene had changed dramatically, it really had. Around us was a scene of utter chaos, utter chaos. There were ships ahead of us tied up, some of them were unloading more material.

17:30 Some were trying to load material to take it away. There were troops including Australian troops, milling around the ship on the wharf, asking up to take letters to post for them. There seemed to be an air that they weren't going to get away and you know that - Singapore was a very much doomed and beleaguered and doomed island, no question. There were fires burning, Japanese aircraft were

18:00 operating with absolute impunity. We never sighted a single allied aircraft in the area. And when we pulled out of Singapore, we took some photographs, you could see the smoke from the fires all close by and we had the old destroyer [HMS] Tenedos, a very old vessel. I think they were 1920

18:30 sort of era as our escort. And when we got into - at the beginning of Banka Strait at the Singapore end of it, the merchant ship Norah Moller was on fire and being attacked by Japanese aircraft. We fought those Japanese aircraft off and then we rescued the survivors from Norah Moller. They had got into boats and those boats came alongside Hobart, and

19:00 in fact I was off duty at the time, although we were at action stations when the aircraft were attacking. Some of us were asked to go up the upper deck to give a hand to help the survivors the side and I in fact was there. I'm in a photograph doing it. They were shockingly burnt. Not all of them, but many of them, and caught with the flashes of the bombs etc and you know stripped, tropical gear, no tops on and what have you. And

19:30 several of them died on the ship and we buried some of them at sea that night. And the bodies were trussed up in Robinson type stretchers I think you called them. And I think we buried about half a dozen at sea that night and more succumbed by the time we got to Tanjung Priok that's the harbour of what was then Batavia, it's Jakarta today. And

20:00 those bodies and the wounded were taken off the ship there. So it was a pretty horrendous period. And that was just the beginning, so Singapore was very threatened. You want me to continue?

I was just going to ask you a few questions about what you've just told us. What was your personal reaction to seeing these dead and wounded for the first time up so close?

Yeah. Didn't trouble me very much, to be quite honest.

20:30 They were just victims, unfortunately victims of war. You tended to have a feeling that – well, you know, "But for the grace of God there goes I" sort of thing, and we were still alive and they weren't. But the

business of sort of fear had tended to disappear. You know we were depressed at what was happening and we lost the (Cav… UNCLEAR) ships and the

21:00 situation looked pretty grim there but we never ever thought we were going to be beaten. We never ever dreamt that we would be beaten. And maybe we were going to have a few setbacks but we would still come out on top. You didn't think too much about whether you were going to be killed or not. I guess if it did happen it would've been pretty quick anyhow. But no it didn't bother me. In the Med people were being killed

21:30 every day. Not only sailors but also civilians ashore. Alexandria had a pretty rough time, the populus had a pretty tough time.

Yeah histories wrote of Singapore in those days as a huge psychological blow?

Yes it was.

How much was that evident at the time?

Well we certainly were alarmed that there was no aerial presence. We

22:00 saw no allied aircraft. British, Australian, anybody else there and it seemed to be that it was a lay down misere [card term = easy victory] for the Japanese to take it. And to give you an example of that; last day there before we sailed, we had expended a fair bit of ammunition and we did have to get some ammunition. And a party was put together to go to the naval stores in Singapore. Now this is 2 weeks before Singapore fell.

22:30 The - there were military police - I wasn't in the party, I didn't get involved in this. But when the fellows came back and two or three of the leading tels of the ship were in the party - the military police tried to stop them going in but they went in anyhow because the Japs were going to take it. And they got the necessary 4 inch ammunition that they needed for the anti aircraft guns. They also got, other material

23:00 and a large number of Singer portable sewing machines came back aboard the ship. They'd scrounged them there. And so there was a bit of looting going on and at that particular time and I've spoken to Sir Richard Peak about this - not that long ago when we were talking about - Sir Richard's about 90. And he was the lieutenant, gunnery lieutenant on the ship and he said

23:30 "Oh you know, that was looting." And he spoke to the captain Harry Howden about this and he thought there should be some action about it. And Harry apparently said, "Oh no, push it aside", and nothing was done. And the reason nothing was done - before we sailed, an Austin Tourer motor car was hoisted onboard and Harry had scrounged an Austin motor car. And the ship's painter painted RAN1

24:00 on the number plate and that was unloaded on occasions when the ship was in a suitable place so - but Freddy Latham who I mentioned lost his life as an able seaman later when the ship was torpedoed - Fred was in that party and he got a huge quantity of Lux, cakes of Lux soap. And when we sailed that day Freddy came around with this great sack of Lux soap - and it was after Christmas, this was you know

24:30 February and he was dispensing cakes of Lux soap to all of us like Father Christmas with this sack on his back. So it had its humorous side. But the crew morale again was very very high and you know we were determined we were going to do the very best we could.

You mentioned you were involved during those few weeks you were there doing escort duties. Can you tell us a little bit about what you were doing?

Yes

25:00 escorting some of the ships. As an escort you've got destroyers and cruisers - and we were the cruiser just providing anti aircraft protection. I don't think we had quite the fear of submarines in that area although the Japs did have subs there but so did the Dutch, they will still operating submarines. But we fell back to Tanjung Priok.

25:30 We did not remain - go back to Singapore after we left about the 14th February. I beg your pardon, early February, 14 days before Singapore fell. We were then formed up into a fleet. We had to go to Osstharven, that was East Harbour in southern Sumatra. And we had to join up there with the Dutch ships, that was Deruyter which became a flagship. There was a rear admiral on there, Dutch rear admiral.

26:00 There was Tromp at Java, ourselves, the 8 inch RN cruiser [HMS] Exeter. Destroyers - there was [HMS] Jupiter, [HMS] Electra and one other. And there were some American ships. And some of them were the old four stackers. There was [USS} Stewart and [USS] Pillsbury and [USS] Barker - I just can't remember all the names off pat but we were a fairly sizable force. And we were

26:30 ordered to proceed to the Banka Strait area to intercept what was reported to be Japanese forces down there. Now the - this was where we expected there would be a surface encounter. And it was Sunday the 15th February, it was the day Singapore fell and we didn't know that day, that morning that Singapore was surrendering.

27:00 One of the Dutch destroyers Van Ghent, fairly early that morning ran aground and Banckert, which was another Dutch destroyer, was ordered to take the crew off. But anyhow it didn't develop into a surface action, we didn't sight any Japanese ships but what happened - we went to second degree of readiness I think it was about, oh half nine

27:30 or thereabouts. And about 30 minutes later we assumed first degree because we were being shadowed by a Japanese aircraft. And then about 11 o'clock we were in Banka Strait and the air attack started. Now that particular day, the 15th February and another day which was later which was the 25th, lived in my memory as the two most extraordinary, traumatic,

28:00 frightening days of almost terror that occurred. The Japanese had occupied Palembang Airfield in the southern part of Sumatra which is only a very short distance from Banka Strait. And they commenced their attacks on the fleet, on this fleet of ships at 11 o'clock in the morning. And it went non-stop until dark. It never let up.

28:30 And in that particularly period, fortunately the only ship hit was the Van Ghent, the one that had run aground, they attacked her and set her on fire. They didn't hit any of the other ships although they launched enormous loads of bombs on us. Hobart was the most targeted ship the whole day. We had a total of 260 bombs dropped on us during that period of which 74

29:00 were classified as "Near misses". And the ship was, we were travelling most of the time at 24 knots and the ship was manoeuvring really violently. In fact one of the reports - Harry Howden's own report it went something like – "He found that he was telegraphing his engines from full ahead port and full

29:30 astern starboard" or vice versa. And swinging the ship he said, "In a manner he never thought possible" in dodging the bombs as they were unloaded. He would watch the bombers with his binoculars and start his manoeuvring. And he said that "The bombs were close enough for him to see the ugly red flashes of their explosion and feel the heat

30:00 across his face". So it really was a pretty horrendous day.

What was it like for you below decks during that time?

Pretty tense. The noise factor was extremely high because our guns were going all the time and on occasion even our 6 inch main armament was being used. If the angle, if the approaching aircraft was such and they could be elevated they fired. Even the Exeter used her 8 inch on a few occasions which is

30:30 pretty unusual. And so the noise of the bombs exploding. On that particular day I was in the main wireless office and I can see myself now clawing the deck, I wasn't monitoring a receiver, I was in the narrow sort of passage area in front of the main transmitter. And you could feel the reverberations of the bombs and of course the gunfire,

31:00 the ship heeling. You'd feel her swing and heel. And the whine of the turbines. The noise level was very very significant. Did we speak to each other? What we might have said, somebody would be crouching laying down very close to you and say, "Oh gee, that was close" or something like that. You were tense but you didn't talk very much. And then there would be a little bit of a let up and you could stand up. You weren't laying down all the time.

31:30 But the Exeter was also blanketed. I think Exeter and Hobart were probably seen as the two larger ships. Hobart was 555 feet long, she wasn't short. And in my photographs there, in my action shots you can see Exeter totally obscured and in fact at one stage and Exeter didn't tell us this until a bit later, by visual signal at one stage we were so

32:00 blanketed that she piped, "Stand by to pick up Hobart survivors". Now we did suffer superficial damage to upper works, shrapnel, bomb splinters, that sort of thing but nothing that affected the fighting capability of the ship. So that really was a day of great trauma. Some of the other ships company - a chief petty officer Bain I think his name was - I didn't know him on the ship. He has written

32:30 a little bit about this and makes - he was feeding four inch guns at the time. And he said in some of the comments he made that, "They were praying for darkness and dusk for this to stop", you know it was a pretty horrendous day. We then returned to - that was the 15th. We then returned to Tanjung Priok and the ships went various ways. Some of the Dutch ships went to Surabaya. And there was no doubt

33:00 that the anticipated invasion of Java wasn't far away. And Harry Howden, we were in Tanjung Priok, Perth was in there. She had come up to the Java area. And the Exeter and the RN destroyers, including the two very old cruisers, [HMS] Danae and [HMS] Dragon. And Danae and Dragon were very old ships, they came to Australia on a RN world cruise in 1924. (UNCLEAR)

33:30 Now Howden is the senior British naval - Australian officer - was ordered to take Perth and all these other ships except Danae and Dragon (UNCLEAR) us to Surabaya. And the other ships were refuelled first and we went alongside a tanker, it was called the Warsurda, to refuel. And we'd no sooner started pumping fuel and this was about

34:00 ten thirty I think in the morning when it happened. 27 Jap bombers came over and attacked us and the Warsurda. They dropped a pattern of 60 bombs across us. Warsurda was hit, a bomb went straight through her and exploded underneath the ship. And the explosion lifted Hobart violently. And a piece of

shrapnel, it was about a foot long

34:30 30 centimetres long came through the open scuttle in the communications mess deck. And there were three or four fellows in there but they were flat on the deck. And the splinter ricocheted around the bulkheads but nobody was hit. And our ship parted company from the Warsurda in a great rush, to get out to open water and room for manoeuvring in case the attacks continued. And that was the reason

35:00 we didn't go to Surabaya and become a participant in the Battle of the Java Sea. So I suppose we can thank a Japanese pilot for putting his bomb through the tanker which stopped us getting fuel. You know for saving our lives in that regard. That was a pretty frightening experience too.

Tape 6

00:35 **Was there any occasions when you had to bury people at sea?**

Yes.

Can you describe or tell us about those instances?

Well when we took the (UNCLEAR) aboard in Banka, the ones that died, about a half a dozen, and the bodies were prepared by the seamen branch, they were wrapped up in

01:00 I think they were called Robinson stretchers or something and weights put in there and that's how they're prepared for burial, or they're wrapped in a canvas shroud if you don't have that sort of thing. And then the ship's company, a small number of the ship's company, will gather in the ship's waste for the burial, and the ship's in that case on the Hobart, we had an Anglican chaplain on board, I think his name was Romanus

01:30 and he conducts the burial service, fairly brief. The bodies are placed on a board, like a flat door type of thing, and when the moment comes to commit them to the sea it's tipped up and the corpse just slides off into the water. They just repeat that if there's more than one and that's it.

02:00 That's how you bury them at sea.

Do you recall any of the words that are said?

Well, no, I can't remember the precise words but it's fairly typical burial service. Instead of committing them to the ground and ashes to ashes sort of thing you commit them to the sea. I'd have to get the prayer book out I couldn't tell you really

02:30 but it's a fairly brief ceremony in a situation like that. I'm sure it would perhaps be a little longer if it was peacetime. Well, you have no alternative, you have no facilities for storing bodies like that although the ship has refrigeration, I don't think they would accommodate it like that.

Is that the case, sailors are not

03:00 **brought home if they're killed on the ship?**

If they're killed on the ship they'd be buried at sea. You would be taken ashore if the death occurred ashore. It did, for example, in the Med, not as a result of enemy action but we had one of the ship's stokers who was killed, and I attended his funeral ashore in what was then the military cemetery in Alexandria and that was your typical burial with a

03:30 firing party and so forth.

How was he killed?

He was killed ashore in a fight. He was attacked by some RN sailors and knocked down and killed which was pretty grim.

How did that happen?

Well I wasn't with him, it wasn't a person I know –know his name, I just couldn't answer that. I could imagine it might have happened in a bar, an argument or something the sort of thing you read about in Sydney occasionally but it was unfortunate because he was a young man.

04:00 **After picking up the survivors from the Norah Moller you sailed, what happened?**

We were on our way back to Tanjong Priok the harbour of Batavia, or Jakarta as it is today, and I think we arrived there in the 6th of the month, which was three or four days after we left Singapore

04:30 and there had been further deaths amongst the survivors and those bodies were simply taken ashore, they hadn't been prepared for sea burial they, had died that night, and they were taken ashore and taken away. I imagine they would have been buried ashore by the authorities, we certainly weren't involved, and the injured were taken away by ambulance you just, you know, just discharged the people

as quickly as you can.

Did you ever meet any of the survivors?

No, never, no.

What were their main

05:00 **injuries?**

Well, burns mainly. The ones that I saw which we had to bring over the side were shockingly burned, the skin absolutely scorched off their bodies and there were a small number of women and children amongst the survivors. I remember in helping over the side being handed a couple of small children and lifting them over. But burns were I think the

05:30 main injury that caused death – there's not a lot that you can do. The Hobart had a pretty good sick bay, the surgeon commander on the ship was a fine fellow whose name was Surgeon Commander Lockwood, I think he became the chief naval doctor before he left the service but he and his sick bay attendants, I think they did a magnificent job in what they did try to do. In fact they

06:00 Lockwood and a couple of them did get down into those lifeboats and were administering sedatives I suppose, morphine or something but, you know, everything possible was done for them.

And after you left, I'm sorry the name of the port?

Tanjong Priok.

06:30 When we got back to Tanjong and we discharged the dead, we were involved in, between that date and the attack when we were alongside the tanker, we did some more escort work. The important thing was trying to get shipping out and into the Sunda strait to get them back into the Indian Ocean etc. and there was a fair number of ships there that were moving. The Orchides [?] in fact was one of the

07:00 passenger liners being used as a trooper which we in fact did escort part way into the Sunda at that time. Then when we got back into Tanjong Priak and that refuelling exercise and we couldn't refuel because of the bombing of the tanker and Perth, Exeter etc. We sailed for Surabaya, we remained with the Danae and the Dragon and the [HMS] Scout and the [HMS] Tenedos, they were the two very

07:30 old British cruisers and the two very old destroyers and they established us under the orders of I think it was Rear Admiral Helfrich, a Dutch Admiral in Surabaya who had overall operational command of the allied ships in the area at that particular time, we were then told to form up as a western strike force. And we really were a very small force and not very good, Hobart was the only

08:00 modern ship there. And we were sent out on sweeps from Tanjong Priok for the next three days, I think it was the 26th, 27th and 28th to - again reports of Japanese forces coming down into the west, towards western Java, that's the western end where we were. We didn't make contact and I remember on the 28th the instruction was that

08:30 if contact wasn't made by half past four in the morning we were to seek to escape out through the Sunda Strait. Now the action with Perth, Exeter etc. and the Dutch ships and the British destroyers was underway and had taken place off Surabaya and Perth was transmitting and I was actually in the second wireless office at the time. I was receiving some of those signals and these were

09:00 position signals, you know, indicating that she was in action. She survived that action with Exeter and the American cruiser, Houston, and we knew that they were then coming to Tanjong Priok, we were leaving and they were heading that way. When we got into the Sunda Strait we were in fact a little way ahead of Exeter and

09:30 Perth they hadn't in fact reached there. We had been joined when we were making that escape with one of the Dutch destroyers called the Evertsen but for some reason or another she parted company with us and we learned much later that she returned to Tanjong Priok where she was beach or destroyed, she didn't escape from the Japs. We didn't know, we didn't hear action signals of Perth when she was engaged by the

10:00 Japanese ships as she was entering to come out through Sunda. We had proceeded north with the Tenderdoss and Scout to Padang on the north western coast of Sumatra because we were ordered to go there to pick up people who had escaped from Singapore and had got to Padang and were hoping to be able to get out. So we

10:30 couldn't go into Padang to pick them up but the Tenedos or the Scout, one or the other, I think it was Tenedos went in loaded up and she came out and the bough was touching Hobart, I remember this as if it was yesterday, and they transferred these people to the Hobart. We also had brought some survivors out of Singapore from the Prince of Wales and the Repulse. I think we dropped them in Tanjong Priak – I don't think they were still with us

11:00 for that trip. These were mainly civilians and officials who had got out of Singapore. In fact one of them I caught up with much later in Cocas Island his name was Bruce de berg Thomas, he was a plantation

manager type for the estates in Singapore, Malaya and he became the plantation manager for Cluneys Ross at Cocos Island. We'll talk about that in a minute.

11:30 We loaded up and we set sail for Colombo and we guessed the Perth probably ran into difficulties. We got to Colombo – we were desperately short of fuel and oil, we got there with very little margin. We did go at speed, we achieved a speed of about 29.7 knots I think it was in one point of our passage across there. We were unescorted, we were on our

12:00 own, I remember we got quite a cheer when we entered the harbour at Colombo, or Sri Lanka as it is today. Food was pretty desperate, fresh food had run out and I like to phrase this, the cooks used their imagination to make what came out of a tin palatable. We had plenty of limejuice that was always plentiful in tropical areas on the ship but food was pretty

12:30 desperate so that was the end of our exploits there.

What did you hear of Perth's fate?

It wasn't until we got to Colombo that we heard that there had been an action and she was probably sunk. I don't recall us getting anything very definite at that point in time not until we returned to Australia. I think there was a certain amount of uncertainty about some of these things. Our own ship, Hobart, had also been reported as sunk by the

13:00 Japanese and that had hit the press in Australia and I know my family back in Adelaide were pretty anxious and relatives were ringing up because they'd heard these reports, but we hadn't been. But at times the authorities didn't always make it public what had happened to ships as that sort of information is of benefit to the enemy anyhow.

Why were you reported as sunk?

Well the Japs had

13:30 identified us I guess their 5th column [subversive enemy agents] activities in Java and the Singapore area would have enabled them to identify us and there were reports that they had sunk the Hobart, propaganda broadcasts, they hadn't of course, but they got pretty close to it I reckon with the amount of stuff they threw us at times.

What was the morale like on the ship when you got to Colombo?

It was still very good, we were all pretty thankful to be out of that area and I think we were incredibly

14:00 fortunate that we did escape. Had we delayed perhaps 24 hours I'm sure we would have suffered the same fate as the Perth and the Houston we would have been lucky to have dodged it. Now a very interesting after the war sequel to this, and as I mentioned I do read a lot of naval history, and when we were sent out on those sweeps, 26th, 27th, 28th as a western strike force

14:30 the Japanese were heading for western Sumatra they had a force under Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita was the Japanese Admiral and he had located our western strike force, he had discovered us with his reconnaissance and he despatched two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers and destroyers to intercept us

15:00 but failed to make contact with us; in the same way that we had failed to make contact with them in those sweeps searching for them and I'm fairly confident, although I've not read this, that that probably was the force that got Perth, Houston etc. in the Sunda area and there is no doubt that their failure to make contact, ours with them and theirs with us, was a deliverance from suicide because

15:30 ours was such a puny force with those two old cruisers and two old destroyers, I doubt very much in a surface action whether we could have possibly survived. So we were a very lucky ship. Anyhow, when we got back to Colombo and yes I did get ashore there and I've still got a couple of receipts for packets of biscuits and things that I bought ashore when we got ashore for a short period. We came back to Sydney

16:00 we got back here, I think it was the 4th of April when we got back into Sydney.

How long did you stay in Colombo?

Oh, we weren't there for more than two or three days from my recollection, it was a fairly short period to refuel and take some supplies on board and things of that nature. We came back and we were granted a very short leave, we got a week's leave, I went home to Adelaide. The newspaper reporters were very anxious to talk to us

16:30 and I do have in the book there, I don't know whether you saw it, it's a photocopy of a newspaper cutting, I have the newspaper cutting which my parents kept about the 260 bombs and the 74 near misses and how lucky we really were. So that was the end of the Java Singapore sojourn so that was April, April 4th, we had a week's leave.

17:00 The next thing was the Coral Sea action which was in May, the 3rd of May I think it started. So when the ships' company reassembled after the short leave we left Sydney with the Australia and we sailed from Sydney to Hervey Bay in Queensland and it wasn't a populated holiday area then. And the tanker

Karumba was

there and we both refuelled, that was Hobart and the Australia. And there was an American destroyer, I think her name was Whipple, USS Whipple, she was to be our escort and after we refuelled we sailed east to join up with the American force which was fairly substantial, it was the [USS] Enterprise [actually Lexington] and so on and [USS] Yorktown. And that was the formation of the naval force

with large American cruisers, heavy cruisers, the [USS] Minneapolis and so forth. And the task was to intercept and stop the Japanese invading New Guinea so that was how the Coral Sea started. Do you want me to continue?

Yes, I'd like to maybe take us out of when you departed Australia again to go up there.

I beg your pardon?

What did you know of that impending battle when you set sail?

We knew a fair amount although a lot of it was fairly highly classified, and I do have a good knowledge now as a result of my reading of the history of the thing, but what had happened was the Americans had radio monitoring posts, they had one on Corregidor which up until the time it surrendered and the one at Corregidor was shifted to

Melbourne and they had one in the Aleutians and they had one in Hawaii and they had been monitoring and succeeded in breaking some of the Japanese naval code. So the American authorities, this was Admiral Nimitz etc., had early knowledge of the Japanese intention to seek to occupy Port Moresby and that's why the

ships were able to be placed where they were. Now the only dilemma that Nimitz had, and this is recorded in his biography which I have, he was a little uncertain whether the American force with the help of a couple of Australian ships would be powerful enough to stop this Japanese force because the two American carriers, the [USS] Hornet and the [USS] Wasp I think it was were on the

jolly to bomb Tokyo, this was the doolittle ride, and they were observing very strict radio silence and there was uncertainty whether they would in fact be able to get back to rejoin. In the event they did in fact get back and then they were very hurriedly sent to join up with the Coral Sea force, which was under Admiral, American Admiral Fletcher. But they had about 6,000 odd

miles to steam and they didn't catch up before the action started. Now we were with the American fleet.

Now just before we go there, what was the feeling in Australia towards the state of play up in New Guinea?

I think there was considerable anxiety amongst people in the north about the risk of, you know, Japanese invasion,

although history tells us that the Japs hadn't planned to invade Australia, they wanted to occupy the whole of New Guinea but there was anxiety about it and certainly there are many people, particularly Queenslanders, who see Coral Sea as having saved Australia in that sense. I think it was a very important naval action in turning things around but anyhow when we

joined up with the American force what they had predicted in their intelligence was correct. The Japanese had sent one force ahead to occupy Tulagi and the Solomons and the [USS] Yorktown was detached with escorts and she'd mounted a raid on the Japanese landings at Tulagi and then she rejoined the main force. We, Hobart, were with Australia and our flag

was in Australia and the American six inch cruiser, [USS] Chicago, with a destroyer of escorts of [USS] Farragut and various others, four or five of them, we were sent ahead of the main force with the task of stopping the Japanese invasion force that was to come down through Jamard passage on the eastern tip of New Guinea into the Coral Sea.

Our task was to seek to prevent them coming out of the Jamard passage into the Coral Sea. We went off at fairly high speed, this force. That was our mission.

Before coming up to this and going into this what sort of telecommunications are you getting?

Yes. We're reading two broadcasts, we're reading the Fox broadcast from Honolulu, the American broadcast, and we're reading our Canberra-based Bel's broadcast.

All of our radio traffic was coming through on both of those circuits.

Is that how you were passing on the instructions of what you'd do?

That's how the instructions of the ship and so forth – although the detachment of the force from the main body was locally done by the commander on the spot and that would be done by visual signal and the Americans used their TBS. I can't remember if we had the TBS, I'm not sure whether we had the TBS

23:30 installed for Coral Sea or whether it came after the Coral Sea. I'll have to ask one of my colleagues whether he can remember.

I'll get you to describe that when we perhaps get on to it. But what sort of signals are you getting from your naval command in Australia?

Well they're all, first of all they're in these codes and the Americans - signals that were for us from Australian authorities were being transmitted by them so sometimes we were getting the same signal from the

24:00 two sources and there were codes that enabled you to decipher stuff that the Americans were sending to us. There was fairly good communication liaison at that point although it was early days of working with the Americans, you know, it was possible to be able to work together.

And are you maintaining radio silence at the same time?

Yes, we're not transmitting, no, we're not transmitting. And very much so

24:30 because we didn't want to disclose our positions to the American major force. You see with the Tulagi force and the force that was intended to invade New Guinea, the Japanese had their two fleet carriers, Zuikaku and I've forgotten the other one, they were a third arm of their organisation and very heavily

25:00 structured to be able to protect their two forces wherever the action might move to. So it was important to maintain silence and not disclose our position because - although the carrier aircraft were out searching for each other. Now at the time that we were dispatched and before we reached the position that we were to reach the American carriers had located,

25:30 American airmen had located the Japanese force that was heading for Jamard and they did attack them and they sunk one of the, the Japanese light carrier that was accompanying that force and she was sunk with a fairly heavy loss of life. The Japanese had also discovered the American fleet tanker, Neosho, and her escort which was the destroyer, the American destroyer,

26:00 [USS] Sims, and they bombed both of those ships believing when they found them based on the reconnaissance report that they were part of the main force which they weren't, it was a mistake by the Japanese. They sunk Sims, I think she was lost with all hands and Neosho was reduced to a hulk and was eventually scuttled or sunk but anyhow that was the first strike by the Japanese. We, as we approached

26:30 Jemad and again we didn't engage in a surface action, the Japanese attacked us very heavily with torpedo and high level aircraft and that was a pretty vicious onslaught of aerial attack but the American intervention in sinking of their escort carrier which was coming down with that force and then the subsequent attacks which took place between the major carrier forces, the Japanese

27:00 turned and didn't continue on their invasion of Port Moresby. The experts say that it was very much a draw, neither side had a decisive victory. The Japanese did locate the Enterprise and she was hit and she was lost. Again that was quite a remarkable episode, we weren't with her of course, we

27:30 were up further north with this venture that we were involved in. But she was set on fire and there was an explosion on the Enterprise from aviation vapours and so on but the loss of life was only of the order of about 250 out of a crew of about 1600. I do have some photographs, I don't think they're in the album at this stage, of the evacuation or of the people abandoning the Enterprise.

28:00 The Yorktown was hit.

Where were you at that stage?

We were in this northern group to block the Jamard passage when that happened.

During the battle, during the two days when things were quite vicious what were you doing?

Well I was a trained radio operator by then and I was either reading Bel's or Fox in the wireless office and manning radio positions

28:30 and normal action stations etc.

You'd had a promotion at this stage?

Not a promotion, I was still a telegraphist but in what we call the non-substantive rate, I was a TO that's a trained operator, WT, which meant that I was capable, or the authorities believed I was capable of manning any position in the radio set up. I didn't become a leading tel until 1943.

And the Bel's was the

29:00 **Canberra based?**

Yes.

Can you describe that system, how it worked?

Yes, here in Canberra and I'm assuming that it's still - although they've moved progressively to satellite transmissions and so on but over here in the Kaleen area in Canberra and you see those tall masts that's the Belconnen Transmitting Station, the Naval Transmitting Station. And Harman, which is getting over towards Queanbeyan, is the receiving

29:30 station and at the time that we're talking about, the operators at Harmon keyed the transmitter here at Belconnen near Kaleen and you had to transmit from Harmon the messages that had to go to the fleet. Now this is a very powerful transmitter and apart from the high frequency channels that are transmitted we also transmitted on low

30:00 frequency 44.1 kilocycles and that's a worldwide type broadcast. Australians ships generally wherever they are generally were able to pick up the Bel's broadcast on one channel or the other. Now when I left the Hobart, I'm going ahead a little bit now, and that was 1943, I spent six weeks there and when I was on duty in Harmon, sometimes I was monitoring

30:30 receivers, others times I was operating the transmitters. And I have operated and keyed messages on the Bel's broadcast. And the Fox broadcast which was the Americans in Honolulu or Hawaii; it was exactly the same sort of set-up. The only difference between the Americans broadcast and ours is the Americans used to transmit at a reasonably higher speed when they were transmitting messages for us and we had to really work hard to copy the stuff.

Why's that?

31:00 I don't know, it's just the way they did it and I think the Americans well before us took their messages, their receivers, they were using typewriters and so on and we didn't.

Were you getting any personal messages?

Oh no, that never happened. It did in peace time, you could receive a message if somebody in the family was ill or something, when I went to England on the Kanimbla I received such a message but during the war,

31:30 no, you never got personal messages. I don't know whether the admiral did but we certainly didn't.

It's coming in through code, how are you recording that and then decoding this information?

Well when you're receiving it, nearly all of these messages in those days were in numerical code, that is five figures in groups of five, and then you had your code books which enabled you to

32:00 decode those and you had, apart from the principal book which identified what the particular group meant, to arrive at that group you had another conversion that you had to carry out which was really the key that created the confidentiality. And those keys were changed almost every day. So that's how it's done roughly but it's a long time since I was there.

How long would it

32:30 **take to decode a hundred words say?**

Well messages that were of that nature, done in those numerical codes, it would take a little while to decode it but in more emergent situations you had what they call fleet code and these were – my recollection of fleet code when I joined the service it tended to be, I think they were 3 letter groups and they were directly

33:00 translated without a conversion but they had limited security life. They were fairly easy to compromise in short, but the sort of emergency situation when that was used or if it was used that didn't matter.

Were you also receiving or monitoring Japanese communications?

No, we weren't at sea. Here in Canberra and also in Townsville when I finished up in the

33:30 radio station at Townsville just before the war finished and in other places we did have receiving stations that were monitoring and reading Japanese traffic. And these operators were trained to read Japanese Morse which was different.

And how could they locate your position?

Oh, direction finding. When you transmit a radio message on say high frequency,

34:00 and it was the same with the Americans when they were gathering their intelligence prior to Coral Sea etc., the stations dotted around the pacific were focussing on these naval transmissions and they would take bearings and they could identify whether they were coming from a fixed point such as a ground station or whether they were coming from a ship and you were equipped with

34:30 direction finding and that's why you had to be very careful about the use of your radio in those days and it would still be the same today although with satellite transmissions and so on the game's changed a fair bit.

How are you, coming up to that battle how are you liaising with the navigation department?

Well you're not actually liaising but the navigating department are generating the ship's

35:00 position and that information is being passed down to the radio and main wireless office or wherever it was required in the radio set up. And it generally came to the main wireless office, I just can't quite remember I think there was a tube, you know like you see in stores where they send things up. I think we had a tube for passing that sort of information. The main wireless office would

35:30 send it on to you in your other positions as it was needed and that was updated as the position changed. In the event of being hit and so on and it was decided that you would transmit the position that's what you had to do.

What was the message you had to send out if you were instructed to abandon ship or you were sinking. Was there a particular phrase that you had to use?

36:00 Well, we certainly didn't use plain language. The ship's position was converted to a code, or fleet code or whatever it was, I just can't remember quite what we did, so that it gave some protection for at least a short period. But in a case like Sydney when she was destroyed there's no evidence or we're not aware of any transmissions being made.

36:30 Whether she attempted and couldn't because her aerials had been destroyed - it's pure conjecture on my part but that of course can happen that a ship could be damaged in such a way that she couldn't transmit, and if you lost power as a result, electrical power, you couldn't transmit. You couldn't operator the transmitters at all if that happened.

How great is the temptation to break radio silence sometimes?

I don't think it was

37:00 ever a temptation I think the penalty if you did it, you know, not necessarily in error but if you deliberately put the thing on air and transmitted, oh boy, you'd probably finish up in jail I could imagine. It was a pretty significant thing because your security and your safety were dependent upon protecting your location.

Down in the room,

37:30 **when you became a fully, a TO on that, how many other people are around you at the station?**

Take the, let me take the Moresby, when I was promoted to leading telegraphist after that course and that came through straight away and I was posted to the Moresby, there was myself as the leading tel, there was only one leading tel, there was an old PO tel on the ship but he was

38:00 Second World War vintage and he didn't take any real interest and he let me have the running of the WT department, I did the lot, and I had about 8 or 9 tels which we divided into watches and the signal side was much the same. There was a yeoman and a leading signalman plus his hands.

When you were in the battle of the Coral Sea what watches did you keep or did you just stay awake for 48 hours?

Once we

38:30 were despatched and we went to action stations you just stayed on. When you're at action stations you're on duty all the time until you're released from the action stations. And in periods we were at action stations for any length of time and there were occasions in various things that we did, Java and so on, we were at action stations for many hours on end. The galley would deliver food to

39:00 members of the ships' company, sandwiches generally would be organised and despatched and sent around and tea and things like that. So you did get some food but it wasn't in the mess it was where you could get it.

We'll stop there.

Tape 7

00:32 **I want to go back a little bit before we go on to talking about the Coral Sea and post that. During the Battle of the Java Sea, the Perth was involved in some actions that you were monitoring form on board the Hobart. Can you tell us in a little more detail what you heard during that day?**

Well the ship was transmitting as a result of that action and we were reading her

01:00 signals. As far as I can recall most of it was in fleet code and I was in the second wireless office and at that particular time there was great tension and concern, and I was all geared up in the event that I had to transmit myself with the second wireless office transmitter and that was information telling us that

she was involved in an action. I wasn't decoded the fleet codes in the second wireless office but we

01:30 knew from the information that was coming in to our ship, and there wasn't a lot of it and not for any great length of time, that she was involved in action and we knew that she was heading for Tanjong Priok, together with the Exeter. We didn't know at the time that [USS] Houston was with her, the American cruiser, but we were well aware that the action was underway and the ships, we didn't know who had been

02:00 sunk and a heck of a lot of the ships were sunk really. Exeter had been damaged, Houston had also been damaged. Perth hadn't been apparently, Perth had survived and she obviously put up a pretty good account for herself when she did catch up with the Japs in the Sunda area. But that was fairly typical of what you would do.

What were you standing by to transmit?

Well at that particular type we were involved in this

02:30 sweeping or searching business for the west and we were at a very high stage of alert because had we come into contact with the Japanese surface force, I have no doubt that we would also have broken radio silence to report, you know, report enemy sighting and give a position that sort of thing. And that would be so that the authorities, if they were picking u pour signals, would at least know what might have been happening to us.

03:00 **How long was it after that event that you found out about the fate of the Perth and realised how close she was to the end when you were receiving transmissions?**

Well from my recollection of it, when we got to Colombo we were pretty anxious and I can remember saying, you know, we wondered whether Perth had got through. "Had Perth got through?", it's not, she may not have come to Colombo, she may have turned south and headed for Australia, purely conjecture on my part.

03:30 So there was no assurance that had she escaped that she would come to Colombo, but we were anxious about her, wondering whether she had got through. It wasn't really until we got back to Australia that we were then informed that they were pretty certain that she was lost. And I don't ever recall much information being published early in the piece about her loss. I mean ships were sunk, but they never published a great deal of detail.

04:00 I'll give you another classic example of that. A first cousin of mine, her name was Lorna Fairweather, she was a nursing sister at the army hospital in Singapore. She escaped from, (I didn't know about this until well after the war) she escaped on the Vyner Brooke with that group under Sister Bullwinkle and she was one of the nurses when the Vyner Brooke was sunk in Banka and got ashore at Banka and the

04:30 Japanese shot her. Now we didn't know what her fate was until almost the end of the war. In fact I found a letter that my father had written to me saying that, you know, they still didn't know what had happened to Lorna and my aunty, we called her Aunty Flo at the time, was still hopeful that she would come back but of course she didn't. But that's the way it was. It happened with

05:00 others, where I lived in Walkerville in my street, there was my brother and myself were the two who joined the navy, there was a fighter pilot, his name was Les Clisby, he lived across the road from us, he was shot down in Europe in the Battle of Britain and we didn't really know what happened to him until well after the war. And two other fellows from the street who joined the army, they were both killed in North Africa and it was a

05:30 reasonable time before families received confirmation that they had been killed. I think that was the way it was, there was always uncertainty in certain situations.

On that subject, it's a tangent that we'll go on with. What did you hear towards the end of the war about the Japanese and their treatment of prisoners of war, troops, whatever that means?

Well, when for example, after the atomic bomb was dropped and I mentioned in an earlier chat with you that I got this

06:00 pier head jump to join the Townsville and we went to Rabaul and with other corvettes we were sweeping the mines so the ships could come in. We then heard that the prisoners of war that were being picked up then were in pretty poor condition and they were they were apparently really very bad. So I think there was some knowledge that the treatment by the Japs was less than satisfactory.

06:30 My late brother landed in Japan in the initial landing, he was staff officer to Buchanan who was one of the naval officers in charge, and he was sent on a mission to find prisoners of war around Japan. He in fact went to Hiroshima – although he didn't talk about it a great deal but they did locate POWs [Prisoners of War] and they were in pretty bad shape. They were treated very

07:00 harshly. A lot of the, well not a lot but some of the Perth survivors of course were taken to Japan to work in mines and the conditions they worked under were pretty horrendous.

What information were you given about what to do should the Hobart go down in somewhere like the Java Sea?

Well not very much at all to be quite honest. If she sank and you got off her, well you'd try and save your life but what happened to you then was a bit of an uncertain thing.

07:30 I can only remember on one operation when we were given a code word for identification in the event of sinking and that was actually the invasion of the Guadalcanal and the code word that we were given was "lucky strike" and in the event that we were sunk and we scrambled ashore in Guadalcanal that would have identified us as being part of the allied force if the Americans, for example, found us but it didn't happen. But no I don't ever

08:00 remember being given any instructions except make sure you have your lifebelt with your or your blimp as we called it.

You came back to Australia before the Coral Sea engagement. Can you tell us what coming back to Australia after so much time away was like?

Yeah, well we'd been away a long time we'd been in the war zone for a very long period and it really was a great relief to be back in your own country.

08:30 Also from the family's point of view, we were certainly extremely well received when we got home on that short leave. We only had about 5 or 6 days but, yes, it was a relief of tension and anxiety because we were completely safe in the southern parts of the country so it was great to get back. But very short leave and you know there was still a lot ahead of us.

What did you do on that leave?

What did I do on leave?

Yeah what did, where did the ship

09:00 **dock and how did you?**

Yes. The ship docked in Sydney and we went on leave from Sydney and I had to go to Adelaide, well I didn't have to, I went to Adelaide where my family lived and it was a case of partying, the family getting together and all these cousins and all that sort of thing and girls that we knew and so forth and music and food and, you know, a bit of enjoyment.

What did you notice about how the atmosphere in Australia might have changed in the period after the

09:30 **Japanese entering the war?**

Well when we got home after Singapore, Java of course well, there was rationing and I think people were still a bit uncertain about, you know, what might happen because the Japanese, with what they had achieved at that point, ad done extremely well. The speed with which they occupied Malaya and Singapore and then into Java and the attack that they

10:00 were launching into New Guinea and so forth it really was a very threatening situation and I think there was, you know, concern that there would be a Japanese invasion. I think people south, like in South Australia, were probably less affected than people in the far north and northern Queensland. But the rationing was fairly stringent, it was tea, sugar, butter, things like that and clothing, they had clothing coupons

10:30 and so on. And petrol was rationed, my father had, in the company that he was with, had access to a car all the time and they'd converted nearly all their cars from operation on petrol to gas producers which sat on the back of the vehicle and this was a generator to gas burning coke, it was an under powered situation but at least you could still get around.

How much did that change the situation for you? The

11:00 **idea that your own country might be under attack and that you were now defending it directly rather than in a sort of more indirect way?**

I don't think I really did give it a great deal of thought. You know, we were there in the front line doing what we had to do and I guess had we suffered a serious rebuff at Coral Sea and let's say the same thing had happened at Guadalcanal I think the situation would have been

11:30 very uncertain, really uncertain. And I think if the Japanese had achieved that sort of success and beaten us at that point I'm pretty sure they would have proceeded with an invasion, it's hard to believe they wouldn't. They had done very well up to that point and of course Coral Sea being a reversal for them from a morale point of view it was a big booster and the same with Guadalcanal landing

12:00 there so early in the piece. See we had Coral Sea in May then Guadalcanal followed in August and it was the 8th of August when we invaded and we held although we were getting thumped as the naval forces were decimated and things like that, and continued to be for some time. At least the American Marine Corps were holding on to the island and I think that in itself, notwithstanding the losses was a tremendous morale booster.

12:30 You could see the tide starting to change.

In Coral Sea you were defending, stopping the Japanese fleet entering Moresby and Tulagi but how much was the connection made that this was the front line of stopping an Australian, a possible leap into an Australian invasion?

I don't think that I became conscious in thinking that way. It was another action to try and stop the enemy achieving

13:00 their objective. We weren't actually trying to stop them getting to Tulagi, they had arrived there and it was Yorktown's aircraft that attacked them there. And they were entrenched in Tulagi and that of course led to them crossing across to Guadalcanal just across from Tulagi and building Henderson airfield, or what became known as Henderson. So the really had established that bridgehead but the Coral Sea action stopped them from

13:30 getting to Port Moresby and of course that then led to their attempt to cross via the Kokoda Trail from Buna and Gona and we got involved in Buna, Gona etc. later in the Moresby.

How closely did you come into contact with the Americans who you were surrounded by in that action?

We had, there were some exchanges of American signalmen between ships to help with the communications and in

14:00 Brisbane we fraternised with the Americans and you saw in that movie clip that I showed you; when we refuelled on our way to Guadalcanal off the Karina, the American fleet tanker, there was a pretty good rapport with them exchanging things like we did and when I was in New Guinea waters, later in Moresby, yes, we had a very good relationship

14:30 with the Americans. They were very helpful, we had – I was involved with some technical maintenance work for the ships up there and the Americans were ever-ready to help us if we needed a piece of test equipment and so on; they were pretty well equipped. We used to see some of their picture shows if we were alongside one of their larger ships and sometimes we would get ice cream from them which was an absolute luxury for an Australian ship like the Moresby, even the Hobart for that matter. So, no, I

15:00 think there was a very good relationship with the Americans.

Just for the benefit of the archive keeping in people may not have access to the footage that we were able to see before, can you explain what happened when the Karina pulled up alongside the Hobart?

I mentioned that the fleet tanker Niyosho was sunk in the Coral Sea action and with the American ships they had a fleet tanker, these were large tankers that

15:30 could operate or steam at reasonable speeds. And going to Guadalcanal – with the Guadalcanal action we sailed from Wellington in New Zealand an escort in the first marine corps and joined up with other ships and there was a trial landing carried out in the Fijian group en route just to test their ability to get the troops ashore and that sort of thing and then after we left the

16:00 Fiji group, the ships requiring fuel, and we required fuel, we were refuelled from the Karina. You were steaming, you'd come alongside each other fairly close, and your steaming ahead at maybe 12, 14 knots on a very steady course and fuel lines are passed between the ships and when they're connected up to let the fuel

16:30 flow into your tanks, the pumping starts and they pump at fairly high speeds, high rates, and you're in that close situation for half an hour perhaps 40 minutes or something like that. And when the fuelling's finished the lines are disconnected and you just part. And the other thing that did happen in the Pacific, one or two of the American destroyers would have obtained

17:00 mail and brought it out and they would come alongside and lines would be passed across and mail bags dragged across.

What happened on board your related ships when they were linked up in that occasion?

Well, we liked to – well the boys on Hobart were keen to get American cigarettes, I was a non-smoker and so there would be exchanges of whatever our side might have to throw and the Americans would be throwing over

17:30 packets of mainly Chesterfield or Lucky Strike cigarettes and our boys would be there catching them and that's the way it was. The Americans were very interested in any war souvenirs I suppose, particularly in the latter stage when I was in the Moresby I managed to get ashore in Madang when we were up there and the Japs had just been pushed out and I got hold of a couple of Japanese brass shell cases and took them

18:00 back aboard and the electricians or the torpedo men as we called them, we didn't have torpedos, they took the primers out and so forth and the detonators and primers and I just polished them and I was able to sell them to the next Yank [American] ship that came along for a fairly handsome sum of money

and that's the sort of thing we did.

Was there anything that the Yanks particularly prized from the Australian troops?

Well they were very interested in any action photographs

18:30 and some of the boys, in fact I did some of those action shots, I had some spares, some that I in fact lost as a result of that exchange I was able to get later in fact Henry Hanson, my friend in Bernie, loaned me his album to be able to re-copy some that I had lost but the Yanks were a bit interested in that sort of thing.

What about from the Yanks, apart from cigarettes was there anything that you got from an American?

19:00 No, I didn't get anything myself, no I used to just watch the action with the movie camera and take a few shots of it.

What did they call you and what did you call them. Was Yanks a word that was used to their face?

Yes, Yank, was when we were talking about them, we would say Yank. They were a bit different to us. In New Guinea waters there was an American ship called the [USS] Mesquite

19:30 and I needed to go across to that ship, we were in Lae or something like that for some technical help with some test equipment and they called you by your surname, they were still sailors like I was, but you know you were "Johnson" or "Smith" or "Jackson" and they expected you to call them that way. I remember being invited to have a meal this particular day, it was a fairly calm situation, and I was a bit

20:00 intrigued at seeing them put maple syrup on meat and things like that, it was all a bit peculiar, but they were Americans.

Was there ever any – certainly in Australia there was tension between the two forces was that ever evident to you?

It didn't affect me but towards the end of the war when I mentioned that I left the Moresby and I was posted to the Naval Wireless Station in Townsville, the American Army had

20:30 virtual control of Townsville, the American Military Police patrolled the streets and even directed traffic and so on, the Americans were really there en masse. Yes, there was tension with the Americans but mainly between the army and the American Army people. I never, ever had any involvement in that sort of thing, as a sailor we didn't seem to get

21:00 difficulties with them.

Let's get back to the story if we can, coming out of Coral Sea you rightly say that now it's been recorded as somewhat of a victory and certainly was a turning point in hindsight but it wasn't a great victory by any means. How did it feel coming out of Coral sea?

Well for a start when we came out of Coral Sea we didn't know what the overall situation was and what the losses were until a bit later when we went from there we came back to

21:30 Brisbane – there was an acceptance that it wasn't a victory in the sense that we'd sunk the other side or they'd sunk us, it was very much seen as a draw. You know, you hear a lot of talk, "It was a strategic victory this one" or a tactical victory. It was a turning point, it really was the first rebuff that the Japanese had had since they started the

22:00 war against America and ourselves and you know we just built on it from there. But I think we accepted that we still had a long way to go.

How is the crew on board a ship like the Hobart informed of the outcome of an operation like that?

From time to time the captain will make a broadcast over the ship's communication system. Once you've sailed and you're out of sight of land you're generally

22:30 informed of where you're going and what you're going to do and any information that could be released would be released. So, no, you weren't kept in the dark, in fact Harry Howden in particular was a pretty informative sort of guy.

How was morale at that stage of the war?

Still pretty good. The whole time I was in Hobart morale on that ship was exceptionally good. Nobody ever

23:00 really felt badly about what was happening. We'd given a pretty good account of ourselves up until that point. We had had an illustrious career, considering the ship had been fighting in the Red Sea before I joined it from the very beginning of the war and she was involved, right up until she was torpedoed which I think was July 1943 when she was torpedoed and even then she was sidelined for several months

23:30 She had a lot of after damage and she was temporarily repaired by the Americans in the Solomons and then she steamed to Sydney where she was repaired. They actually cut a part of the stern of the ship off and shortened her and Y turret, you've got A and B at the front, and Y turret was removed and after she was repaired she finished up with

24:00 6 six-inch guns instead of 8. I was in fact posted back to her just before she sailed for Japan at the end of the war but they only left me on her for I think 2 or 3 weeks and I was drafted off her again. I was a PO at that time and I went, I then went south as an instructor. When I rejoined her, gee she was crowded. The ships' company had been

24:30 increased where it was about 600 when I was on it, there was about 850 or 900 on there and room was really tight.

What signs of the constant tension and battle that that ship had been engaged in were beginning to emerge towards the end of 1942?

When I left the ship and joined the Moresby I did have some slight

25:00 indications of the effects of tension and when I left the Moresby I was ashore for a while and that was a welcome break, and that led to recovery in a sense. But I hadn't got to the stage of hospitalisation or treatment but, yeah, I wasn't sleeping particularly well, I was having a good many nightmares but this was pretty common amongst us really and it

25:30 wasn't until much later in 1948 when the roof started to fall in on me.

Did that come as a surprise?

I was certainly very enthusiastic about a naval career I had visions about remaining in the navy, it was a disappointment when we were in England and this nerve rash problem occurred and when I was asked if I would remain and do the warrant

26:00 telegraphist course, and that was the, from the lower deck to the upper deck, in those days that's the way you went from petty officer you went to warrant and from warrant you became a commissioned warrant telegraphist and then promoted to lieutenant and ultimately you might make commander. Two or three of the fellows that I knew, one of them who was in particular about the same time to me, his name was

26:30 Williams, he became a commander. But I don't recall any lower deck people that I knew making captain but you know, commander and brass hat was pretty significant. And that was the sort of vision I had after that episode on the ladder scrubbing that bird lime off the first day, I was determined I wasn't going to be the bloke up the ladder I was going to be the bloke down the bottom giving the directions. But

27:00 with what happened to me, and I finished up actually coming back in the ship's sick bay, into Sydney, back to Australia. Yes, I wasn't well at all, I had some really serious nervous type problems.

What about the rest of the ships' company during the time that you were with Hobart or indeed the Moresby, were there any signs of stress among them?

Only those couple of fellows in our department

27:30 that I saw virtually crack up under tension in Java but they did remain with the ship and continue to work after a bit of a break from what was happening. The chaps that I know that have survived, the chap in Sydney and the chap in Tasmania and one other who lives up Nowra area, they've all suffered from major health problems.

28:00 The chap in the Nowra area, I was speaking to him just recently, he's in a wheelchair and he's had some very serious psychological problems which have really had a serious adverse impact on him. The man in Sydney's had his fair share. The occurrence of this varied, in my case, you know 1948 when the onslaught really started and I had a pretty bad

28:30 time for a year or more. You know that's three or four years after the end of the war. These other fellows were even later, one of them, the man in Sydney finished up in the Korean War and he started to develop problems from then on. So, it varied and I don't know why it was just the way it was.

I know you've mentioned it before but can you tell us the story again of coming across those guys

29:00 **who in your own words had lost it a bit?**

Yes, one in particular who I can see now, it was in the height of the bombing that day on the 15th, yeah, he'd lost it. He was a much older fellow and he sat in the corner of the radio office and he put his head down and his hands over. And he'd had it, "He didn't want to do any more and he wanted to get out of it", and that sort of thing.

29:30 He was a good bit older than I was. He was a leading telegraphist at the time but he didn't leave the ship there and then, he recovered and rejoined us in the mess and what have you and so on but I guess it's just an episodal type of thing. It wouldn't be too hard to get like that under those conditions that we were experiencing.

And the other incident of that was that the same time?

Same time and the

30:00 same sort of thing but not with a leading tel. You didn't confide in your shipmates that you were having problems. You know, it was the stiff upper lip sort of attitude and you didn't want to be known as a weakling I guess. And I didn't, during those actions I didn't have those sort of problems I was able to grit my teeth and just hope that we would

30:30 still be afloat when it was over which it was.

Were those men –was there any type of official response to this behaviour or was it ignored?

No, in those days in the service and when it occurred to me it was referred to as "anxiety state". The word post-traumatic stress disorder, which they use today was unheard of, we'd never heard of it. And in my particular case when I was hospitalised you were treated with

31:00 sedatives and you didn't have counselling like they talk about today. You didn't have people who would, you know, try and explore this sort of thing with you. You'd be given them sedatives and have a rest and hopefully you'd pick up. But there used to be some very bad cases and I did have to go ashore into the naval hospital in Plymouth at one stage, some of the fellow, the

31:30 Brits who'd really been through the mill, young marines and so on were very bad cases in this hospital.

What aspects are peculiar to naval engagements or the navy's role that make the stresses higher or perhaps might account for the fact that you and your shipmates had problems?

It's a good question, I've not really thought of it.

32:00 I don't know that the stresses would necessarily be any higher in the navy, army or the air force. I would think that they would all tend to parallel each other. My imagination of being a fighter pilot trying to defend yourself would be a pretty horrendous and tense situation. With the navy, I guess the difference is, the major difference if you're comparing yourself with the army or air force people at a base that

32:30 in a ship you can move and you can try and avoid by dodging, which we did. You had far better conditions of accommodation than the people on land. I had stopped in a couple of army camps after the visit to Rabaul on the corvette, I had to come back through Jacquinot Bay and Lae and stayed in the army sergeants' messes while I was waiting for a flight.

33:00 Their conditions couldn't compare with the navy. You know, we had hot and cold water and showers, we had pretty good food, well protected. You know, even when you're on night watch you could get your cup of Kai from the galley which is like a thick chocolate drink and so on. Well I guess if you were in the army or even the air force you probably didn't have those advantages. So whilst

33:30 under action conditions when you're being bombed etc. the tensions would not be vastly different but you certainly had better surroundings that would help you to cope with it, you know, when it ceased.

We'd better move on so that we don't end up not talking about anything. So in the lead up to Guadalcanal what did the Hobart do?

The Coral Sea was May, early May,

34:00 we were with the – we were called "Taskforce 44" with American ships. We had Chicago I think and [USS] Salt Lake City was an 8 inch cruiser, Chicago was a 6 and it was the Australian and the Canberra and this was a fairly sizeable cruiser force, a fair bit of power there with destroyer escorts. And we were exercising

34:30 together and various practice shoots and then we had to, that was May, we didn't have a lot of time to the invasion of Guadalcanal and when that decision had been taken we sailed as a force from Australia to Tasmania, we had to go across the Tasman. There was an incident going across, it was a pretty rough crossing,

35:00 and one of the crew on Hobart was washed overboard going across the Tasman. And the Salt Lake City launched one of their boats, not a power boat called a Skimandish and they got this man and took him aboard which was a remarkable piece of seamanship actually. We got to Wellington and it was cold and windy and there were a lot of Americans there, the American

35:30 Marine Corps were there waiting to be embarked and the Americans were involved in a lot of re-stowing the transports, sorting a lot of things out that weren't right. And then, we as the escort of the marine corps, we sailed from Wellington heading for the Guadalcanal , this is late

36:00 July by then. We hadn't been that long out of Wellington, a day or two before we met up with the major

American force, including a battleship, I think it was the [USS] North Carolina or one of those ships, it was a fairly sizeable fleet with the carriers and so forth. And the task was to go through this practice exercise on landing the Fiji group on an

36:30 island there. I mentioned after that we refuelled of the Karina and we headed for the Guadalcanal for the invasion.

How does a fleet like that travel, a large fleet like that travel?

Well you're in a formation, you've got you're screening your transports and your heavier warships are screened by their destroyers, anti submarine detection and things like that and the

37:00 communication was by us, principally, and by them by visual signals, flashing lamps or flag hoists. TBS was in use then, yes, we definitely had TBS, that was the VHF radio voice communication. And then the main concern was whether we would be detected and we weren't. The

37:30 weather was pretty kind, there was a fair bit of overcast as we got close to the Solomons and the ships were divided into two groups. Where we had to go in, you've got Savo Islands and you've got between Savo and Guadalcanal on your right or the southern side and on the northern side you've got Savo and the nearest point of land there is the Tulagi area.

38:00 This bay at Guadalcanal is quite huge and Hobart was with the group that went in on the starboard or he southern side. And it would have been about half past four in the morning. We closed up the second degree and I was allowed up on the upper deck for a little while. And we crept in and we could see the gloom of the island, you see, just before daybreak and not a sound, no

38:30 firing, no guns or anything. So we took the Japanese by complete surprise and the attack started at daybreak with the bombarding of the Japanese positions. The northern group bombarding the Tulagi area and so on and we were bombarding Guadalcanal with the other ships and the carrier aircraft came in and launched their attack. There was quite an onslaught attacking the Japanese and I think it was about 8 o'clock or perhaps a little later that the

39:00 transports then started to disgorge their troops and making the actual landing. And they didn't encounter much if any opposition when they hit the beaches because the Japs retreated, they'd been taken by complete surprise. We had been there protecting the transports, there were reports coming in from Bougainville from coast watches and we

39:30 were alerted to the Japanese aircraft coming down and were able to, all of the ships got underway, including the transports. And when these attacks, which were combined high level and torpedo bomber attack, there were quite a few I think about 22 torpedo bombers came in and about half of them or more were shot down. The fighter aircraft of course were able to come into the scene, but Fletcher,

40:00 after the troops were put ashore, Fletcher withdrew the carriers and there was a lot of criticism after about doing this. He withdrew them some considerable distance away. A lot of people believed he should have been closer and been patrolling the area between Bougainville, what they call "The slot"; it got that name later. And it was, at night, the night disposition, Hobart with the

40:30 [USS] San Juan which was a six inch fairly modern American cruiser, our task was down the Tulagi end protecting the transports. And the heavy cruisers, that's the Australian and Canberra with the American cruisers and destroyers were into two boxed groups and were going around in a box near the southern Guadalcanal area of the entrance, Savo Island, Guadalcanal , and the others were

41:00 patrolling this other area between Savo and the northern segment. And two of the American destroyers, one of them was called the [USS] Blue, they were radar ships outside, and there had been reports about a Japanese surface force coming down. It had been detected leaving Truk, it had been detected by an Australian Hudson aircraft and it had also been reported by a

41:30 submarine, an American submarine.

We'll just stop there because we're about to run out of tape.

Tape 8

00:30 **The Japanese are coming in from Truk?**

There were really a lot of alerts of this impending Japanese surface force coming south.

What sort of signals were you getting to indicate that?

Well again the information was coming in via our broadcasts, the coast watches reporting in to wherever they reported and the stuff was being transmitted in code to us. It had to be

01:00 coded because you wouldn't want the Japanese to be knowing or finding out about them.

But you've got fairly time sensitive information. What's it like decoding information under those circumstances?

Well it could come through very quickly, yes, that could be dealt with pretty speedily.

How long would it take you to decode that particular message that the Japanese were coming from Truk?

Oh they would be short messages, it would only be a few minutes, it wouldn't be critical I don't think.

And then what would you do with that information?

Well the information, of course is made aware to

01:30 the fleet. The admiral would be the one getting that information as early as possible, the flagship would be getting that, whereas the other ships under his command would be informed by the flagship. That's the way it would go you wouldn't necessarily be dealing with it yourself.

That's coming in on TBS to you?

No, that would be coming in on the broadcasts.

Can you tell us about before we got that, this -

02:00 **I don't want to break it up too much but the TBS?**

This is a VHF, operated at very high frequency, radiotelephone that is a microphone speaking communication system. The sets, they're a transceiver in a black box, they were RCA [Radio Corporation of America] made in America. And the Americans fitted ours in Garden Island and the antenna, which was on the mast,

02:30 the feed from the black box to the aerial on the mast was in a coaxial gas-filled cable. It was a copper tube with the wire spaced inside it and it was gas-filled with nitrogen gas to keep it dry. That was the way it was done then. Today you have solid type co-actual cables, the sort of stuff you connect to your television cable.

03:00 And it was only VHF communication short range about line of sight, horizon to horizon, and it was used to communicate between ships in the Pacific and there wasn't any concern at that time about the security of it, the ability to locate it by DF [Direction Finding]. Today that would be the real worry because you can do that in later technologies. But at the time it was considered to be pretty

03:30 safe.

Why is that?

Well because of the short range. Line of sight communication, that's all. And unless a ship with equipment was able to receive on that frequency was in the line of sight range they wouldn't pick it up. Or it's unlikely they would. There are certain meteorological conditions where they might extend over long range, what you call an inversion layer would cause a reflection over distance and so on but that's pretty rare.

04:00 **Sorry, getting back to the Japanese, they're descending on you from Truk?**

Well this surface force under, this is all post-war history, the Japanese Admiral's name was Mikala or Mikawa. Now Crutchley was the Australian Rear Admiral and he had charge of the cruiser

04:30 formations to protect the area and he had these cruisers going around in these two box-like structures. He had the radar pickets outside. Now Crutchley himself in the Australia detached himself from his force to go ashore to go to Guadalcanal or get as close as he could, he wanted a meeting with the American Marine Commander.

05:00 And it was while he was there that the action started. Now the American radar pickets outside failed to locate the Japanese ships coming in and what the Japs did they came south, they went very close to the destroyer picket ships and went around Savo Island on the outside, that's the

05:30 outer ocean side, and came in the southern entrance and they just attacked the cruisers as they went through. Now action stations sounded, it was about 2 o clock in the morning, the Hobart was down this far end, well away from Savo with the San Juan protecting the transports. The Japanese had also flown off their floatplanes, some floatplanes were dropping flares when their own ships came in and helping to

06:00 illuminate. And I was in the remote control office that particular action time and I had to race up on the flag deck and I remember as I passed the flag deck stopping momentarily and looking towards Savo, which was I suppose 3, 4 miles or maybe longer, further away, I could see the gun flashes, I could see the occasional trace of shell going through the air. And I could see fires in fact. There was one explosion with a

06:30 massive red in the sky up in the action station. And we were not attacked at the end where we were. It

only lasted about 20 minutes before their Japs had completed their destruction of the force. They had disabled the Canberra, she hadn't fired a shot, he [USS] Vincenze, the [USS] Quincy and the [USS] Astoria,

07:00 the three American 8 inch cruisers were sunk. They were so badly damaged they were either sunk or beached because we could see the upper works of one or two of them the next morning. And when daybreak came, we at the time in the Hobart, did not know that it was a Japanese force that had come through. We had not been informed that it was. And there was an enormous amount of

07:30 chit chat going on in the mess the next morning. "Did the Americans fire on us?" "Did the ship shoot at…?" – that sort of argument was going on. And it wasn't until a good deal later in the morning that there was knowledge that it was a Japanese force that had come through. And, you know, that really was a licking, it was a terrible loss. I think the total number of sailors killed collectively was of the order of

08:00 2,000 in that action, Americans, and a couple of hundred or something off Canberra, and I knew one or two of them off Canberra. So we then, on Chicago, the six inch cruiser that we knew quite well because she'd been part of Taskforce 44, she'd had her boughs blown off and for some reason or another she found herself well away from the action by day break and anyhow the forces were gathered and with

08:30 the transports – we understand they hadn't been completely unloaded. We sailed from the Solomons back to Noumea and, this is a lot of stuff you find out later, there was concern that the American marines had virtually been abandoned there, they didn't have all their equipment unloaded and things like that. In

09:00 Noumea, we didn't know this until a good bit later, the captain of the Chicago committed suicide, his name was Bede I think. Apparently, because he found himself well away from the action and what have you, he must have worried in some way but I don't know the full background to it, but it's written in the books.

At the time were you aware that this had happened?

No, no we weren't. Not in Noumea, we only found this out later.

And what was the role of the Chicago at that time?

The Chicago was a six inch cruiser and she was part of these box formations of the cruisers, cruising around in like a square protecting their particular area of the entrance.

And was there some concern that some sort of discipline had broken down to allow the Japanese to?

Well this is purely conjecture on my part but when a ship finds herself away from where she should be something went wrong.

10:00 Did he deliberately take his ship away or was it purely accidental? I don't know and I've not read anything that confirms it but that was just another side incident that happened. So we very much had our tails between our legs, we had really suffered a major reversal with the loss of those ships. So we then returned to Australian waters, to the area around Palm Island, the Whitsundays,

10:30 and we went through a period of intense night encounter exercises. We had radar by then and we exercised night after night in night attacks. You know, a couple would be the enemy and the others would be the other and locate each other and so forth, that was to sharpen our skills. Now here was another example of how wrong we were in our judgement, going back to Java,

11:00 nobody thought the Japs could fly aeroplanes, nobody thought they could shoot at night – their ability in night encounter, what they did at Savo was quite extraordinary, quite extraordinary. And they suffered so little damage themselves as very few shells that were fired by our side hit them and as I mentioned the Canberra didn't even fire a shot. There was an awful lot of argument around the

11:30 ships about Savo for a very long time. Much later in my naval service as a petty officer, I did what they call a petty officer's course in Melbourne at Flinders, and there were a couple of POs on that course who were on Canberra at Savo and there was endless argument with these guys saying, "Yes, they did fire, they did do that", but the official records say that she didn't fire any

12:00 shells at all.

Before you left Guadalcanal were you able to do anything, picking up people?

No, we didn't. We stayed with the transports that night, with the San Juan and, no, there was no picking up. Destroyers in fact did the rescue work, the American destroyers went alongside

12:30 Canberra and took the survivors, the surviving crew off Canberra and the destroyers did the pick ups of whatever had to be done. No, the Norah Moller was the only occasion in Java where we picked up survivors and they were in the ship's lifeboats anyway, they weren't floundering in the water.

When you're in those battle positions in the Guadalcanal , is the ship flying any particular

ensign?

13:00 Yes, you fly a battle ensign at the masthead it's just –in our case it was a very large whit ensign and all ships tend to do that, even the Yanks had battle ensigns.

Was there any particular concerns you had because of the lack of experience of operating with the Americans?

By the time we went to Guadalcanal I don't think there was. That was another thing about

13:30 TBS, the Americans we found, particularly at Guadalcanal , weren't very disciplined when it came to using their radio. They were really like a lot of squawking cockatoos, all wanting to speak at the same time. And it was absolute babble on that TBS channel, absolute babble, and it took a long time for them to quieten down. I had a similar experience when it came to

14:00 Morse transmissions on Moresby when I was in New Guinea waters but that's another story.

And what was the morale like on the ship as you were leaving the Guadalcanal ?

I think you've got to look at it this way, the ships' company were a very cohesive, disciplined group of people and there was never any thought, never any talk about we were going to be defeated on that

14:30 ship. But we had our tails between our legs in the sense that we'd suffered significant losses. And, again, much like Perth and Sydney, we'd lost Canberra. Now the Australian cruiser force was being decimated. When we started the war we had Sydney, Hobart, Perth and we had the Australia and the Canberra and we had the old Adelaide, which was a very old cruiser, built in

15:00 Cockatoo and we had some destroyers. Now here we were in 1943, we had lost the Sydney, we had lost the Perth, we had lost the Parramatta, we had lost the Canberra. There was only ourselves and the Australia as the two most effective, heavier ships left in the fleet. So, you know, per head of population and size of navy we were suffering a lot.

How much pressure did you feel as the crew at that time?

15:30 I don't think we felt any more pressure at the time. We still had a job to get on with it. The Brits gave us a replacement for the Canberra, they gave us the [HMAS] Shropshire, which was another county class cruiser, similar to Canberra and Australia which sort of restored a bit of the balance but we didn't acquire any new six inch cruisers like the Perth or the Sydney.

16:00 **What was it like coming back to Australian shores after that encounter?**

Well when we came back into the Whitsunday area and the night encounters, night encounter exercise, we were worked pretty hard in that period and this was getting on to, that was August,

16:30 August 1942, we then rejoined the pacific fleet. We were working with the Americans, the carriers, at one stage we were anti aircraft guard for the [USS] Saratoga.

Where was that?

In the Pacific generally, just cruising in the Pacific area. We weren't on any specific operation but there were air attacks on the carriers. The Japs were attacking the American carriers and the Americans were attacking the Japs.

17:00 In fact there were some fairly significant attacks with aircraft being shot down all over the place. It was interesting to watch the Saratoga at that time. As an anti-aircraft guard we simply cruised close to the ship and provided anti-aircraft protection when an attack occurred and watching the operations recovering, if an aircraft was in the circuit and ran out of fuel and didn't have the O.K. to land, he'd just ditch in the

17:30 water and then the guard destroyer would try and pick them up. And I saw the Americans push aircraft over the side that were badly damaged, you know, on landing or when they landed and so on. It was a fairly interesting period and I had been in the remote control office and so on and was able to go out and watch. And once or twice there were bits of aeroplane falling around all over the place with aircraft being shot down. There was quite a lot of

18:00 aerial activity in the Pacific.

What could you see of say some of those aeroplanes that you were shooting at?

What did I see of them? Well just saw, you know, a wing fluttering down and that sort of thing, and the odd one in the distance you would see hit the drink like in those photographs of Guadalcanal but, yeah, there was a lot of air activity over the carrier force.

How much aerial attack did you come under in Guadalcanal?

Quite a lot in

18:30 those first few days after the invasion with the torpedo bombers and the high level attacks, it was fairly

intense. But we were underway, we'd been warned because of the coast watch reports that were coming down and the barrage that was put up when the attack started was very, very significant and a lot of those Japanese torpedo bombers were shot down. I've got an idea,

19:00 from what I can recall and reading about it after, I think in one of the attacks there were 22 torpedo bombers in one of the attacks and more than half of them were shot down.

Can you just describe the box formation, how that works?

If you could imagine what the situation was in Guadalcanal , on the western end you've got

19:30 Savo Island, just a small round island and then if you come south of Savo you've got an opening in the sea like a large channel to the coast of Guadalcanal, that would be the western end of Guadalcanal. And then between the northern end, the northern side of Savo, you've got a similar wide stretch of sea across to

20:00 the Bougainville area, you've got Tulagi at the bottom. So you've got those two openings into this massive bay area of Guadalcanal. And what Crutchley had done to protect the forces, he had posted these radar pickets, these two destroyers with radar, outside of the area between Savo and

20:30 Bougainville because the ships, the Japanese would be coming down on the side of Bougainville, that is the western side or what would become known as "the slot", and those destroyers were in an ideal position, had they been effective, to be able to detect with their radar the oncoming forces. Now inside that line on the northern section, Savo, Bougainville, there

21:00 were half the cruisers just going, sailing, steaming around in a box formation, a box shape, a square, just going around the perimeter. And the same was the set up south of Savo. And it was Canberra was with the ships in the southern area. I can't remember what all the ships were in each but you had those cruisers that I mentioned. There was

21:30 Astoria, Quincy, Vincenze, Chicago, Canberra and of course, Australia which had pulled itself out of the line. But that's what it really amounted to, it's the best way to describe it I think.

And how long were you – I wasn't quite clear of that box formation. Coming back to your working with the American fleet in the pacific, generally, carrier escort duties. How long were you on those duties on the Hobart?

22:00 I can't quite remember but we were there for several weeks I think in those Pacific operations after Guadalcanal but nothing had eventuated that required us, you know, any specific targets or anything but the carriers were locating each other and so on. And then the Americans became involved later in Midway I think it was after, no, Midway was

22:30 after I think. I then was drafted, I'd been on Hobart almost for two years. I'd joined her in Sydney and this was 1943, it was about May, April/May 1943 and I then left the ship and went back – I came here to Canberra and

23:00 I was holed up here at Harman.

How did you leave the ship?

Well when she came back into Sydney, I was on draft, the signal had come through that AGJ [I] was to proceed here, there or whatever it was and so you just leave the ship, you pack your kit, and lug your C bag with your kit in it and your hammock and off you go. And you had instructions to go to wherever you're going, in my case I had to come here to

23:30 Canberra so I had to catch a train and get down here.

Was it a sentimental departure, was it sad to leave your shipmates?

I don't recall any sadness because I knew that I was actually destined to go to Flinders to do the course for WT3, which was leading telegraphist, so it was all part of an anticipated promotion

24:00 and I was a fairly ambitious sort of a young fellow. So I arrived here and it was bitterly cold, you know, the wind was blowing, there weren't all the trees around the place like there is now. And what had been built as married quarters, houses on Harman, you know weatherboard houses, about six of us were accommodated in each of these houses. And there were WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] there, it was my first encounter with women in the Australian Navy, they were

24:30 telegraphists. And I think I was here for 5 or 6 weeks before I then continued on for the start of this course. And I was a watch keeper here in Canberra, keeping watch at the station and I was operating the Bel's transmitter and broadcasts or receiving. We had two or three Americans there as well, American radiomen as they call themselves doing the same thing.

25:00 **What was it like being in a nice safe sort of scene sending out messages to the ships out in the –**

Well it was a very good atmosphere, it was a good break. The accommodation, although it was very cold, it was bitterly cold there having come in from the tropics. Off duty at night in the kitchen of these houses we could get a large can of milk and we'd have the kitchen wood stove

25:30 stoked up and we'd be heating the milk to make coffee, and we'd be playing cards, crib or something like that. And I remember one night we had the damn think stoked up to warm us all up, and there was about 4 of us in there. There was a knock on the door, and the officer on duty with the PO knocked on the door to tell us that the chimney was on fire because had such a raging fire going in the fire place – so we just let it die down and it went out. The food was

26:00 excellent because the WRANS were doing the cooking, female cooks, and there was no shortage of good food, fresh milk and all that sort of thing. It was a good break actually especially after the experience we'd had.

What was it like to come from a very male environment of a ship?

It was strange. In fact I had one really embarrassing moment as a result of this. I was off duty and I was in the mess having a cup of tea and some

26:30 cake, the WRANS had asked me, said, you know "Come in and join us". And there was myself and 20 or so WRANS in the mess, we ate together, and I didn't hear the fire alarm sound, they had a bell that they rang, and it was a fire alarm practice. And the next thing the PO or the chief came in and yelled at us to fall in outside. It was GJ falling in, the only male amongst these twenty or so WRANS and we were

27:00 marched up the road to the regulating office to be ticked off about not answering the fire alarm which was a bit amusing but to me it was a bit of an embarrassment. But otherwise it was pretty good, I got to know one or two of the WRANS - one or two were rather nice ladies. I remember going out with a couple of them, mainly to the War Memorial to have a look which was fairly new, not like it is today. But that was life in Harmon, and then it was back to

27:30 Flinders Naval Depot.

And can you tell us briefly about your time at Flinders?

Yes it was a fairly intensive course, it only lasted about six weeks and this was just training in higher echelons of the radio communications area. I did very well on the course, there were about twelve of us in the class, and if you look at my naval wireless history sheet there you'll see I did pretty well, I topped the class.

28:00 And when I completed that course it was very soon after completion of the course that I was drafted to the Moresby. I had to pick her up in Sydney and I had been promoted straight away to leading telegraphist, and that's just the one hook, and I picked that up before I got my first good conduct badge so I just had the hook on the arm. And I joined this ship and this old PO, he was a nice old

28:30 guy, but when he realised I was pretty technically oriented sort of a young fellow and pretty enthusiastic, he didn't worry about the WT department, he let me run the WT department. And I had a pretty good crew of lads, one of them had been on Hobart earlier, a man named John Potter. But the ship was ancient she really was. As I mentioned before

29:00 when we were talking off the record, she had been sunk by a mine in the Thames towards the end the First World War and she was what they called a cue boat in the First World War, that was some sort of disguised vessel. She was raised and refitted and sold, her name then was HMS Silvio and she was sold to the Royal Australian Navy in 1923, that was the year I was

29:30 born. The radio receivers were powered by lead acid accumulators, I had a battery room, where the batteries had to be charged. And the battery charger was really ancient; to drop the voltage down etc., apart from the rectification, there were carbon filament lamps to get the voltage correct. And the transmitter in the wireless office had been

30:00 salved. It was a transmitter that had been salvaged out of the battle cruiser the Australia, which was sunk off Sydney after the Versailles Treaty and it was really a prehistoric piece of equipment, it really was. To tune it you had to put fibre rods through the front of the cage to get hold of these funny old condensers and so on. It really was a weirdo. And the emergency transmitter was a spark transmitter which was down

30:30 aft in the ship, down towards the officers' accommodation. And I had to use that spark transmitter on one occasion (UNCLEAR) and that really was very old technology.

Can you describe that for us?

Yes, this particular day we'd been out on Moresby on anti submarine patrol of the east coast and coming back into Sydney and as we were close to Sydney, Sydney Heads I was required to send a signal,

31:00 this was a plain language signal. And the only, we couldn't get the main transmitter to operate and anyhow it would have had too much power and I went down and I fired up the spark transmitter for the first time and sent the message on 500 kilocycles which was the commercial channel, the commercial

station ashore in Sydney, the marine station, picked it up and it really was, you know, really old technology.

31:30 **Can you describe that technology though, it's no longer with us?**

Well, what we call a spark transmitter required the generation of a high voltage spark across a gap and the gap was about half an inch or so and it was organised with condensers and so on that were charged to be able to generate a radio frequency, a virtual pulse, it used to be like a

32:00 pulsing sort of output. And a very harsh note if you were listening to it on radio, like a very deep rasping sort of sound and that was the "Ark and Spark" transmitter. They were used in the First World War but, you know, it was pretty ancient stuff, the very early days of radio. Well things changed, we were doing a bit of this coastal

32:30 work and she wasn't a good ship, she had no running water. You had a 44 gallon drum with the lid cut out of it in the bathroom and you had to wash yourself with a dipper and the stoker, we'd call him the tankie, was responsible for filling it. She had very limited water capacity so you had to be pretty careful. She had been changed from coal-burning boilers to oil-fired, probably when she became an

33:00 RAN ship or at some stage. She still had the original reciprocating steam engines, they were piston engines. She had very little armament, she had anti submarine equipment so she was a rough ship. We were paid hard line money, we got an extra one shilling and sixpence a day for living on her. She only had a couple of junior permanent officers, the captain was a wavy navy [on account of the wavy gold stripes worn by the officers]

33:30 man, an ex-merchant navy and the first lieutenant was also that type, I think he came from the Huddart Parker line or something. He was an unpleasant, nasty man, he really was very unpopular.

In what way?

He was brutal in his punishments if anyone offended, I was never involved in this, and he treated the sailors like dirt, he really did.

What sort of punishments would he meter out?

Oh, you'd get

34:00 punishments of you know, confined to ship, your leave cancelled, that sort of thing and you'd have extra duties that sort of thing but he was a mean-spirited sort of fellow.

Were there any physical punishments in the navy?

No, not getting whacked with a rope's end. They used to do that back in the Tingira days [An RAN training ship where young sailors were harshly disciplined] when they took boys in at Sydney at the age of 15, they used to use the rope's end on them, then but that's a long time

34:30 ago, well before my time. That's a bit of the Nelson [famous 18th century British naval figure] touch. But the morale on the ship was poor. The seamen branch didn't like the ship. After I left here there were mutinous activity, they chalked "Altmark" up on the cabin doors or some of the officers. Altmark was that hell ship in the Scandinavian waters. You know

35:00 where they found all those merchant navy prisoners from torpedo ships, the Altmark story. Oh, it was a well-known thing. Yes, things weren't very enjoyable on that ship but I spent a long time on her. Anyhow, before we went to New Guinea we were refitted in Mort's Dock and in Garden Island and when we got to Garden Island they

35:30 pulled this old transmitter out of the wireless office. The Hobart had been refitted with new equipment and what was the transmitter in the second wireless office of Hobart came to Moresby as the main transmitter. And I in fact helped the dockyard people installing it to get it going because they weren't too sure about a lot of things. That was a much later Marconi or

36:00 Admiralty pattern transmitter and it had a rated output of about 8 kilowatts. Now I was running the show, and I was very technically minded, and I knew what frequencies would be our main frequency, so I calculated my aerial lengths to match the frequency so I maximised the transmission of power, re-jigged the means of feeding the aerials and so on and I finished up with a very powerful transmitter that could

36:30 whack out a real signal. When we got to Moresby the first place we had to go to was Milne Bay and there were a lot of American ships there and the Japs were being pushed out. The Japs had been pushed out of Milne Bay and they were being pushed out of Buna and Gona. The Yanks, there was no imposition of radio silence and I had signals, my department had signals to send ashore, but the Yanks would monopolise the ship to shore line for transmitting;

37:00 they were on the air all the damn time. So when I started to transmit, on low power I couldn't break in, so we would crank her up to full power and we'd just transmit over the top of them and they soon shut up, we could swamp them. So that was a pretty interesting experience technically. And we had to go into Buna and Gona and very soon after the Japanese had left those

37:30 areas. We were a hydragraphic vessel then and our people had to survey the harbour areas and issue new charts. And there was an American ship called the [USS] Ridgeway and the information was taken to the Ridgeway and she very quickly printed these new charts with these new soundings and markings etc. for distribution to the allied vessels who had to operate there. And we did that

38:00 right up as far as Madang and when we – we hadn't been given any shore leave at that time. The ships' officers were treating the ships' company very badly. They were going ashore and they were bringing nursing staff ashore for parties at their end of the ward room area and when we got to Madang we were, in fact, given to some shore leave but they wouldn't give us one of the

38:30 ship's power boats to go ashore. So we got these seamen people, chiefs and petty officers, they got two of the cutters into the water, these are boats that had to be rowed, and the liberty men including myself we simply piled into the cutter and the leading cutter had only one pair of oars and they towed us in ashore. And it was a pretty slow journey going in, I can tell you. And the Japs had only just

39:00 been pushed out and the army were in the area and we were warned – the Japanese camps were still there and there was ammunition lying around all over the place – and we were warned not to touch anything, not to attempt to pick anything up in the tents in case they were booby trapped. And I went ashore with a signalman, his name was Tony Steele who I was very friendly with. And we decided to have a swim, it was quite a decent sort of place to swim, and this spot where we swam is where we found this great

39:30 heap of Japanese shells, or shell cases, brass cases, very much like our 4 inch shells. The brass cases stood about that high, they still had cordite bags in them but they were in the sea water and completely safe so we decided we'd take a couple of these back and we just shook the cordite packs out and took them back. Anyhow, when we had to go, we were only allowed on shore for about 2 hours altogether, and we got back to the

40:00 cutters and there were lots of these trenching tools, Japanese trenching tools, little short-handled shovels, and the chief who was really in charge of the parties said, "Now come on boys, as many of you as you can, get hold of a trenching shovel". And we got into the two cutters, we separated them and we paddled them back like Indian war canoes, as many as we could get on the gunnel, paddling these things back and he gave us instructions, when we got

40:30 close to the ship's gangway, he would give the instruction "Oars" which was if you had oars you tossed them upright and you'd drift in. He said when he called "Oars" we had to toss these up in the air to get rid of them you see and they were just left drifting. The first lieutenant was too amused when he saw what we were doing but that was our run ashore in Madang, we never got another one. So, you know, they were the sort of things that could happen but she wasn't a very nice ship at all.

41:00 and when I left her – we were only bombed once there. The Japanese were being pushed well back and we were off Madang and anchored and some of the natives were coming out in canoes and offering coconuts and things like that. One solitary Jap aircraft came and we weren't manned or on the alert or anything and he dropped a

41:30 bomb, but he missed us fortunately, and we didn't even fire a shot at him but we were able to give an emergency call on the radio and within a matter of I suppose 5 minutes there were American Lighting aircraft swarming over us and, you know, racing around u trying to find him but of course he'd gone. So that was it.

Tape 9

00:33 **After Madang where did the Moresby go?**

I then left the Moresby, she came back south for a boiler clean and we did a boiler clean in Cairns and I'd left her soon after that boiler clean. She did go back into New Guinea waters and continued doing what she was doing but I wasn't on her.

01:00 I was returned to the Townsville Shore Wireless Station which was on Castle Hill just behind the Catholic cathedral in Townsville. Again that was a station with WRANS a bit like Harmon, and initially I was leading hand of a watch, keeping shifts, but I was quite a technical, an adept technical hand,

01:30 and there was a need for somebody to do technical work there because the first batch of navy-trained radio mechanics arrived on the station. There were three of these fellows and I was given the job of getting these fellows occupied and we provided a technical radio maintenance service to allied ships and apart from work on the

02:00 station if we had receivers or things like that packed up. The transmitting station was in south Townsville and I didn't have anything to do with that, it was just the receiving end. We were fitting what were called AWA [Amalgamated Wireless Australasia] Teller Radios to some of the army vessels that were coming in. Two or three of the corvettes who were having trouble with their transmitters and we

did repair work on those. I lost one of the mechanics, he was electrocuted, his name was

02:30 Bob Brown. It was at the stage where there were rumours the war was over, and I'd sent Bob, together with another fellow, down to this army barge, I've forgotten what they call them but it was a fairly large vessel, to install one of these AWA Teller Radios which was a transmitter and receiver assembly. And to do this they had to feed lead-cased cable through the

03:00 bulkhead into the engine room and the vessel was connected to shore power. And where they went through the bulkhead it happened to be behind the power board which was energised by the shore AC [alternating current] power, and Bob Brown, instead of the boys checking that the power was off, he was in the engine room receiving, pulling this cable through, the cable touched the back of the switchboard of the

03:30 AC and he was electrocuted. And the first the other guy knew was that he wasn't pulling the cable. And we buried Bob in Townsville and that was a bit of a blow. Anyhow, the atomic bomb was dropped shortly after that and the war was over. Yes, we celebrated, we organised a party on the station. The officer in charge of the station was a warrant telegraphist, a wavy navy fellow named

04:00 Hoad, and I got on pretty well with him and caught up with him after the war at one of the reunion functions, he's not alive now. But we organised a decent sort of a party and we organised a dance or a ball in what was the dormitory where the boys lived. It was a nice big area, four times the size of this, with a wooden floor. We hired a piano and a small band and invited some of the

04:30 officers up from the main station called HMAS Magnetic so that was really the end of the war. I got that pierhead jump at that time and was away for a shot period on the Townsville to go to, I was still a leading tel, and they needed a leading tel on the HMAS Townsville, the corvette, to go to Rabaul with the corvettes for the mine sweeping. And I got back, the bomb had been dropped and when we got to Rabaul it was pretty interesting, very

05:00 briefly, although the war was over the Japs were still there and Japanese aircraft were flying around and Japanese army people in their boats and barges and floating around up and down. We just didn't take any notice, but it was a bit eerie a bit unusual. So that was the closest we got to the Japs but the war was over and there was certainly no shooting or anything. Anyhow, my promotion to petty officer came through and they dumped me off the Townsville at

05:30 Jacquinot Bay and I had to thumb a ride back from Jacquinot Bay to Townsville. And I managed to get from Jacquinot Bay to Lae in an air force aeroplane. I then got another flight in a Dakota DC3 sort of thing across New Guinea to Moresby and then I got in a Sunderland flying boat from Moresby to Cairns and another air force aeroplane back to Townsville. And I got back to Townsville

06:00 and I was only there a very short time before I was sent to Flinders as an instructor and I finished up down there instructing, I was down there for a couple of years.

Before, just around that time when the war ended, how were you stepping back onto a shore posting after all that time on the ships?

I rather enjoyed it to be quite honest. I wasn't sorry to be off the ship and back on shore after

06:30 you know, we'd been through a pretty horrendous time.

Is that because it was the Moresby?

I think it was a combination of both and you know Hobart was a long strenuous period of war activity and Moresby, it still had its tensions to a lesser degree because you never knew if you were going to be torpedoed when you were doing what you were doing. So I was pleased to get ashore it was

07:00 really a good psychological refresher you might say.

Do you have any time for submarine people?

Yes, I think they're extraordinary people to be quite honest. Well, the risks they are exposed to, both you know the Germans in the last war and our own fellows - it was just extraordinary. I don't think it would be every man's job.

How did you respect the

07:30 **Japanese as an opposition?**

Well, we didn't like them very much; we disliked them pretty intensely. We thought they were, you know, they were very good at what they did but they were, you know, pretty vicious, tenacious, we didn't like being bombed by them. There was that hatred about them but when the war was over that sort of changed and in my peace-time situation I did

08:00 in fact go to Japan and had discussions and meetings with people in Japan and I don't have that feeling now. But at the time when the war was on we weren't too impressed and we certainly weren't impressed when I found out what they'd done to my cousin when they'd shot her at Banka. And when we heard so much about the atrocities, you know, Burma Road and that sort of thing.

Where did you find out that?

Most of that was after the war as a result of press articles mainly. I don't ever

08:30 remember receiving any publications in the navy that gave us that information – there was a lot of stuff in the press.

Can you give us a few more details of what happened to your cousin or what you know of what happened to her?

Well, what we do know is that she got out of Singapore on this vessel called the Vyner Brooke, with Sister Bullwinkle and 12 or 14 others and the ship was sunk in Banka, I guess she was sunk as the result of bombing,

09:00 aerial bombing, and they got ashore on Banka Island and the Japanese troops that had got to Banka Island found them and shot them. Sister Bullwinkle, they shot them in the water, and Bullwinkle was the only one that survived. She feigned death and did come back to Australia.

It's quite well-known the story but your cousin was amongst the ones that were killed?

Yes, Lorna's photograph is with the group of nurses in the War Memorial

09:30 as one of the people.

Had you seen her when you were in Singapore.

No, I didn't. I knew she was there and the reason I knew she was there, she left Australia in a vessel called the Zeelandia at the time when I first joined the Hobart. And that escort when we went across the Bite to Fremantle we actually escorted the Zeelandia and she was on it but I didn't know, not until later.

10:00 **I've just got to pick up something out of order. You showed us some film before and I know the archive might not see it, but maybe you can describe the occasion for us in which the captain of the Hobart was replaced and he left?**

Yes when Coral Sea was completed we returned directly to Brisbane

10:30 and we were in Brisbane River, I think the Hamilton Wharf area, and we were alongside the Australia which was also there with us. And Harry Howden was to leave the ship and he was to be replaced by another captain H A Showers, Harry Showers. Now Howden was an immensely popular man on the ship and we really were very sorry to see him go. The ERAs,

11:00 That's the engine room (UNCLEAR) that's the people who work with lathes and metal and so on had made a model of the Hobart in metal and the ships' company farewelled Harry on the quarter deck and he was presented with the model of the ship. He was one of the last naval captains at the time who wore a wing collar which made him fairly distinctive; you could pick Harry when he had his wing collar, and

11:30 he made a speech and one of the senior chiefs made a speech to farewell him. He shook hands with practically everybody on the quarterdeck and we gave him three cheers and we really were sorry to see him go. I wasn't on shore leave that day and at the time I didn't participate in having a drink of alcohol but he did in fact invite anybody who was on leave that afternoon, or that evening, to come to I think it was The

12:00 Lennon's Hotel or something like that in Brisbane and he would supply the beer and a lot of the boys, including my friend in Sydney, Max Piermont, went along and had this sort of farewell drink with him. Showers, who replaced him, never achieved anywhere near that popularity. Showers took us into the Guadalcanal and so on. I'm not saying that he wasn't an able officer or anything but he wasn't a

12:30 man who had any real oh, charisma or developed that sort of rapport with the ships' company in the time that I served after him. So, yeah, Harry was a pretty decent bloke.

If you had to characterise Harry Howden's captaincy, and why he was such a good captain in a few words, how would you do that?

Gee, that's a hard question.

We're getting near the end of the interview that's why I say sort of in a brief way what was it that made him a good captain?

What characterised

13:00 him was the fact that what we had been through we had survived and we had survived because of his sheer skill as a cruiser captain. I don't personally believe there was anybody who could be considered to even be in his class the way that he was able to handle that ship. Now it's very much a communicator's judgement, I've not served in other cruisers so I can't – but he really was quite an amazing fellow. I think he had a

13:30 much more relaxed attitude, for example Singapore with the sewing machines and, you know, the possibility of looting was mentioned and, you know, after all he did much the same thing. And, you

know, you can't blame him, you know, the Japs were going to get that car anyhow so why couldn't he have it. And it was used as a transport when he was shore-based in Colombo and places like that. I don't know if I can describe it any differently

14:00 and if you ever had to deliver a signal to him in his cabin, let's say in port, and duty people would have to take a signal to him, he was always extremely pleasant. There was never an attitude of "I'm the captain and you're the underdog", there was a great equality in the way he approached men. And I found that myself, post war in the contacts I have in the defence

14:30 organisation, that in the navy that I joined and the discipline that I experienced, the gap between the lower deck and the upper deck was a very marked dividing line, that never made its presence felt in the Hobart and I don't see that today in the contact I have when I've made presentations to the Defence College.

On the Moresby the situation was completely different?

The exact opposite.

What were some of the

15:00 **examples that made the relationship bad in that respect?**

Well take the first lieutenant for example who was an ex-merchant navy man. He'd obviously been brought up in the Merchant Navy where sailors were under the thumb and just the lackeys on board a ship. He was a fairly big fellow and a little bit on the fat side. And I remember the yeoman of signals we had on the Moresby, he was really a nice guy, his name was Johnny Rogerson.

15:30 Johnny was a little bit musically oriented and could come up with some lines and we planned a concert and I organised to have a microphone up on the bridge, it was an open bridge, and there was a loud hailing speaker after on the mast, it was right over the quarter deck, and one of these ditties that Johnny Rogerson had composed and had sung was to the tune of Trees but it went something like "I have never met as

16:00 fat as he". You know it was so obvious it was focussed on the first lieutenant. Well before Johnny had finished his song, orders had come to close the concert down and that was it. So that gives you an idea of how popular he was. And with the treatment in Madang, the way liberty men were treated, and yet they were using the ship's motorboat and they were bringing army people on board for

16:30 drinking sessions and they were scrounging ashore Japanese rifles and ammunition and having target practice down aft. Yes, the divide was very, very marked.

We'll move forward to the end of the war in Townsville. What were your ambitions at that point having spent this long in the Navy?

Yes, when I was elevated to petty officer and got the

17:00 posting for instructor, I as ambitious to go as far as I could. The next step in the technical non substandard rate was what they called WT1 and this was wireless instructor level and I did that WT1 course for wireless instructor and was granted the, I think they called it a non substandard rate, it's just a rate and not a promotion in terms of rank. And I had

17:30 clear visions of going through for warrant and commissioner and so on and that opportunity was presented to me in England, but health problems intervened and that altered the whole course of things. That was a disappointment, it was a disappointment but you had to live with it. The health situation wasn't good, it got pretty bad at times.

The age between 17 and 21 is an important

18:00 **sort of period of any man's life, or any boy's life – anyone would say that they changed a lot in that period but how did your experience in the war particularly change you?**

Well it certainly changed me and that's a very interesting question to have asked and I'll tell you why. I was on the Moresby when I turned 21 and we happened to be in Sydney and I never drank at all at that stage, I never touched alcohol. And

18:30 most of the fellows on the ship did. I used to say to them, when they used to tease me and say you'll be 21 soon are you going to take us ashore and we'll have a booze up. I said to them, I said "look, when I turn 21, if we're in port, I'll go ashore with you and I'll have a drink with you and I'll buy a round". So sure enough we happened to be in Sydney for my 21st birthday and I trotted ashore with several of my crew including

19:00 Tony Steele, the signalman, and the leading signalman, I've forgotten most of their names. And they took me to the Ship Inn in the [Circular] Quay area and I bought them a round of drinks, well one led to two, and they got me pretty full as a matter of fact for the first time, so that was my introduction to the demon drink and that was how I celebrated my 21st and I remember sleeping that night at what they called

19:30 Johnny's, that was the navy house down in that area and having breakfast there, and then going back to the ship with a thumping headache the next morning. Does that answer the question?

Were you tempted on future occasions from then on, was that a changing point for you?

No, well, I wasn't afraid to have a drink occasionally but, no, I didn't imbibe freely and they had introduced an occasional

20:00 issue of a bottle of beer on the Moresby at that time and I used to give mine mainly to Tony Steele the signalman, because he used to like his drop of beer. No, it didn't have a huge effect on me.

What about the harder times of the war, what had that taught you.

The?

The harder times or the stress of being at war that experience, what had that left you with?

Well it certainly

20:30 had a major impact in the sense that you had to judge, initially, when I went to work, not to get too involved in too much pressure and tension, but I gradually worked myself back. I've not had any relapses in recent years but I did have a couple of bouts in a minor sense of

21:00 relapse at various periods. I didn't enjoy the last twelve months of my employment as a first assistant secretary, the pressures there were pretty horrendous and that's why I decided I needed to retire which I did. So I think the lessons were there as to you've got to pace yourself a little bit and not get too involved. The work that I do now in the Association (UNCLEAR), I don't let it bug me at all,

21:30 in fact I get a bit of enjoyment being on the other side of the table ticking a minister off, you know belting asbestos sheets over his backside. You might want to wipe that off the tape by the way.

We'll let it slide. If you don't mind I'd like to talk about how that impacted on your health because I think it's an important issue for the archive to deal with. How did that happen, was it a gradual process or what were your first instances of that?

22:00 Well I was in England and conditions in England in 1948 weren't easy, you couldn't go ashore and have a first class meal in a restaurant, they were rationed fairly stringently. The ship when we arrived there - we went over on the Kinimbla, the commissioning crew, and we transferred to the RN carrier, [HMS] Glory, and the food on her was pretty poor. And we'd been there a good while, I was retraining

22:30 ex-Royal Navy telegraphists who would become part of our commissioning crew and I started to develop a nerve rash. That is, if I was walking along the deck and accidentally, you know how you trip and recover your step, a bit of a shock affect, I would break out in a blotchy red rash all over my trunk and the irritation from it was really awful and it would sort of build up to a crescendo and then it would die away and I'd be O.K. for a while.

23:00 I became sleepless and I did report to sick bay and saw the ship's doctor and so on and they tried sedatives but it progressively got worse and it ultimately developed, coming back or before the ship sailed to come back in fact, the RN hospital, I was hospitalised in Plymouth and the medicos there, it's on my medical records,

23:30 recommended that I be repatriated without delay to Australia. That didn't happen. I came back in the ship's sick bay and apart from this rash, when this rash occurred when I was laying down I'd finish up with like a paralysis – I was very conscious of everything around me or people talking to me but I couldn't move a finger or bat an eyelid I was sort of frozen. And that would last several minutes and then it would pass off and the

24:00 frequency of it progressively increased. When we got back to Australia, the ship came into Melbourne and I was then taken to Flinders Naval Hospital back in the Cerberus and I spent a good many months in the naval hospital there. And then they decided that I would have to be boarded, I was reviewed by some specialists in Melbourne and things like that. And they called it, in those days they called it "anxiety state" as a result of the stress I'd been

24:30 through. So I was discharged physically unfit in November 1949, I'd almost been in the service 10 years, went home, I wasn't terribly well and I suppose it was by about 1951, about two years after, that I started to sort of come to grips and cope.

25:00 And then I got that job with Civil Aviation and I was in the local area, in Adelaide, with them for a while and their radio service and then they sent me off to Cocos and I was pretty good out there. When I came back from Cocos and I joined Philips, that would have been about 1954, things weren't too bad. After I'd been with Philips for a while I had a bit of a relapse and I

25:30 was admitted to hospital again and that's where they gave me this insulin shock treatment. After that I was pretty good. I met Fleur and we married 43 years ago and that made an enormous difference, and having the boys and so forth. So I go along fairly well now. I do have nightmares every now and again, they're mainly manifested by yelling in my sleep

26:00 and, you know, if Chris is at home, like he is at the moment he'll get a bit anxious and come and see if I'm all right but it doesn't happen every night. And I try not to worry about it. I don't think too much about the war, I suppose it's buried in your subconscious to some extent. I've got on with living the best way I can. I think of other people who are much worse of than me.

How much are those nightmares concretely connected to the war?

26:30 Most of them, most of them.

Are there certain images that come up?

Mainly the stress situation. You find yourself under pressure, you know, intense – or confinement is another thing because in a ship's wireless office you haven't got too much room so it's that sort of impending doom and pressure and tension and I guess it's reliving that sort of thing.

When you first started manifesting these symptoms it was a baffling medical condition for anyone looking at you I'm sure. What did

27:00 **you think was happening?**

Well I didn't, I didn't really know and I'll be honest I didn't connect it as being like a war neurosis type of thing. Not much was ever said or spoken about it and the initial diagnosis was "anxiety state". I suppose it was a case of being anxious and the rash they called that a psychosomatic urticaria which

27:30 was nerve or psychologically generated. Now, of course, my GP [doctor], and I have to see the GP fairly regularly, my blood pressure has to be monitored and I have a lot of skin problems, I have melanoma and skin cancers, he says well, you know, you're really a PTSD person, post traumatic stress disorder is what it is, but I haven't had to be treated with

28:00 sedatives for a very long time. And I've got a good outlet here with a very good wife and we've had an extremely happy marriage.

How did you deal with that on your own in the two years after you were discharged?

Not that easily to bevery honest. It used to drive me to distraction and it was very hard to concentrate. And my father was dead, he died in 1950, just after I came home, and I was living at the home in

28:30 Walkerville with my mother and it wasn't easy. You know, I'd go off on my own for periods and try and work the tension off and so on.

You mentioned in 1954 they gave you insulin shock treatment. Could you briefly describe what that involved?

Yes, I was admitted to the repatriation hospital and that was in Dawes Road in South Australia and I as only one of several who were

29:00 there. And fairly early in the morning, it would be 5.00am or thereabouts, the nurses would come and you would be injected with insulin and the insulin would get rid of the sugar in your system and you would lapse into a coma. You would just become unconscious, still breathing of course, and you would be left in that state for a period and I'm really not sure

29:30 long, probably half an hour or an hour. And then you would be brought out of it by being given sugar and you became very ravenous for sugar. You'd then have your breakfast and if you had Kellogg's Cornflakes you would really pile the sugar on. Something you wouldn't do today, because you'd put weight on and that would restore the equilibrium, the balance, and that went on for a fortnight – every day for about two weeks. And then

30:00 I didn't have any more of it and the situation improved and I felt better as a result of it. In my working situation I was still ambitious when I really got back into harness in a proper way. When I came back from Cocos I'd been a senior communication officer and that was an enjoyable experience, it really was and it wasn't technically difficult and we had some excitement.

30:30 Then when I came back into the public service and I left the job as the Assistant Commercial Manager of Philips and I rejoined the public service, or joined the public service again because I had been in it for the Cocos episode and I had to come back as a base rate clerk but I had set my course to do administrative work related to technical functions and I got involved in areas where there were engineering matters so I could speak their language and that sort of

31:00 thing. I gained pretty rapid promotion I was a class 6 clerk within about 18 months and went to Darwin and we got married, I had my first son, my eldest son was born in Darwin, I was up there for about 3 years. And then fairly rapid promotion followed, I went from there, there was Civil Aviation in Darwin, I was running stores, accounting, paymaster and really acquiring a lot of knowledge

31:30 about that side of the public sector. And it was involved with all the technical sides of stores because we had a pretty big radio operation there. I was then promoted to the Civil Aviation Flying Unit in Melbourne as the manager of the flying unit and that got me back involved with the aviation side and technical matters again and there were a lot of interesting technical areas there administratively. Then I won a promotion of there to the Department of Supply of Aeronautical Research

32:00 Laboratories and I was there for I think about two years. And then I was virtually head-hunted to come to Canberra as the principal executive officer which was class 10 in those days which was a job as PEO [?] of the Aircraft and Other Weapons Division under a well-known aircraft designer who was the controller, a man named Ian Fleming, he was the designer of the Jindavic target aircraft and I

32:30 got very involved in the Mackie, Mirage, Nomad, Ikara projects on the technical commercial side. My Philips experience, which was commercial, I brought into the department all the commercial aspects of selling the Nomad aircraft, I wrote the contracts for the sales, travelled overseas and negotiated them, raised the loans for the buying countries out of the banks under the export finance and (UNCLEAR) corporations so I had a pretty good job.

33:00 That then department was demolished and we became the Department of Productivity and I became the Assistant Secretary, that was about 1985 I think and I was working with industry, a lot of areas of industry, and running programmes and then what that department was demolished and it ultimately became defence support and I

33:30 moved in there running the marketing organisation as an AS [Assistant Secretary] and then I was moved into the FAS [First Assistant Secretary] chair and I wasn't promoted permanently to the FAS Level 3 but I acted for a very long time and as such when you've acted in a job in excess of I think it's a year and a day and you retire as a First Assistant Secretary, so I was retired as a FAS and here I am.

You mentioned that the last year of that

34:00 **job was difficult again.**

It was very difficult, yes.

Was that the result of tensions arising again that hadn't come up in a while?

Well I was working under a great deal of pressure. I'd been put into the management services division and running that. It was a very big division of nearly 400 people and whilst I knew the work, the financial and all that side, and dealing with ministers and what have you, because of my involvement in the past in these technical

34:30 areas in these projects I was still being dragged back into those areas and, you know, I was being pulled in all sorts of directions. I had the Costigan Royal Commission issue on my plate, as far as the Williamstown Dockyards were concerned, and I didn't get on particularly well with the permanent head, he applied a great deal of pressure to me. So I was really pleased to fold my tent and call it a day.

How much could those

35:00 **pressures be connected to what was earlier diagnosed now as this stress disorder?**

I think there was some degree of connection with it because the blood pressure problem mounted as a result of those pressures and I wasn't feeling as good as I should have been so I think there was some relativity there.

35:30 **During your entire career that you just went through were there times when these symptoms came up again?**

When I was in Melbourne with the Civil Aviation Flying Unit and I was married, and very happily married, I did have some recurrences of the rash on a few occasions. I did have to get some treatment and again when I said (UNCLEAR) but in a much more subdued minor situation and medication for that improved dramatically and I don't take it now at the present time and I hope it doesn't happen again.

I certainly hope

36:00 **it doesn't bring anything on from this interview. How often did you think about the war and how often did these physical symptoms bring up emotional responses and memories?**

Talking about it today in these presentations it doesn't cause it to re-emerge. In fact, I think it's improved a great deal as a result of talking much more freely. I've often heard people say that if you talk about

36:30 problems that they'll go away, and certainly with the presentations that I've made over the last three years and continue to do I think being able to talk about it fairly freely and so on – no, I read a lot of naval history – I'm currently reading Fortress Mortar which is a new book out and I've got a lot of interest in that sort of thing.

When you think about the

37:00 **war, 60 years ago today, with all the hindsight you have. How do you feel about those years that you spent?**

Well I suppose to some extent they could be called lost years in that in your very early days you didn't have the enjoyment that a 15, 16 or 17 year old has now or even had if they hadn't have been at war.

But on the positive side of it the naval training I think has

37:30 stood me in very good stead. You know, I became fairly disciplined in my thinking and attitude. I was motivated to be very ambitious because I didn't like being bawled out and kicked around and things like that. So I think there were a lot of positives there. I have no regrets that I had my time in the navy and you know the war service well I guess it was war, like the fellows in Iraq, the just had to

38:00 go if they're in the forces, it's just one of the things that happens to happen in your particular life cycle.

You helped to win that war for your country and something that you should be justly proud of but have we won the peace?

No. I sometimes, I really do ponder this, not sometimes. I think about what goes on in Northern Ireland what's happening at the present time in Iraq, the Middle East, Bosnia, the Balkans and so on.

38:30 Until people in their particular factions, religious or what have you, can really learn to accept each other, I don't think we'll ever have what you call true peace. There will always be conflicts and fighting and killings. You rather despair a bit about Iraq, it's a major issue, it's a major problem. The Balkans were the same with what happened there.

39:00 I think we enjoy a nice peaceful existence here but I tell you what I'd much rather be living like we were when I went to the boy cubs when I was a primary school boy. Life was fairly simple and peaceful then. It's a bit different today – the pressures on living are quite significant really. We're absolute clock-watchers, every jolly thing we do is all based on time.

Taking into account those

39:30 **changes that have occurred in your lifetime and looking forward into the future when perhaps someone's looking at this archive in 50 or 100 years time, is there anything that you could say given your own life experience on a personal level to someone in the future?**

Yes, I think that's an interesting question because I ponder that a bit, particularly with my younger son Christopher who's 33, I wonder what sort of a life, you know, in say 20, 30 or 40 years time that he will enjoy if he's still around. The people of today

40:00 are learning to live with the technological change that's occurring which is having an enormous influence on their lives. They can readily operate computers, they can programme digital watches and goodness knows what. If I have a problem on my computer, I whistle Chris up and within 2 seconds he's fixed it. So I think the education training etc. is moving with the times and I think when people look at this archive, 50 years, 100 years down the

40:30 track I think they'll say, "Gee, weren't they primitive sort of individuals, they really were". So my message to those people would be, yes, it would be primitive where you're looking at it but it wasn't to us when we were doing it.

Thank you very much for talking to us today, Gordon, it's been a pleasure meeting you, we've really enjoyed it.