

Australians at War Film Archive

Ernest Tyler (Ern/Tim) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 9th October 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1088>

Tape 1

00:38 **Ok we will make a start if we could. Could we start with a bit of an introduction to your life story?**

I was born in a little town called Oakley in Surrey England on the 9th of the 9th in 1924. I was the youngest member of the

01:00 family at that time naturally. And in 1925 the family migrated to Australia. And we came out on a ship called the Esperance Bay and eventually made it here to Brisbane because that is where the man who had nominated us was so we got a cheap passage lived. We lived in a house at Windsor until all four of us

01:30 children got whooping cough. And the doctors advised that we go somewhere where there were plenty of eucalypts and we finished up at Morayfield renting a house on a property up there. We came down from there when we all got better and rented a house at Newfarm.

02:00 I was three when we left there and went into a worker's dwelling at Cannon Hill. Where my younger sister was born the following month. She was born in November. I lived at Cannon Hill, went to Cannon Hill Primary School. Belonged to the local boy scouts, which my father was a scoutmaster,

02:30 became a cub master myself, and that was later on of course. I passed a scholarship in 1937 and went to the industrial high school. But after nine months there I passed sub junior and my mother, who had breast cancer,

03:00 had a massive operation which left her a bed ridden invalid. And because of the times and the fact that there wasn't a great deal of money around, my father was out of work and the two older sisters were both working, I was taken away from school to stay home with my mother because my father was on relief work. Working on the roads and earning five shillings a week and rations.

03:30 He was lucky because he was married, if he had been single he would have had to tramp the countryside from one police station to the next to draw rations each day. My mother died in 1940. In between times my older sister had been brought home to look after her and I went to work. I worked as an office boy

04:00 which I hated. Then as an assistant wood machinist. Another apprenticeship but I learnt to use machinery and make things which I liked but unfortunately our place had a fire and got burnt down. And I finished up working in a mill that

04:30 made ammunition boxes actually for the services and I was a machinist there just using one saw, a docking saw. It was under the control of manpower and I couldn't leave unless there was someone else to take my job. I was trying to join the navy and eventually I

05:00 did and I managed to get my mate's younger brother to take over the job that I had at this place. I left Brisbane and went to Flinders Naval Base, a very short period of time there because they lined us up one day and counted us off in 40. First 40 general service, the next 40 special service and I finished up in the special

05:30 service. Now I joined the navy to be a seaman. Special service I ended up, still of a chance to being a seaman as barge crew, landing barge crew. But for some reason I didn't make that and I became a naval beach commando. After a bit of service at Penguin

06:00 in Sydney I did a three week stint on the Hobart when she was in Sydney Harbour after being torpedoed. Just relief while the crew were on leave. And then back to Penguin and then the Queen Mary brought the Brisbane back or part of it, and I was put on the Queen Mary as a security guard and when she sailed we were taken off

06:30 just before she got through the Heads, they had forgotten about us. And we thought we were going to

end up down in Adelaide which was going to be our next port of call. But unfortunately we were taken off and we missed out on that trip. Back to Penguin from there to HMAS Assault which was a new depot at Nelson Bay at Port Stephens which was a combined operations training centre. Very secret

- 07:00 weren't allowed to talk about it. People who lived in the area had to have a pass to get in and out because some of them worked in Newcastle and it was, as I say, very secret. They weren't allowed to go down to the foreshores and watch any of the manoeuvres or anything like that. And over the period of time I was there we trained something like 20,000 troops in amphibious
- 07:30 landings and in the meantime being trained ourselves. I left there and went to Trinity Beach, north of Cairns as part of Royal Australian Navy Commando attached to the 1st Australian Beach Group Headquarters. While there we did more training, training the army in landings and being trained ourselves to drive any vehicle
- 08:00 other than a tank and we were told if a tank got hit there was no point in putting a new driver because the tank wouldn't be able to be moved and possibly have to be burnt. But if a driver of a truck coming ashore from one of the ships was hit we would be able to take his place and get it off the beach so that we didn't hold up any traffic. We learnt to drive everything up to and including graders
- 08:30 or bulldozers. We learnt to fire every weapon from a 38 revolver, 48 revolver, 303 rifle, American carbine, Owen gun, Stanley gun, Thompson submachine guns, Vickers machine guns, Bren machine guns, light machine guns. One group even learnt to fire 25 pound artillery pieces. I was a member of that
- 09:00 group. We learnt demolition. Both on land and under water so that if necessary we could clear any obstacles on beaches that we went to. We went up onto the Atherton Tablelands to a place called Wongabel and from there we did jungle training.
- 09:30 I have a photograph of a group on a route march on the Atherton Tablelands. As a matter of fact it appeared in one of the HMAS Mark books. I think it was Mark III, which was produced by the navy during the war. Went back to Trinity Beach and from Trinity Beach back up again to Wongabel, well we were
- 10:00 both at Wondecla and Wongabel and from there received word they were forming another beach group. And some of us were transferred to the 2nd Australian Beach Group Commando B. I was one of them. And we went back to the original camp on Trinity Beach and the ones who had been on the Kanimbla, Australia, Manoora as beach party
- 10:30 were drafted ashore. And with the ones that came down from the first beach group, they formed the second beach group. Each beach group all told, had about 120 men, all officers, commandos, signalists, telegraphist a few stokers who were dispatch riders, drivers. And when we had our own landing
- 11:00 barge, they ran the engine on the landing barge. I trained there, back up the Tablelands to Herberton. Which was the second coldest place I had been in. I didn't feel it quite as much as we did at Wondecla because even though it was the middle of winter both times at Herberton we were in log cabins not under canvas.
- 11:30 At Wondecla we had been under canvas and the first night there we had navy square neck shirts and shorts, one blanket and we spent the night sleeping or trying to sleep around big bonfires. You would toast your head until your hair started to crisp then you would swing around and put your feet to the fire to get your feet warm
- 12:00 and the next day after that our skipper made complaints and we were issued for, the regular army issue, for that area with seven blankets per man. So we didn't, we weren't quite as cold from then on. At Herberton I was quartermaster, which is totally different quartermaster to an army quartermaster. I had nothing to do with stores. I was a watch keeper. I
- 12:30 kept the log and I took note of anybody who came into the camp area, they had to come through me and when they left again I had to mark it in the log that they had gone. And one of our jobs on the night shift was to make sure that the fires in the galley didn't go out otherwise the water in the pipes would have frozen and the cook would have screamed blue murder the next morning. And at that stage we had army cooks, not navy cooks.
- 13:00 We never got a navy cook until much later on. I went back from there back to Trinity Beach and from Trinity Beach to we were taken to Cairns and boarded an American transport the Seabarb which took us to Morotai Island. Now after a short period of time on Morotai Island where they discovered that actual fact only the Queenslanders
- 13:30 had pre-embarkation leave so they sent the others back to Australia for leave and left the Queenslanders on Morotai. They widdled into an American camp which was next door to our camp, but working every day for the Australian Electrical Mechanical Engineers splicing wire strops. After the first four days we asked to be fed at that
- 14:00 camp. We couldn't take the Yankee soft food. It affected everybody and you never got very far away from the latrine. We went back to bully beef, biscuits and M&V [Meat and Veg], goldfish, baked beans,

tinned sausages and bacon, and felt much better for it. The rest of the crew came back

- 14:30 and we started to get ready for an invasion, we weren't told where. And it turned out to be Tarakan Island and we went there with elements of the 9th Division and landed on Tarakan Island, there wasn't a great deal of opposition and after a couple of weeks which I was,
- 15:00 start with camp security, I will just call it camp security. As a mate of mine once said when his grandson asked him, "What did you do in the war pop?" He said, "I was one of the silly so and sos," he said, "that landed where the enemy held the country and immediately turned our back upon them and faced out to sea." Because they were brining in the landing barges, telling them where to go and all the rest of it you see. And he turned around to me
- 15:30 and he said, "And what did you do?" And I said, "I was one of the silly so and sos that when your father faced out to sea I turned my back on him and faced inland so that I could protect him." That was the story. We went back to Morotai and refurbished all of our gear and our stores. And the second beach group in the meantime had come to Morotai.
- 16:00 and they took off and did the landings at Labuan and Brunei. Sorry I said the second, the first group. Because I was in the second. I am getting a bit old and stupid. We landed on Tarakan on the 1st of May 1945. The first group landed on Labuan and Brunei on the 10th of
- 16:30 June 1945 and my group went to Balikpapan on the 1st of July and landed there. And I got a very close haircut one day, or it felt as though I had, because I was standing on the shore and a Jap mountain gun up in the hill, which was in a cave, came out to fire a few shots at the shipping and dive back into the cave again. And we
- 17:00 were in a direct line between it and the Shropshire which was anchored out to sea and it felt to me as though the shells were passing just over my head. We jumped into what had been the Japs first line of defence there which was a big trench all around the foreshore from the oil refinery. There idea was that they would pump it full of petrol and oil and set fire to it to stop anybody getting on shore.
- 17:30 And luckily the bombing or bombardment had blown up the installation and it was dry. But it was about six foot deep and we jumped into it to get away from the shells and one of my friends was almost killed by a 16 stone war correspondent landing directly on top of him. But had no injuries at that time, but a few days later a few of our personnel....
- 18:00 oh god I have done it again. We lost two people on Tarakan Island. They had done their stint of duty on the beach and were leaving to go up onto the high ground above the beach where we were camped and the Japs landed some mortar shells on them and killed two. They were buried on Tarakan Island. I am sorry I missed that.
- 18:30 **That is ok.**
- But we were there and we took over the naval headquarters, the Japanese naval headquarters which was up on a hill overlooking the oil refinery and the bay. When we had been warned that we were going to Japan to land on the
- 19:00 mainland of Japan and were told to expect 75 per cent casualties. Luckily for us they dropped the atom bomb before that happened. I was one of those due to go. They made a list of people to go to Japan as part of the Occupation forces.
- 19:30 I was part of that but for some reason they stopped us going. On the night the Japanese surrendered unconditionally we sat up on top of the hill above the bay and we were dismantling Japanese shells and with the explosives, the cordite we were making rockets and we were firing the rockets out over the bay and after we
- 20:00 landed a couple on one of the hospital ships that was in the bay, they sent the army MPs [Military Police] up to stop us. After that we had a Salvation Army captain with us who was a great man. He would take his van up, his Red Shield van up as close to the front line as he could get it and a couple of times he came back with bullet holes
- 20:30 through the canopy, and he always said to his conscientious objector offsider, "You stay in camp, you can't come with me." He put on a service for thanksgiving in his Red Shield hut or tent, which was a big marquee, and out of our group there were two men left in camp, one officer left in camp and three
- 21:00 very strict Roman Catholics who went to the Catholic service, everybody else piled into our one and only jeep and trailer which took three, I think three trips down the hill to where Cappy had his tent. They were lying across the bonnet, hanging onto ropes that had been draped around the windscreen, they were packed two and three deep in the jeep.
- 21:30 The driver was the only that had much free movement. They were standing on the trailer hitch and they were packed in the trailer. And I think we shifted something like 35 men each trip. The Cappy put on this service and we presented him with a white [(UNCLEAR)] which was at that time the British style white [(UNCLEAR)] with St George Cross on it and on that

22:00 was listed every man of our unit. I did have a photograph and I did have a photocopy but I think somehow that my daughter on one of her cleaning up operations here picked it up with some other stuff and threw it out because I can't find it anywhere. But there up in the top right hand corner of this white [(UNCLEAR)] was my name. Now

22:30 it wasn't until somebody saw that that they realised that I had actually been at Balikpapan because in the official list they had me down as my name being Taylor, not Tyler. And in an official list of personnel who went through HMAS Assault they had me marked as going to the NBC [Nuclear Biological Chemical Warfare] but no record of me afterwards so that

23:00 was when it must have happened. We didn't carry pay books or anything like that. I woke up one morning and I couldn't get up off the cot, I couldn't even sit up, so they called the duty officer, the duty officer came down he called the skipper down, the skipper came down, he called the RAP[Regimental Aid Post] corporal who had been

23:30 attached to us to come down and have a look. "Oh yeah, I know what is wrong with him," he said. "I can fix that." And he started to manipulate the back of my neck and eventually I could sit up. But I was on excused duties for some weeks and when I did go back onto full duties I was no longer quartermaster I was just one of the boys around the camp.

24:00 And when we, one day a flotilla of English LSTs [Landing Ship Tank] sailed into the bay and my skipper looked at them and said, "My god where is the jeep". And he came back several hours later and he said, "if you people can clear this camp site, pack up all the tents and the army gear we have and return it to the army we can sail on those

24:30 LSTs tomorrow at 4 o'clock and go back to Australia." He said, "I used to command that one." And it was part of the flotilla that he had belonged to in the landings in the Med, in Italy. And we managed to clean everything up. I went to say goodbye to this RAP corporal and found him out the back of his tent with a 44 gallon drum with a fire going and he was burning all his

25:00 records. "I am not going to carry all of this back to my unit." So there was no records of anything that happened to any of us for a period of 18 months. We came back to Australia on the LST, came back to Morotai depot and they refused to allow us out of the depot to start with because we weren't in the dress for the day. We wore jungle greens, slouch hats and army boots,

25:30 I had a pair of American gaiters with the buttonhole type thing all up the side, which you laced up. And I thought I was looking pretty smart. And it wasn't until they managed to get word to our skipper that they wouldn't let us ashore that he came up from the LST and

26:00 tore a strip or two off them and eventually we were allowed out and sent home on leave for a fortnight. And when we came back they had managed to locate our navy gear which had been packed away at the beginning of 1944 and was at a warehouse up in Cairns and it had to be brought back here and then we had to change into the rig of the day and they had the hide to say that we were the most slovenly looking lot that they had seen, because

26:30 our khaki shirt and shorts having been packed away for that length of time had creases and should have been ironed. But up until that stage I was going to join the navy permanent forces. After that and the fact that the first week I was here I was put sweeping concrete paths through the depot. There was six ABs [Able Seaman] sweeping

27:00 paths. There were two leading seamen, a patty officer, a chief patty officer, a sub lieutenant standing by watching to see that we did it properly. And I thought if that is peacetime navy I didn't want any part of it and I tore up my enlistment papers. But after a week things got a bit better because they looked for Brisbane natives who could live at home and if they could there were several jobs going around. The people that had been doing them

27:30 had been discharged and we could take over. And I became the confidential book officers yeoman in the staff office, which at the time was in the Commonwealth Bank of, no Commonwealth... Lets try again, something Bank of Sydney anyway, CBS, building in Queen Street. But after a week there they moved to Smellies building on the corner of Alice and Edward Street

28:00 and it was the most, well the easiest job I ever had in the navy. I would go through what I had collected the day before from airports. And I would sort it out and I would bag it for transshipment further on, any confidential mail or books that came in. Anything that was for the Brisbane

28:30 area such as Archifield Aerodrome, Eagle Farm Aerodrome, the Boom Defence depot down at Pinkenba, the small ships depot at Colmslie, army work shops at Bulimba, anything, any ships that were in port. And then around about midday, half past 12, I would ring the transport officer at

29:00 Moreton and request a car driver or a jeep and driver, whatever was available to take me to all of these various places. And the driver would turn up quite often the RAN [Royal Australian Navy] driver and we would go out and do all these deliveries and go to the airport and send on whatever else had to go further north or south. I did that until

- 29:30 I was discharged in, when was it, April, April 46. I found it a bit hard to get back to what I wanted to do. I applied to go to the rehabilitation scheme as a wood machinist because I never had received a ticket. I wasn't a tradesman according to the union, even though I could
- 30:00 handle most of the machines. I finished up, while waiting to go there I went to work for the repatriation department as a night watchmen at Perry House while the night watchmen had leave. And then I went to, I forget the name of the place now but Kangaroo Point, no not Kangaroo Point,
- 30:30 before you get to Kangaroo Point. It was a part of the repatriation department where they had, more like a nursing home than anything else. And I worked there as assistant to the gardener who had a nice, brand new, cylinder lawn mower
- 31:00 given to him where he used to cut the grass with an old hand mower. They must have decided that he was getting on a little bit and he needed some help and they bought him this new lawn mower. And the grounds down to the river were terraced and he was using it and he was called, he let go of the mower which was in gear and it took off down the terrace and ended going over the bank and down into a
- 31:30 few mangroves at the edge of the river. So I had to climb down, attach ropes to it and get back up and help him pull it up. Well we had to take part of it apart and clean it and put it back together again. Eventually we got it working properly so we didn't have to report the fact that it had been partly submerged. I did that for about two months I suppose
- 32:00 I was there, and then they transferred me to Greenslopes Hospital as an orderly. I didn't mind because I was only waiting to get into the school so I didn't really care what I did, as long as I got some money coming in. And I worked at Greenslopes as an orderly and I upset the sister I had been working under when I said I was leaving to start at the Commonwealth rehab school at the beginning of 1947 and
- 32:30 she said you are mad, you should stay here and do a nurse's aid course, you would be good. But I wanted to go back to what I classed as my trade. I went back, did the course at Hamilton Road at Moorooka here actually and then partly at the trade school at Windsor. I got a job
- 33:00 with a firm down the Dashin [?] making bedroom furniture and dining room furniture because that dining room suite was made there. And I bought it second hand for \$30 a number of years later, actually in 1969 when I came here.
- 33:30 This fellow had been in business for a long time and he promised me that as long as he had a factory I would have a job. But several months after I got married, he turned around and said, "Look sorry I have got to let you go. So and so used to work for me years ago, has a lot more experience than you do and wants to come back and work for me again." So I got the sack. But I
- 34:00 walked into another job, I was only off work two days. And I started a job out here at Ketch Street, Moorooka with a fellow called Ozzie Castle. And he was making furniture and the building we were in had been all sorts of things. It had been a wood merchant store, it had a boot maker in part of it, but he started
- 34:30 a furniture business. It was an old corrugated iron building and the machine shop was a lean-to built on the back of it with also a corrugated roof and walls. It was like a furnace during the summer. I worked for him until he sold out to Alan Smith whose father Headly Smith was a well known furniture manufacturer. And
- 35:00 I worked for Alan for, I think it was about 1955 when he took over until 1974 when I was warned by my doctor to get out otherwise I wouldn't last too long. I had been swallowing too much sawdust and I was talking to a friend one night about what would I do and he said,
- 35:30 "Oh I don't know, what do you want to do?" I said, "I don't care, as long as it is a clean job." And he rang me up the following Thursday night and said, "Go over to Don Henley's place and pick up some papers I have left there and you are sitting for the Commonwealth Public Service Clerical Assistant exam on Saturday morning." So I sat for the clerical assistant exam. I think it was something like 300 people there.
- 36:00 And we were sitting, each six by three foot table there was one at one side there and one at the other end of the same side and one in the middle on the other side so that you couldn't cheat. And I wasn't told how I went or anything like that but I got a phone call that following week, "Can you come in on Saturday morning for an interview and decide where you would like to go to
- 36:30 work?" So I must have passed and when I went in there were ten of us there. And he said, "I will take it in order of seniority," or other words how well you did the exam, "to ask you were you would like to work out of this list." And he gave us each a list and I thought well there is the Forestry Department over here on Evans Road. And Greenslopes Hospital is not very far away
- 37:00 from here. I was the second asked to name where I wanted to work. And the other fellow had picked the Forestry Department. And so for me it was either Greenslopes Hospital or Bulimba workshops, army workshops. So I finished up going to Greenslopes Hospital as a clerical assistant, grade 1. Earning the magnificent sum of \$70 per week,

- 37:30 less tax. And I had been bringing home between \$150 and \$200 a week as a foreman machinist in the furniture factory. I was on salary, I was the only one on salary there, everyone else was on wages plus. And I was working on an average of 60 hours per week. And I would get called in. Somebody set
- 38:00 fire to the place one night, one cracker night, which you might know, was the 5th of November. They put a big bungler in the crack of the big wooden door and set fire to them. The fire brigade was called and they bashed the doors down instead of just putting a hose on the door and putting it out. They thought there might have been a fire inside though, and these doors were big enough to drive a truck through. And I got called out
- 38:30 at 2 o'clock in the morning to go down there and close the factory up so that people couldn't get in and steal things. And I don't know why I was called but the fellow who had given the police the number said I knew where you lived but I didn't know where your boss lived. So that is why I had to come down and do that. Well I worked at Greenslopes for
- 39:00 a total of ten years. I started off as I say as a CA1 [Clerical Assistant], I was promoted to a CA2. I had the honour or the distinction of being the only male ward secretary ever to have work in the female ward. And I was put up there because my boss at the time says, "You are old enough not to be distracted by the sight of bare flesh so you go up there." So I went up there but I
- 39:30 didn't like the female ward and I transferred to a male ward. And then I was called down and said, "Would you be interested in working shift work?" I said, "It doesn't matter to me." I got used to four on four off in the navy. And he said, "Well we are starting a new section down here. There will be eight of you and
- 40:00 you will work shift work." And he gave me a list of the shifts. Someone started at midnight and went to 7.20 and then 7.00 till 2.40pm in the afternoon and then 7.20pm until another time, and 8.45 until 5.05, and then 1.00 until
- 40:30 8.20 and 4.40 till midnight. On the day shifts there were three people in the morning. Two handled phone calls from doctors requesting admission patients and arranging ambulance transport to go and pick them up or cars if that was suitable and the other one did computer work
- 41:00 and after several years on the computer work.

Actually I am going to have to pause you there because...

Tape 2

- 00:32 **Ern can I talk to you a bit about what a nomination means, you said that your father was nominated to come to Australia?**
- Yeah, well assisted passengers, they still worked, even in the migrant days after the war, it was still possible to get an assisted passage from the government. But you had to be nominated by somebody who was already here. I was
- 01:00 looking for something the other day and I found a box under the house, that I never knew had been put in there, which had some of families' belongings in it. I didn't get on with my step mother and after my father died she stayed on in the house at Cannon Hill for a number of years but then decided she was going into a nursing home and they packed up a lot of stuff and they must have brought it over here,
- 01:30 and because I wasn't home and there was nobody home and they didn't want to leave it out on the patio or the back landing and they took it in underneath the house and pushed it in under there. And over the years I think possibly the kids moved it without knowing what it was, because they used to play table tennis under there. And I found a letter from one of my father's half sisters asking to nominate them
- 02:00 to come to Australia which they did in, it would have been 1950s but if Australia House in London had a letter or you got a letter from somebody in Australia saying that they would nominate you, in other words make sure that you had somewhere to live when you came here
- 02:30 the Australian government would more or less pay your passage costs. I think it was ten pound.
- Oh the ten pound pounds?**
- They had to pay and then the government paid the rest of the passage fees to Australia.
- And when you nominated somebody did the person that was being nominated have to be employable, I mean?**
- Yeah, yeah well the old fellow at that time,
- 03:00 well he was working on the railways as a signalman in England. But by trade he was a painter, decorator, paperhanger and could even do some cabinet making because his father had a firm where he

trained and his father was painter decorator, cabinetmaker. He could go into a house, he could make the furniture for the house he could paint it, he could hang paper. But the only thing he couldn't do was be a plumber.

03:30 **So if you didn't have a trade though you couldn't be nominated, would that be harder?**

Oh no, no. You would just have to be employable because they were trying for migrants. And we came out here as I said, before late 1925 and I think I was 10 months old, I am not sure.

Well you couldn't remember that passage?

I don't remember that at all. My sister tells me a couple of things. Such as

04:00 she got a belting because she refused to look after me while the parents went for dinner. She was just on five.

Did she resent that as she got older?

Yes. I always said what happened in my life it was all her fault because she didn't want to look after me, and instead of being careful of me she would drop me on my head, so it was her fault that I am

04:30 a little bit off these days.

Is she still alive?

Yes.

How do you get on with her now?

Very well. Although she gets angry with me, I pick her up over something, "Yeah I know why your other sister doesn't like you, you are a sarcastic so and so."

Is that why your younger sister doesn't like you?

Well, I didn't like her lifestyle and I am not going to go into it.

Ok sure.

All

05:00 I will say is that she was married and she had a boyfriend on the side and that happened several times, with two husbands and several boyfriends.

Do you remember much of Cannon Hill because you were quite young then?

Yes, I was. My younger sister was born at Cannon Hill in 1927. I started school in 1928

05:30 at the age of four and five months. Four years and five months old when I started school.

Gee, that is young.

In first babies, as they called it, you went first babies, second babies, first grade.

What do they call it now, preschool and kindergarten?

Yeah. Well preschool anyhow, but this was all with proper school teachers in the main school.

06:00 I stayed at all my primary schooling at Cannon Hill state school. And at one stage my sister, who was two years older than me, she was held back a grade and I jumped a grade and we finished up in the same class, which was a terrible thing to have. An older sister in the same class who delighted in going home and saying, "Oh guess who got the cuts today?" And of course,

06:30 my father on being told that I had received the cuts would immediately give me six of the best across the seat with his leather belt. So I got punished twice for the same offence. But I was in scholarship class at the age of 12.

That is another question I was going to ask you Ern, what does scholarship class mean?

Well grade 7 in the primary school

07:00 was classed as the scholarship class in most schools.

To get a scholarship?

To get a scholarship to go on to high school.

Now does that mean financial scholarship or just a placement?

Well, you got a placement and you got your books free. And your schooling was free. If you didn't pass and your parents could afford it they could pay for you to go. But

07:30 in the depression days there weren't that many parents of people in our state of life, you know, who had spent most of the Depression and their parents had spent most of the Depression unemployed. And the Depression was only just beginning to ease of.

How did your family make do during the depression Ern?

Well single men went

08:00 on the track. If they didn't have a job they walked. They might go to the police station here today and next week they might have to be up at Ipswich. And the next week somewhere else, 20 miles away each time you know. They would have to move 20 miles in the week. 'Humping the bluey' as they called it. Looking for any odd jobs that they could get but they got rations at the

08:30 Various...

We will have to stop, something with the camera.

Did I move forward?

It is fine.

They would draw rations and in a week's time they would draw rations at another police station. But married men with families were, well my father was working on the roads, keeping the gutters clean and filling in pot holes in the dirt roads and that sort of thing.

09:00 And he got five shillings a week plus some rations and that is how we existed. To this day I will not eat pumpkin unless it is roasted and burnt absolutely black. Because I had a part time job, even as an eight year old school kid. I was helping the man who fed the pigs at the Cannon Hill sale yards and he used to feed them on

09:30 pumpkin, and we would go over there and we had tomahawks and we would chop the pumpkins up and just throw them into the pig pens and my payment was pumpkin. I had pumpkin boiled, baked. pumpkin stewed and pumpkin stuffed, and I never ever liked pumpkin afterwards.

So your mum was quite thrifty then?

Oh. you had to be.

10:00 You know nasturtium flowers?

Yes.

Nasturtium leaves became part of salads, nasturtium seeds were pickled and they looked like capers.

What did they taste like?

Vinegary, but you ate them. We used to walk the railway line picking the little

10:30 cherry tomatoes that grew wild. After rain you would get out with your buckets and get mushrooms. We would lobby in the local creeks, catching lobbies.

What are?

Like a little lobster, fresh water lobster. We would go up the river, which in those days was clean and we would fish, we would

11:00 set crab pots in the local creeks, they were salt water creeks like Dobroyd Creek and parts of Tingalpa Creek and we would ride our bicycles down there. It all helped to supplement what you got to eat and the fruit man used to come around and he would never bring good fruit into our place. He took good fruit into people who had money

11:30 but he would come into us with two buckets and one would have soft fruit and the other would have apples and they were all scraps. They all had a little bad spot in them which could be cut out and that was the type of fruit we got except what we could grow ourselves or barter with somebody else, with something you grew. We grew cabbages,

12:00 lettuce, beetroot, turnips, carrots and we would swap them for fruit, oranges, mandarins, paw paws, even bananas. We would go down to (UNCLER) where the nearest bananas were being grown and we would take down vegetables and swap with people we knew down there to get a bunch of bananas.

12:30 **What about chokos did you eat them?**

Yes and I hate them too. I hate anything in the way of pumpkins, chokos, squash. I won't eat any of them anymore. In fact I had lunch at Coorparoo Service Club last Sunday, and what are these long like a cucumber that they cook?

Zucchini?

They started

13:00 serving the vegetables for my meal I said, "Take the zucchini off I won't eat it".

My grandmother said they used to make choko pies, choko stews.

Well they used to, this is a fact, during the war a lot of the tin pears were in actual fact choko.

I didn't know that.

Well you know it now, and I know it because my sister told me.

13:30 Not the one I speak to now, but the one that died a year or so ago, when was it 79, yeah, last year she died.

Did your brother and other sisters and what have you all go looking for food together or was it just you on your own?

No, we would all go mushrooming, we would go fishing. My brother actually ran away from home when he was 16.

14:00 He was an apprentice to a chemist and he couldn't learn Latin. It was beyond him so he said, "I didn't want to do it anymore." And one night when my parents were out at a local meeting, we helped him pack his gear and he took off.. He was 16, I was 10.

Where did he go?

He went up bush, he went to Murgon.

14:30 and got a job on a property up there. And the old fella, the father he got the police to trace him and they found out where he was and they said to the old boy, "We will bring him back if you want us to but he will only go again." My father said, "Well is he well looked after, is he with good people?" "Yes, yes." "Well leave him there." So he wrote to us a few times and he was never very good with a pen any more than I was.

15:00 I could write something today and couldn't read it myself tomorrow. So it was no point in me writing to anybody.

But why did he run away Ern if it wasn't his parents that he was working for?

Well he was working for this chemist and the old fella always, he got him the job and he was determined he was going to stay there and he was going to learn Latin and my brother said, "No, I can't do it, so I'm going."

15:30 So my parents came home, we were all in bed. The next morning they came in waking us up and they go to wake him up to go to work and his bed hasn't been slept in. "Where is Frank?" "Oh we don't know, he was reading when we went to bed." And we had seen him off at 8 o'clock the previous night. But he came home when he was 21. He came down for a

16:00 Visit, and then he finished up joining the army.

Gee your mum would have missed him?

Yeah.

And was your dad a strict fellow then?

Oh, yes and no, he could be very, very strict. As I say, if I got the cuts at school I got a hiding when he got home and found out about it. He was the local scoutmaster and I had keys, I could get the keys to the local

16:30 scout hall, which we built. We sold the bricks at thruppence a time and if people didn't have thruppence we would collect it, weekly payments of at least a ha'penny. So you might go to the one house six times to collect the thruppence you got for selling them a brick. And the names of all the people that we sold bricks were put into a capsule and buried in the scout hall. Unfortunately they tore it down this year.

And where was that? In Cannon Hill?

17:00 In Cannon Hill, just up the street from where we lived actually. And there was a group of us that used to get up there on a Friday night and one of the boys worked for McWilliams wines and he was allowed two bottles of wine per week to take home. Well that was alright until his father found out that he was supposed to be taking home two bottles of wine every week. And they never

17:30 seemed to get there because they were buried or hidden in the scrub along the railway line when he got off the train. And his father discovered that he should have it and he said, "Oh I never thought that you wanted it Dad, that is why I never collected it." But we used to drink it on a Friday night. One Friday night we drank the wine and we were playing penny poker.

18:00 And somebody got the bright idea, get on a bike, and collect what money we had and go down to Bulimba pub, which was the nearest hotel, and get a bottle of rum. So they took off down to the Bulimba hotel and came back with two bottles of rum. Well we drank one, somebody said to one of the others,

"Oh I bet you couldn't drink the rest of that bottle on your own without taking it away from your mouth."

18:30 Roy was far enough along that he took the bet, and he drained it, "I win!" out. Well it was a wonder we didn't kill him of course. But we got water and we wet his face and slapped his face and we got him up and walked him up and down, and when he came to he was raving mad and he grabbed an axe off the wall of

19:00 the hall and started to chase us. And I took off down the road along a little short street, along side of the creek, under the railway and he is gaining and I come to the telegraph post up beside the railway line and there is rungs on it and I am up the rungs and I am at the top of the post on a level of the train line and he is down below with an axe trying to chop

19:30 the post down to get at me. And the last train from town came through and my father was on it and he happened to be looking out the window on that side and saw me up on the pole. So he got off the train and hot footed it down the track, came up behind Roy, pushed him into the creek and ordered me down and collected the axe where Roy dropped it as he went in.

20:00 And we had dragged him out of the creek and he had sobered up a bit by then and the old fella kicked his backside up the street and then kicked mine all the way home.

How old were you?

Fifteen and a bit, going on 16 I think.

Was that your first alcohol experience?

No, my first one was at a wedding of one of the local girls. Whose parents were friends of my parents, if there was a

20:30 wedding or a party on anywhere and one family, all the other families they were friends with, you were invited. And her younger brother and I, we were sneaking glasses off the table and getting behind the piano and drinking them and we both got a little bit under the weather. But that was only beer of course.

Can you tell us why you were interested?

21:00 **in the navy in the first place.**

I had always liked stories about the navy. Actually I think it all started when I was going to school and I used to see one fellow walk past on his way home on leave and his daughter was in my class at school. What was his name?

21:30 I get these clasps of memories when I can't remember names and sometimes I can't even remember what I was talking about five minutes ago, and I have three or four minor strokes and that is the legacy of that.

It will come to you, don't worry.

But he finished up as the stoker on the crate on the raider to Singapore.

22:00 Oh the name will come to me, it is like I was trying to think of telling my sister I had some plants coming into flower and I couldn't think of the name, agapanthus.

Who could?

But it came to me yesterday, so I rang her up and said, "It is the agapanthus coming into flower and the Hippeastrums have already flowered."

I hope you didn't call her up at 3 o'clock in the morning.

22:30 No this was about 8 o'clock last night. If she gets on the phone I am likely to get abused by my children. "I tried to ring you last night, tried three times in an hour and a half and gave up." My sister has been on the phone, I am sitting there yes, is that so, yes that is interesting, yes. I don't

23:00 say you told me that yesterday or you told me that last week because she is what, 83 and she is getting a bit like me, a bit forgetful.

So you are talking about the bloke that became a stoker on the crate?

Yes. As I say, I used to see him go past in uniform and then my father had friends who were in the services and it was one of them

23:30 who kept me out of the navy for as long as I did.

Well what do you mean?

Well I had passed my medical, and I had actually everything except being sworn in to join the navy.

Hang on before we get there I will just ask you, where were you when war was declared?

I was here, I was working for

24:00 a wholesale hardware place in the city in Charlotte Street.

Did you know much about what was happening in Europe regarding the war?

Only what came over on my crystal radio and what I read in the papers and we had a couple of letters from relatives in England. But then that stopped.

24:30 **Did your brother join up before you?**

Oh yeah, well he was six years older than me.

Sorry I forgot that.

He joined up when he was 21.

So did you join up because of the war effort or because you wanted an adventure?

No, because everybody had to do something didn't they, you were either manpowered into a job where you couldn't leave or you joined one of the services and two of my friends had already joined the navy,

25:00 and there were several other people that I knew from the local district, and joined the navy and I decided that was for me, not the army. I knew that if joined the army my old man with his connections would have had me attached to where he was at the staging camp at the exhibition grounds. Because even though he was 47 in 1939 when,

25:30 just after the war started, he came home in 1940, and he said, "What time is dinner?" Because at that time I was doing the cooking at night after I got home. He said, "What time is dinner?" I said, "Another half an hour," he said, "Good. I am going up to see Paul." Paul was a local barber and the old fella went up the road with a grey streaked moustache and grey streaked hair and came back with

26:00 black hair and black moustache. He went in the next day and joined the army.

Did they question him?

Not at that stage. He put his age back, he didn't look as old as he was, he got as far as the training battalion in Redbank training camp and he was there for a fortnight and the new commanding officer came along, colonel, to inspect the troops

26:30 one morning and he walks along the line looking at this one and that one, stopped in front of the old man and looked him up and down, turned around to the Sergeant Major and said, "I will see this man in my office after parade." And when the old fella was marched into the colonel's office he said, "Bert you stupid old bastard, what are you trying to prove?" He knew him.

Did he kick him out?

He transferred him from the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] to the Citizens Military

27:00 Force and he was stationed at the exhibition grounds in the transit camp there. Where all troops going north had to go through there and the old fella tried very hard to get me in there and I wouldn't go. I was thankful the army turned me down.

How did your father take the rejection of the AIF?

He was a bit

27:30 upset. He had, he told marvellous stories about what he did in the First World War. I found out afterwards.

So he was in the war your dad?

After, what he told me about what he did in the First World War was a lot of bull, he was actually reserved occupation on the railway.

Well the reserved occupations were important

28:00 **to the war efforts.**

Yeah, he kept the trains running through, he didn't throw the wrong signals and stop any of them and he, I don't know how or what the medals were but he had two, a victory medal and something else. I don't know how as a railway man in England he got them, but they were issued to him

28:30 because I saw the records.

You said the army knocked you back so did you try to get into the army before the navy?

No, as I said, I was waiting to go into the navy, waiting for call up and it wasn't happening and I was

going in every couple of weeks to the recruiting office, what is going on, what is wrong, where am I, what has happened and the writer who I knew, he was a boy scout

29:00 before he joined up, he kept saying, "Look I can't tell you anything. They are not ready to call you in yet." This struck me as very strange because a couple who were younger than me joined the navy as soon as they turned 17 and they went in straight away. Well the army called me up the moment I turned 18 and then rejected me.

Why?

Because

29:30 of my feet. They said I would never be able to march with broken toes that were like that and ingrown toe nails from wearing cast off shoes that weren't my size. Eventually we got a telegram saying that they had heard that my brother was a POW [Prisoners of War]. And a very strange thing, a fortnight after that the

30:00 navy called me in and when I went in and I saw the writer he said, "Your papers just came to light." I said, "What do you mean, they have just come to light?" "Well," he said, "I am not supposed to show you this but here." And he had a big manila envelope and across the front of it was my name, 'Not to be acted on until notified by Captain so and so'.

30:30 Another one of my father's friends.

He was trying to keep you out of the service.

He was keeping me out until he found out what had happened to my brother. If my brother had been killed I doubt as if I would ever have gotten into the navy.

Is that when you found out that your brother had been taken as a POW?

Well it was only after the telegram saying that he had been listed as a POW. That I

31:00 was called in.

Funny that.

Well I had been 18 the previous September and this was January 1943. So that was, 12, 18 months since I had first tried to join the navy.

Did you say anything to your dad, Ern?

Well he was in the army, he wasn't home.

Did you

31:30 **ever say anything to your dad about it?**

I did after I found out about it. "What did you expect me to do, if I had lost one son I wasn't going to lose the other."

It was out of father's love then?

I suppose in his way he loved. I suppose in my way I loved him even though I did offer him a cigarette paper to stand on and make himself man-sized, for which effort of liberty I finished up at the bottom of ten steps.

32:00 **What was that about, what did you have an argument about?**

It wasn't an argument. He picked me about something, I can't think what, I was 16, I think. I stood on the second top step and he was on the landing and I had just received permission to smoke which I had been doing for several years previously, and I took out my tobacco and took a cigarette paper out and put it down on the landing and said, "Stand on that

32:30 and make yourself man-sized." Because he was 5 foot 3. And the next minute I was spun around and a big number 7 boot lands on my rear end and I land down the bottom of the steps.

So he was sensitive about his height?

Oh yes, he was called a shrimp and he didn't like it. As a matter of fact he was called a shrimp much later on in life when he stood next to my 6 foot 3 brother-in-law,

33:00 who was 16 stone and the old man is 5 foot 2 and a bit by this time, he had shrunk a bit and somebody said, "That is not your father-in-law, he is a little bloody shrimp isn't he?" He was sensitive about his size.

Now you said that your mother was sick and did she die, was it 1940 that she died?

Yeah.

So you were basically looking after the house then?

Well,

33:30 no, I was working then. '38 I was looking after the house and I was working but my sister also had a little part time job, and she would be away in the evenings for a while, and when I came home from work she would take off and that is how come I cooked

34:00 most nights. Some nights she would have started it before I got home. But I was finishing work, I was getting home at 5 o'clock anyhow. At 1939 I started work for that wholesale hardware warehouse. And...

Were you good with your hands Ern, with timber?

Yeah.

And so that is why you wanted to continue afterwards?

Well, that table you hid behind there

34:30 I made that, and if, when you went down to the toilet you looked into the main bedroom, I made the bedroom furniture in there.

I did have a look, actually it is beautiful.

I didn't make these and I didn't make this, I made those; there used to be two of those.

Did the navy make use of these talents?

No, no I would have been a shipwright, a chippy

35:00 if I had had those qualifications then but I mainly learnt a little bit of woodwork before I went in the navy but a lot when I went through rehabilitation school. And then when I went to work for the furniture factory and I became a foreman machinist there I was doing, at certain times of the year, I would be so far ahead of the cabinet makers that I would be helping the cabinet makers to assemble. And when that was

35:30 caught up with we would help the polisher, all of us, to get everything polished and sprayed and painted and whatever had to be done and delivered before Christmas. Always the last couple of weeks before Christmas, most of the machine shop staff went to the cabinet makers and then they were caught up. Most of the cabinet makers and machine shop staff went to the polishers and they all did a little bit of everything.

Did you learn

36:00 **what is it called, French polishing?**

Yes.

What is French polishing?

Hand polishing. You apply everything by hand and you rub it up by hand and you put the next coat on by hand.

They don't do that anymore?

There are some that do it but most of us just spray lacquer these days.

So can you tell us about enlisting and finally being accepted, what happened then?

Well, I

36:30 I can't remember the exact date. I think it was around the 30th of January that I left Brisbane. I was sworn in here, left Brisbane and went to Flinders Naval Base, HMAS Cerberus down on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, and as I say, we were split up in groups of 40.

Can I ask you

37:00 **quickly Ern, did you make any mates on the trip down there?**

Yes.

Did they stay with you through the years of navy?

Yes, because there was a funny thing. There was Tyler, Tynan, Town and Walsh. We were sitting together in the same compartment going down because that is how we were loaded in alphabetical order.

37:30 And we were paraded in alphabetical order and we were together on the train from here down there. We were together at Flinders Naval Base, we were together at Penguin in Sydney, we were together at HMAS Assault in Nelson Bay and we were together at the first beach group. And I was the one that was

drafted out and broke up the foursome.

In Special Forces.

38:00 Yes, and we had a very high sounding title. We became the Royal Australian Navy Special Service Beach Commandos.

Gee, there is a lot to talk about regarding that title?

Yes. And as I have said, a lot of people said we didn't exist. And we weren't allowed, we were sworn to secrecy, we weren't allowed to

38:30 speak about where we had been what we had done or any of the training we had done or where we had done it until 1993. Which was 50 years after the first group was formed.

Who told you that, the government told you that?

The navy told us.

Did you have to sign something saying that you wouldn't talk about it?

No we were just sworn. As we were sworn into the service, we were sworn that

39:00 we did not speak about these things.

But you went through the general rookie training...

We did the basic training at Flinders which was parade ground drill, rifle drill, familiarisation with the gunnery school, which was just a walk through. The gas instruction, we had to go through the gas filled room

39:30 with a gas mask on. Or walk in without them and put them on, no sorry, walk in with them on and then take them off while you were in there and then walk out without them. We were supposed to do our swimming tests at Flinders but we didn't. And then when we got to Balmoral we were supposed to do the swimming test there and we didn't. But I was quite

40:00 thankful because I could never have passed them.

I wonder why the navy forgot to give the test?

Well they didn't forget but the list went up on the notice board at Flinders that these personnel would undergo a swimming test on such a such a date and two days before that date became due we were drafted out to Sydney. The same thing happened at Sydney. Just before we were due to do them there we were drafted to Assault and at Assault

40:30 they just conveniently forgotten about it. I would never have passed because I couldn't swim the length of a pool. And I particularly couldn't have been able to swim fully clothed. I couldn't have taken my trousers off and tied the legs and blown them up and sweep them through the air to make a flotation device. I would have been at the bottom of the pool with cramps probably.

41:00 **Gee, I would like to talk to you about that later but we should probably change tapes before we run out of time.**

Tape 3

00:31 **Did you, as a Brisbane lad did you know anything about the battle of Brisbane with all the Yanks around the place?**

Yes, yes I remember my brother who was in the army at the time, where was he? Grovely I think, army camp and they brought his battalion in as

01:00 extra police we'll say, and they were breaking up the fights but as they called it, with Australian servicemen they would take him round the corner and tell him to get lost and if they got a Yank they would throw him in the truck.

Do you know how it came about?

Well, there were a couple of reasons

01:30 as far as I know, several, more than a couple of reasons. One that the Yanks were over sexed, overpaid and over here. And the local boys couldn't get the girls, not so much the local boys who knew some of the girls but the boys from other parts of Australia and couldn't seem to get onto the female population. There was a big argument over the canteen up in Wharf Street and there was a fight started up there

02:00 and the Australian troops didn't like the way they treated their Negro troops who were restricted to the

south side of the river. They weren't allowed over the bridge and utterly, I saw one day an American Negro walking over the bridge from South Brisbane over to North Quay and he turned left into what is now known as Coronation Drive and the Yankee military policeman

02:30 on duty at the end of the bridge said, "Stop or I'll shoot," and he kept on walking and the Yankee MP went bang and killed him and I saw that.

What did you think? What did you think when you saw that?

I thought god almighty, you know. Why do that, surely you could just go arrest him sort of thing,

03:00 but no, that was how they treated the Negroes.

And that didn't sit well with the Aussie boys?

Well, the Negroes could never have been serving with white troops. They had white officers, but that was it. They got all the dirty detail, they were transport, they were naval battalions more or less, although there was

03:30 a Negro battalion in New Guinea. The way I heard it they stood their ground when the white Yanks turned around at one stage. I don't know whether I should say this sort of thing.

It is perfect actually, it is long ago so.

Yes it is long ago but I, at that time I was living in a flat at Clarence Corner.

04:00 There used to be two hotels one on the corner of Stanley Street and Anley Road which was the Clarence Hotel and one on the other corner, and I can never remember the name of that one. But immediately opposite the corner there was a row of shops and there was a row of flats above the shops and there were living quarters for the shop keepers. We had the flat above the

04:30 shop and the shop was empty. And I lived there with my elder sister, my younger sister and myself for a short period of time. My sister at that stage worked in the milk bar I think, yes she did, the Duck Inn in Adelaide Street, opposite Anzac Square.

05:00 My younger sister, what would she have been, she would have been 14 at that time, she was working and I was working and I had to keep a very close eye on my younger sister that she didn't walk around the streets there on her own, because there was all the black Americans. And a story that

05:30 I had heard from one of my friends who had been my 'go ashore, about', if you know what that means, we used to always go on leave together. He lived at West End and he lived at a certain number in a certain street at West End and in the street behind him in the same number in that street was a brothel. And one night his mother and two younger sisters were at home on their own

06:00 and two big black Americans came busting up the front stairs, in through the front door and one of them looked at his mother and said, "Oh no, she is too old, I will have this young one." He was going to wheel his 13 and 15 year old sisters out. They thought they were in the brothel. And that sort of thing. It happened

06:30 that girls were accosted and attacked. And as a matter of fact there was one they found in the air raid shelter in the middle of Stanley Street. She had her nipple bitten off her breast, by a Yankee Negro.

Was she still alive?

Barely, she had been bashed up and raped

07:00 and her nipple bitten off and she had been bleeding quite considerably.

So what....?

I have other stories about much the same sort of thing that happened later on.

It is very important that the archive actually gets some of those stories.

Well there was a girl who refused an American in 1945 before they were shipped away.

07:30 And we were going back to the depot which was in Alice Street and we heard the moans and groans coming, I think it was the State Stores building, which had a lawn terraced down to the building, and we decided to investigate and we went in and we found this girl and we had to call an ambulance. Because she had refused the Yank

08:00 she had been drinking with him and he had used the Coca Cola bottle and it was still there. She couldn't get up and walk, she had to be taken to hospital to have it removed. So I don't think a lot about Yanks myself.

08:30 **I can understand why. But I have got to ask given that those sorts of things were going on why did the Australian soldiers, why were they partly protecting you know I guess sticking up for the black American soldiers in the battle of Brisbane?**

Well because they didn't like the way the white Yanks treated them.

09:00 **Irrespective of these other things that were going on?**

Yeah well, there was only these other things that I knew was caused by the Negro. But there was quite a number of cases of Yanks, white Yanks of beating up on the Aussie girls when they wouldn't do what they wanted. Another instance when I was on the Queen Mary in the Sydney Harbour when the 9th Division came back. The night before the 9th came back an Australian soldier was found dead

09:30 in Hyde Park. And the night after the 9th Division went ashore there were 10 American soldiers laid side by side in Hyde Park because the 9th Division boys said that the Yanks had killed this fellow.

So they just took revenge.

Ten to one.

And did that set the Yanks

10:00 **straight I mean did that kind of stop any fighting or did that accelerate stuff.....**

Well, I never heard of any bad fights in Sydney. I think if it ever had started the 9th Division in particular having come back would have gone through Sydney like, to use an analogy that I use over the phone, like mercury through a duck. You don't know what that is about do you?

10:30 **Well I can imagine, but I am not going, you have given me a great image but I am not sure why mercury would be going through a duck.**

Well have you ever seen mercury? You know what it is like, little ball of molten metal say. If you put it in, open a ducks beak and put it in, you'd put a pan behind the duck quickly and caught it as it came out. It went straight through.

That I didn't know.

Well, that was a science experiment.

11:00 **What at school? It has changed a bit.**

Well, they teach different things theses days too.

Just going back to the battle of Brisbane for a minute how big did it actually get?

Well, I would say that there were several thousand involved. And there would have been a lot more if they weren't able to get transport to get into the city.

11:30 **Aussies just had enough?**

Yeah, that was the main thing I think. The lack of female companionship for the Australians.

Do you think they were taking out instead of hitting back at the Americans for some of these other shenanigans that had gone on?

12:00 I think quite often a bit of it was because of what had happened to their own women folk, but they have got stories. I know one of my mates his sister was raped and ended up having a black baby. And

12:30 you might think oh well, that's another incidence of a black but I guarantee the same thing happened 20 times by white Americans to one black.

That's a lot harder to tell.

I had a big, the start of a fight with my younger sister was

13:00 that I was at home on leave once and she came in and said, "I bought a new coat," and she came out with what in those days was known as a bum freezer. It was a short coat that came just below the waist line and it was bright red and I said, "You are not wearing that, where did you get it?" "Up at the draper." "It is going back," and I forced her back to the shop the next morning and made her return the coat

13:30 because it was a sure sign to the Yanks that 'here I am available'. And I didn't want that. What was she, 16. She didn't know what the red coat meant, just saw it and liked it.

That is very.....

14:00 But I wasn't interested in girls, not in those days. I used to like dancing with them but... When I went in the navy I saw films. And I decided that no way in the world that was ever I going to let that happen to me.

With the sexual health?

14:30 Yes, not only the result but how it was treated in those days. No way Jose. There was no penicillin was

there, you wouldn't get a jab in the arm with a needle, they got the umbrella and that is what it looked like

15:00 and it opened up and pulled out. No. I remained a good little boy.

And can you take us through the training that you did, the secret training that you did?

Well, I never saw the reason for it to be so secret. We were trained

15:30 as I said earlier, in all types of weapons. We were trained in a little bit of navigation, how to handle landing barges, we could take a part of a coxswain, crew member, gunner, whatever. I was a gunner then and I am a gunner still. I am gunna do this and I am gunna do that and I never seem to get anything done.

16:00 We learnt a little bit of radio work, voice radio, we learnt Morse code, we learnt semaphore. As I said, we learnt demolition we could drop a tree in any position, we could blow up railway lines, we could blow up bridges, anything like that we could handle the different explosives that were available. Gelignite,

16:30 the most common one, and we used to have a lot of fun with that, we used to cut off little sticks and little bits off the stick and blow things up, blow up the latrines just for fun. But the only trouble was we had to dig new ones and mined the beaches for the practice landing with little bits of gelly.

17:00 And our tame torpedo man he would blow up where he thought the commanding officers would be standing or sitting, he would lay charges there, but he would bury them enough so all it gave them was a jolt, they never got hurt. Although I sometimes wonder if he'd misjudged his depth in the sand as to whether they would have been splattered with sand in their faces, but it never seemed to happen, he must have been very

17:30 good. Because a quarter of inch of gelly or even half an inch buried with a fuse to it, and he would bury it maybe so far under the sand and boom that was it. And he would blow up the captain, or it was the skipper, the lieutenant commander and any

18:00 of the other officers we didn't like. We liked the skipper but we just liked to surprise him and he was a gentlemen. He would come down to our mess decks and he would stand in the doorway until someone looked up and saw him, and he had taken his epaulette off his shoulders and he would put them in his cap and have his cap under his arm, and he would wait until someone saw him, "May I come in?"

18:30 And he would come into the mess deck. And he would sit down and play cards with you. And there was only one of the other officers, maybe two of the other officers that would do that.

That is very unusual.

But to have your commanding officer to come down. And when he was in there he was Buddy, that was his name or nickname and you were never referred to like,

19:00 if you were out on the parade and he wanted to speak to you, "Able Seaman Tyler." Oh, "Tim, so and so..." and he promoted me once. That was on the trip home from Balikpapan.

Did you have a particular preference in all the range of training that you were getting?

As to what I wanted to do?

Yeah well I guess, did you warm to any particular facet of what you were doing?

Well,

19:30 I really wanted to be coxswain of a barge but I never got that. The closest I came to a barge was when I was on the landings at Tarakan and again at Balikpapan, I was on the salvage barge and I was a gunner. That is what I said I had been, a gunner, and I am still a gunna. But I had twin calibre 50, or twin calibre

20:00 50 browning machine guns, and 50 calibre was approximately half an inch and it fired so many rounds per minute. Used against airplanes but we never got strafed by Japanese airplanes only by American and that wasn't on the barge that was on the shore.

We will get to that story a

20:30 **bit later.**

And I liked the salvage work. We poked around all up the creeks and the rivers and round the bays and if anything went wrong at sea we had to go out. One of the floating docks got away and was swept out to sea and we had to go and retrieve it and we brought it back. And there was half a dozen

21:00 so called sailors dressed in jungle green but we had cut the legs off the trousers and made them into shorts. And one Commissioner Bozen who had worked his way up from the lower deck, he wasn't a young man, he was old to us, he was probably in his mid 40s, something like that. And we went out to retrieve this floating dock and brought it back and when we

- 21:30 tied it up along side the mother ship again we were just about to cast off and take off and a voice said, "Hold it!" And we turned round, "Tie up again, come on board." So we all went up on board. "Your clothes are a bit dirty. Go down," and take us down to the showers, "and have a hot shower
- 22:00 and we will wash your clothes." "What are we going to put on in the mean time, you know?" "Oh it won't take long to dry but we will give you something." And they issued each of us with a white t-shirt and a pair of blue jeans, trousers and then when they handed our clothes back they had all been washed and ironed. This had never happened to them before, well we washed them by tying a rope around them and dragging them through the salt water. That was how they got washed. And then
- 22:30 when we were ready to take off again the officer on the deck said, "Don't cast off." He called out an order and the next one to the cargo net comes over the side and for each man of the crew there was a case of Budweiser beer and a carton of cigarettes, "Thanking you for a job well done guys."
- 23:00 And we drank the whole case of beer each, we sunk it in 6 foot of water first to try and cool it down and then we pulled it up after we had finished duty that day, and we sat on the barge and with the ramp down and one fella diving down getting beers every time we wanted fresh beer until we drunk all the beer, and we still hadn't got a glow. It was something or other point alcohol, I think.
- 23:30 But the cigarettes went down well. Because it was only just the week before that that we had missed out on our ration and we were smoking Niger Twist. You know what that is?

A twist of tobacco.

Yeah, black like a stick of liquorice, shaved and rubbed up and we didn't have any cigarette papers and the padre

- 24:00 wondered why there was a rush on the New Testaments because that was very thin paper and we were rolling our cigarettes in that and he said, "At least it is getting into your system that way." But then the next week we got back onto our rations again. Well at that time
- 24:30 the six of us on this barge had been missed out, they hadn't drawn rations for us. They hadn't drawn water for us and we were making do with what we could get off the various ships and then we found a well up the coast and we called in there got water a couple of times. And we were still only getting a meal every now
- 25:00 and again off the ship. And then one day the Commissioner berths and we tied up alongside the jetty at Tarakan and he said, "See that pile up there on the wharf there? It is covered by a tarp, better get up there and see what is under." So two of the boys got up there and under the tarp they found there was cases of food. So they passed things down onto the barge and a voice said, "Hold it sailor." And they looked up and there is the newsreel
- 25:30 cameraman filming them. And a fortnight afterwards we went to the picture show on land and part of the news reel was this, "Hold it sailor," and you never got anybody get up and leave a picture show so quickly in all your life, because we were the only bearded ones around.

Why were you, why did you leave though?

- 26:00 Because we had stolen not troops rations but officer's rations and it consisted of things like tin tongue, tin beetroot, which we never saw. A crate of lettuce which we never saw, tinned fruit,
- 26:30 tinned herrings in tomato sauce, tinned salmon. We never saw that, we saw the herrings in tomato sauce, we saw baked beans too often. Until this day I can't eat herrings in tomato sauce, I tried last year I bought a tin thinking seeing as though I have had a tin of baked beans recently for the first time, I will try the herrings. I couldn't
- 27:00 eat them, I tipped them out. And we existed on that until we left Tarakan.

Can I just ask you Ern, sort of going back to what you were telling me about what the Americans were doing in Brisbane. How did that colour your dealings with them throughout you know, your service experiences?

Well on this Yankee transport

- 27:30 was the real close contact I had with the Yanks. I had some down in Nelson Bay but on the transport we were put on board for passage to Morotai and two days out of Cairns we run into the tail end of a cyclone and the Yankee captain panicked. And he dropped the anchor,
- 28:00 we were sailing underscored because it was classed in the fast transport, I think you can do 18 knots or something which was faster than a submarine can do. And we swung around that anchor for 48 hours, the tide had carried us, the wind would blow us back, the tide had carried us and the wind would blow us back. And she is rolling and twisting and turning and the troops on board were in
- 28:30 the holds which had six bunks in tiers, with a couple of feet between each tier and bunk. And after the first day less than half the troops turned out for a meal and when you went past the hatch leaning into the hold you didn't put your head anywhere near it, you held your nose when you went past because

they were too sick to get out of their bunks.

29:00 And the Yanks on the crew were sick and we weren't. I think we had one man seasick out of 120 odd. They drafted us in to take part to do some of the boats work, the crews work and I got the best job of the lot. I was the ration boss. I

29:30 was going down into the hold where the rations were kept and drawing the rations to go up to the galley, and my little clique never ate better in their life. We never went to the galley, we lived on things like fruit salad and ice cream and ham and turkey, tinned turkey and it started to affect us.

30:00 But we gave up on the turkey and we still ate the tinned fruit and ice cream and the ham and sausage, and I think at the finish, there was something like 3,000 on board the ship and there were about 250 going through the galley through the servery for a meal. The rest of them were too sick to appear. But the moment the ship got under way again

30:30 and they started to clean it out, they put the pumps into the holds and sucked all the... out and it went overboard and they swabbed them down and disinfected everything and it began to smell almost sweet again and the troops recovered and were getting out on deck and exercising. The crew on board

31:00 there weren't bad although they did throw it up at us that we didn't have any ribbons, we hadn't been anywhere or done anything. They had left the states three months beforehand and they are wearing full ribbons. "Oh guy this one is because I joined, this one is because I left where I lived to

31:30 the other side of the States. And this one is for leaving the States and this one is for coming out here." No wonder when you see the Yanks dressed up in their full uniform with all their ribbons up that they have got so many. Now my CO [Commanding Officer] had been through the Mediterranean, he had been in England, he

32:00 had been to the Med, to Gibraltar then to the Med, took part in waterborne landings there as CO of a LST. And had one ribbon.

There is a bit of difference.

And that was the Africa Star. But of course when he got here and we went overseas

32:30 he got the same four as the rest of us got.

Ern going back to the HMAS Assault and the training you were getting, how much, I am just curious how much you were told of what you were going to be using your training for?

We were told that we would be doing what we had been doing there. That some of us would be beach party.

33:00 In other words in control of the beach, some would be protecting the beach and we didn't know who or what because we were all trained in all the facets. We knew we were going to be eventually used in landings to take back some of the islands. We had seen the films of some of the Yankee landings which were pretty horrific.

In what sense?

The

33:30 number of casualties, the fact that the, some of the ships, the landing ships, they never even got close to the shore, they were let out in chest deep water and that is... We had had one experience of that when we were training the army and the second lieutenant in the landing barge, we told the troops on board the moment they got on the barge,

34:00 undo your buckles, your belt buckle so that you can get rid of your gear if you have to, and he ordered them to do it up. "It is slovenly you don't look like soldiers, do your buckles up." And the ramp was dropped on a false shore where it was a beach we hadn't been on before, and it hadn't been reconnoitred properly, and there was a sand bank

34:30 and on the other side of the sand bank was about 8 foot of water. And when the ramp was dropped and he ordered them out into what we thought would have been about foot of water, they just went straight down and some of them didn't come back up. The ones that were smart enough to undo their buckles again they got up. They lost their gear we

35:00 had to dive for it, but that was one result of an army officer countermanding a navy order on a navy vessel.

Did it ever happen again after that.

Not that I know of. I did see

35:30 an LST once drop its ramp too far out. I don't know why because the ones on either side would have gone straight in and this one dropped its ramp and it had some water proof tanks on and the tanks drove down off the ramp and just went straight down.

What would happen though in a situation like that Ern, when you have got troops heading off and obviously I mean you would discover

36:00 **pretty quickly they were in too deep, could anybody try to go in after them?**

Well we tried, that is what I say, we'd go down but there were a couple that we couldn't find straight away. I couldn't dive down because I knew what would happen if I went in. I would have been out of the navy or put into a shore base in Australia and never allowed out. Because I had three episodes of near

36:30 drowning.

Was that during your service time?

Yes, when we were up on the Tablelands. I don't know why we went into Kuranda and we went swimming in the Barron River up above the falls.

Actually Ern, I want to hear those stories but because we have only got a few minutes on this tape I want to keep to the landing of the troops in the water.

Well as soon as we got them back on board we backed off and then

37:00 sounded our way in until we got them onto the beach. And then went back and dove down to try and recover their gear.

And did the army officer in question...?

I don't know what happened to him, but what is the old term, packing them, he was scared at what was going to happen to him.

37:30 I never found out because they weren't troops that were attached to us. They were just ones we were training.

So that was in some of your later stages of training?

Well that was, yeah.

Whereabouts exactly?

I am not going to tell you. No, as I mentioned earlier about losing two people

38:00 in Tarakan Island and as far as the navy was concerned they didn't die on Tarakan Island, they died at Madang in New Guinea.

Why is that?

For the same reason as I wear a medal with a Papua New Guinea clasp on it and I have never been in Papua New Guinea. But that is the medal they issued to me because that is where they say I served.

38:30 **But why would they say you served in a place that you didn't serve, oh because of the commando and the nature of what you were doing?**

Well we were in the commando and we did not have our papers with us they were kept at the nearest naval base. And at one stage the nearest naval base was at HMAS Madang in New Guinea. And that is where, according to the navy records, that is where I was.

39:00 And that is why a lot of my friends say, "Oh look at this joker, joined the so and so navy and never got out of the depot." Because, except for I think it might have been a three day period on the Kanimbla my records state that I served in these depots dong, dong, dong, dong, dong. And out of them all I only saw four. There was

39:30 Cerberus, Penguin, Assault and Moreton while I was waiting for discharge but in between there is Magnetic, Kuranda, Platypus, Madang, Gololo. I know where they were but I was never there.

40:00 **We have to pause there.**

Tape 4

00:31 **What did you know about the Special Forces before you went into them?**

Nothing, except a little bit I had read about the Royal Marine Commandos in England.

When did you read that?

It would have been '42 I suppose.

Did you have any desire to go into them?

No.

I know you said you wanted to be a naval seaman.

01:00 I made an appointment to see my naval divisional officer down at Flinders and asked to be taken out of it because I thought he was a friendly old man too, maybe he will get me transferred out of this, back into general service where all my friends were. "You'd be perfect," he said, "you have done a bit of bush work, you have done canoeing, you have done this you have done that you have caught your own food."

01:30 **So tell us about, you mentioned it very briefly about your training, after you did the rookie training you went into Penguin, HMAS Penguin?**

Yes HMAS Penguin in Sydney. I didn't do much training there, we were just used as a work force and, as I said, like when the Hobart came in with a torpedo hole in it and they sent the crew on leave, or some of the crew on leave,

02:00 they put us on board to do the ship board duties while they were away. And it wasn't until we went to HMAS Assault that we really started serious training.

Sorry I will just interrupt for a second the Hobart got hit by a Japanese torpedo?

Yes.

And was the ship very badly damaged?

Well if it got back to Sydney with a hole in her side.

02:30 **Did you see it?**

Yes, I was on board it.

When it got torpedoed?

No, when it was in Sydney.

Sure, what were the crew like, were they a bit shaken up?

They didn't seem to be too worried. I imagine anybody who was having problems would have been off and being treated somewhere. Only the diehards were still there.

So tell us about going down to the Assault?

03:00 We were told one day that we were on draft and that we were going to this depot at Port Stephens. The officer that told us didn't even seem to know at the time what the name of the depot was. But it was HMAS Assault and it was a combined operations training depot.

03:30 And we got up there, it is what a 100 mile north of Sydney isn't it, Newcastle. We went up to Newcastle by train and by truck from there to Nelson Bay. And walked into this beautiful setting, bushland on the side of a bit of a hill, just down on the other side of the roadway was the water, the beach and the water. You are looking out across Port Stephens

04:00 you saw the Heads, Tomaree and what was the other one? I can't remember now. But it was really, it was beautiful spot, but at that age we didn't appreciate it as such. We went back years later for a reunion there and that is when the beauty of the area hit us. What magnificent scenery there was around and the fact that there was a great big expanse of water and bigger than Sydney Harbour

04:30 really. And there it was and we had been there and all we had been interested in was jumping into barges, jumping out of them and running across beaches and being down on the firing range and shooting and blowing things up.

Can you tell us in detail about the training, because it is important to know what exactly you were taught during that time?

05:00 We were taught, we didn't do route marches, we didn't do very much in the way of parade ground drill. But they had an assault course. Which started off on one side of the depot and I think the first obstacles, there was a series of obstacles more or less, and the first one was a big open pit filled with dirty muddy water and they told us there was

05:30 barb wire in underneath the water. I don't think anybody ever fell in to find out. And there were a couple of logs across it. Well you were timed on going through this course. You would start off at the run, you would run across these logs and you would run up a bit of a slope and you would have to climb a rope, a knotted rope up a tree then walk across wires between two trees, come down a rope ladder, go over a wall

06:00 and probably about nine or ten different things that you had to go through, and first time it was hard work. Second time it wasn't quite as bad. And at the finish we used to go and run this course after we had finished duty for the day or on the weekend when we weren't training, we would be out running the

assault course, just to keep fit. And it paid off.

06:30 **It wasn't for the faint hearted then.**

We had one fellow froze up on top of the wires and he was a bit scared to come down. I don't know why because he come down on a rope ladder but he was trying to come down so the rope ladder was there and he's coming down here. Whereas the right way was to come down from the side and a foot on the ropes that side and a foot on the ropes this side that is when one is swinging free like that.

07:00 And it is easy, but... We did that and we trained with the Australian landing craft to start with. Which were a death trap, if you would take them into action they were wooden.

Australian landing craft?

Yeah. Australian landing craft

07:30 something or other. It was LCA [Landing Craft Assault] anyhow.

What was that exactly?

Well it was about a 30 foot long craft with a petrol motor and petrol tanks which had very, very thin metal on the petrol tank and I suppose the sides were in ply or something like that. But it would only take an incendiary around there and the whole thing would have gone.

08:00 up. And they were low in the water and they only had a ramp that was about that high. And when they dropped that it was wide open.

Were they left over from the First World War or something?

No, they never had such things in the First World War.

Why did they...

Theirs was a copy of some English ones and they weren't satisfactory.

08:30 And when the Americans started to bring in their supplies and they brought in the Higgins boats which were LCVs [Landing Craft Vessel] and LCVPs [Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel] and LCMs [Landing Craft Motorised]. The LCPs landing craft personnel they didn't have, they didn't have a ramp, they had a blunt bow three sided. And

09:00 you used to have to jump over the side. Well you used to have to use those as a command vessel. In a whole wave of landing craft going in there could be one on either end of the wave and they would just keep the station, and the other craft had to keep with them. The LCVPs were landing craft vehicle and personnel and they had a drop ramp

09:30 and it was 6 foot or more high. And they would take 35 troops or a 3 tonne truck or a couple of jeeps, and then the LCMs would take maybe a tank and a truck or a couple of tanks, small tanks and they were the biggest ones, they were 40 something feet. All the small boats had a crew of three, a coxswain and two seaman.

10:00 Or a coxswain and a seaman and a stoker in some cases. And we trained on those down at Port Stephens, actually the depot itself was right on Nelson Bay. You walked out of the main gate of the depot and fly point was right in front of you. And our whole armourment in the depot was, in the way of offensive armour,

10:30 was, other than small arms, was one Oerlikan set up on the point, fly point, and covering the Heads. But up on the Middle Head there were army coast artillery set up there and there were torpedo tubes set up there, machine gun nests. And the last time

11:00 I was there in 99, you could still see where they had been. A lot of the training was done in Shoal Bay, Anna Bay and Shoal Bay was sheltered water, very, very shallow water and very sandy bottom. Down on the outside of the heads, down the coast, the waves were sometimes

11:30 strong enough that they would broach to the bigger, the smaller landing craft quite easily broached to, that means driven in sideways to the beach. But the bigger ones like the LCIs landing craft infantry, which were a shocking thing. They were very narrow and no ramp as such, the doors didn't drop down or open up, but there were two ramps came down, one on

12:00 either side of the bow and the troops used to go down them like a flight of stairs, but they were only about this wide. So it was one man behind the other and they would have been a trap if you got into a very heavily defended area. But the others when you dropped the ramp you got a 6 to 8 foot opening and the troops would be gone in two or three seconds flat, the barge would be empty.

12:30 No hanging around waiting for the bloke in front of you to get out of the way. If he didn't get out of the way you pushed him over and ran over the top of him.

Is that what you were trained to do?

Yeah, you didn't stop for anything, so if somebody got in the way push him to side, if he was too slow holding everybody up knock him down and go over the top. And I got that

13:00 little article that was written by Ron Zushnan the secretary of the Assault Association and it appeared in one of the club magazines up here and I kept a couple of copies and that more or less gives you an idea of what some of the training was. And he says that we were the most, most trained assault force in Australia.

13:30 **I don't doubt it from some of the exercises you were talking about.**

No, the people who were selected as boats crews, they went to the three LCIs Landings Ships Infantry, Manoora Kanimbla, Australia and the rest of us left over were put into beach

14:00 commandos. We ended up at Trinity Beach in Cairns. Some people who did the training there did revert back to general service, because they decided to start with, they were only going to have one commando. And then later on they decided that they would form a second one.

Did the blokes that you were training with and you, did you think at some point this seems more like army training than navy training?

Well we

14:30 were those, what was it, those bloody freaks, those army-navy freaks, they are either one thing nor the other. We would have been I suppose, the closest thing the Australian navy had as marines. The equivalent of the Royal Navy Marines and the American Marines but we were never

15:00 called that. The only marines that were in the Australian Navy were bandsman. When I first when in the navy the navy bandsman were a marine band.

That is interesting I wonder why they call them a marine band?

Well they served on board ship but they weren't actual sailors as such. In action they were to become the doctors'

15:30 offsidars and things like that, stretcher bearers.

You mentioned before lunch the other blokes coming down the two Ts and W, did you meet up some other mates in commando training that you were able to get on with?

Yeah, most of them, there were one or two that rubbed people up the wrong way.

Bad apples?

Not actually, but they seemed to think that they were better

16:00 than you were and better able to do things. In the depot at Assault there was a fight one night in the hut between the fellow who had been with us right from the start, and a chappie who had transferred from the army and he thought was the best king pin and Jackie decided he wasn't. I don't know about the one that came from the army but the navy boy he had been a

16:30 preliminary boxer in Sydney and they fought for about two hours up and down this hut. And we were all up in our hammock, that was the safest place to be. They were fighting between the hammocks, under the hammocks, down the corridor, on the mess deck tables. In the hammock beds.

Who won?

I think it became a draw in the finish. They were both so exhausted they couldn't go on any longer.

17:00 Well he is one that I have never heard from since I left the beach group. I finished up, Jack Town, he got married just after he got out of the navy, he had a couple of children and he had a cancer sore up on his shoulder and it had never healed up. We knew it was there. He

17:30 used to go to sick bay and they didn't know what it was, they would put some ointment on it and say, "Oh you have got a tropical ulcer." Anyway it turned out it was cancer and it killed him in the finish. And a few people gave statements saying we had seen this years beforehand and it had never healed and his wife ended up as a war widow. He would have been maybe 30 when he died. Des Tynan the other T.

18:00 As far as I know he is still alive and he is running a pub in Rockhampton I think. His mother had a hotel in Long Reach, that was where he joined up from and he was the only man that I ever saw that would go into a pub with you and every time you had a beer he could have a schooner of lemonade and drank it. If I had a schooner of lemonade I would be out here, worse than beer. You would be absolutely bloated, but not Desmond. He never drank

18:30 any alcohol. He said he saw enough as a child living in the pub. And my other friend Mr Walsh, Nobby. I was best man when he got married and he was groomsmen when I got married. He finished up the head man in the external territories for Queensland and outlying dependencies. Like if anybody wanted to go to

19:00 Papua New Guinea for any reason, he was the one that would say yes you can go, or no you can't go.

So tell us about going up to Trinity Beach, what were your first impressions of Cairns and up there?

Well we didn't see much of Cairns, we were taken off the train. We went up by troop train and I think it took 24 hours to travel from Townsville to Cairns in the troop train. And the rest of it had taken

19:30 about three days anyhow, but that last little bit, 24 hour trip. You could get out and walk faster than the train was travelling sometimes and we were taken off the train at Cairns station and there was a line of army vehicles there and we loaded up and we drove out to Trinity Beach where we had to put up tents. The only thing

20:00 that was there at the time was the headquarters building, the naval quartermasters office and a kitchen for the ORs [Other Ranks], a kitchen for the officers and a kitchen for the sergeants and petty officers. Because it was our first time that we had lived with soldiers. It was beach group headquarters.

20:30 Now there was the headquarters such, colonel was in charge, I can't think of his name, doesn't matter anyhow. There were few other officers with the headquarters, there were military police detachment, there was an engineer battalion, a pioneer battalion, an infantry battalion. All as part of the beach group headquarters and then there was us, just thrown

21:00 in. That was where we changed from navy khaki to army jungle green. That photo you saw of me was about the last time I wore a khaki shirt. From then on I was wearing greens.

I meant to ask you before, what was the difference between the army and the navy cooks?

Navy cooks didn't know what to do with tin food.

21:30 That is being pretty well honest. You know, you gave them tin food and they didn't know what it was, that is if they had been accustomed to being in depots because you didn't get tinned food in depots, you got fresh food all the time. So Sunday lunch was always roast pork, applesauce and roast vegetables followed by a sweet of one sort or another.

22:00 Sometimes in the evening, your evening meal you would have cold meat and salad, you would have bacon and eggs for breakfast or porridge and then bacon and eggs or toast and bacon and eggs, but you always had reasonable food and we had an army cook right up until after we

22:30 landed at Balikpapan and then they transferred a navy cook to us. Who, his first effort of providing a meal was to count the number of men, get out so many tins of M&V stew, put them on the tables with a tin opener. Didn't heat them up at all. I thought you just ate it straight from a can.

23:00 But errk it was vile when it was cold, it had to be cooked up.

Did the men complain?

Bitterly and he was told what would happen to him if he ever did anything like that again. And I ran into him a few years back when I was playing bowls, and I went to play in the Navy Bowls Day and I thought I will go to the

23:30 toilet before I go out on the green. And I opened the toilet door and I heard a voice, and I put my head in the door and I said, "Who called the bastard a cook?" And he said, "Who was it that called the bastard a cook? You?"

He didn't get any better then?

No.

Was he replaced eventually?

No we were stuck with him, it was only for a bit over a month

24:00 I suppose.

So when you got to Trinity Beach, how long was it, how long was your training there up in Trinity?

We were at Trinity Beach, I could refresh my memory by looking at something but. Say we went there in January of 44, I don't know whether it was January or February, somewhere about that area of time, and we trained

24:30 at Trinity Beach and on Atherton Tablelands on several occasions for 12 months at least.

What was the difference in your training to what you had been doing at Shoal Bay?

Down there we had been doing a lot of boat work. Up north we were doing the demolition and jungle survival courses, being sent on route marches. And to keep

- 25:00 us fit the CO in the first group who had been a celebrated sportsman in his younger days, he used to get us out at 6 o'clock in the morning onto the beach and we were about half way between Yorkies Knob and the Nest Point, and we would run and swim alternatively from where the camp was down to the point that he chose that day. One day he would go south, next day he
- 25:30 might go north and you would run a 100 yards and then you would swim so many yards, you would get out and run 100 yards and then swim so many yards. I never tried to do the swim I just used to run in knee deep water. And it kept you fit, I was never as fit all my life. I never put on a great deal of weight. I think the heaviest I ever got to was about 9 stone 2.

Even after all that breakfast?

Yeah, because you worked it off.

- 26:00 Then when we were up in the Tablelands we were doing, as I say, jungle survival courses and the driving courses and that was the funniest thing you ever saw. I great big paddock or a big clearing actually. I don't know whether at one time it would have been part of a farm or not, but it was all fairly flat ground, no fences, no buildings and a heap of 3 ton trucks, 30 hundred weight trucks,
- 26:30 jeeps, a bulldozer or two and novice drivers in each one with an instructor. And they're careering in all directions over this open ground, and there were a few buckled fenders, nothing really dangerous. And that was how we were taught to drive.

Like dodgem cars?

Yeah, more or less. Only once I get into trouble driving,

- 27:00 and that was at Trinity Beach. It was with the second beach group and I was quartermaster on duty one night and the skipper came back to camp and he parked the jeep outside and he lifted the bonnet and took out the rotor and brought it into the office and gave it to me. Alright he left his jeep there, it couldn't be driven away until the rotor was put back in it.
- 27:30 And he went off to bed and about one hour and a half later one of the lieutenants turned up, rotten drunk, also driving a jeep, "What is the captain's jeep doing here?" I said, "Waiting until I am off duty when I will take it to the garage, the same as I will come and get yours and take yours to the garage, if you are too lazy to take it down there yourself." I
- 28:00 didn't like him and he didn't like me. When there were no witnesses I could say things and get away with them. And he said, "Have you got a licence?" I said, "No, they taught us to drive but they never gave us licences." "Well you can't drive on your own then. I will have to come with you." So I put the rotor in. I said, "It has got to wait. I can't leave the office unattended." "You will do as you are told." "Ok." I go
- 28:30 and put the rotor in the jeep, I get in the driver's seat, he gets in the passenger seat beside me, and you went down a track from where our office was and the track branched out both ways in a big circle and in that circle were the army military police camp, and the garages. And right in the junction, right in front of the junction was a great big gum tree, about so big round.
- 29:00 And I always drove down, turned left around the block and came back, parked in the garage and then walked 100 yards back to the office. This night he said, "Where do you think you are going?" I said, "This is the way I go." "Not on your life. We are going the other way." And he leant across and grabbed the steering wheel, his elbow came down on my knee, he is reefing the steering wheel back from where I started to turn left and his elbow on my knee is pushing my leg
- 29:30 down and my foot is on the accelerator. And instead of going left or right we went straight up the gum tree. And then he had the hide the next day to charge me with wrecking the captain's jeep.

Did you tell the captain what really happened?

Yeah, he asked me, he had me up on the charge and he charged me and the captain said, "Alright, lieutenant so and so," whatever I won't say what his name is or was, because he is dead now, he said,

- 30:00 "What is your story?" "Seaman Tyler didn't have a drivers licence. I deemed it advisable to travel with him in the jeep, to the garage, to see whether he was proficient enough to take the jeep down to the garage," he said. "But when we got to the junction he panicked and went straight ahead and up the gum tree." And the
- 30:30 Skipper looked at him and said, "For your information he has been driving the jeeps down to the garage for the last three months, he has never had an accident yet." And he turned around to me and asked me what my story was and I told him the truth. "Right lieutenant, your wine bill has stopped for three months." And he was also restricted
- 31:00 to the camp area unless he was on duty.

So he had a problem with alcohol obviously?

Yeah, and I had a problem with him forever on, after that. He didn't like me, he didn't make any bones

about showing it. But you just had to grin and bear it.

So that 12 months at Trinity did you get to go home?

I came home on leave once.

- 31:30 I had a full growth on and we were notified that we might not be going back to Trinity Beach. Now the only navy gear that I had with me was my hammock. Because we had been using the bedding on makeshift stretchers and we had to bring that home with us plus our rifle or what other arms we had,
- 32:00 and we searched to make sure we had no live ammunition. So I came home. I got a taxi from the exhibition grounds out to Clayfield or Tunanda where I was living, and my sisters were sharing a house with the woman who eventually became my stepmother. They had the front half of the house and she had the back. And her kid, her daughter and a foster child
- 32:30 she had, were playing in the front garden. I went in one gate and they went out the other and ran screaming up the road. They weren't used to seeing anybody with (points to beard) and carrying a rifle. That was the only time I came. No I told a lie. I came home from the first group that time and then I came home again in the very
- 33:00 beginning of '45 before we went overseas, and it was with the second group then that I was given leave. That was when it was only the Queenslanders that got leave because there wasn't enough time to give the others leave and then when they got up to Morotai discovered that none of the others had had pre-embarkation leave so they had to have it. So they brought them all back to Australia again.

33:30 **So what about you, you got stuck up there?**

I was stuck up there, yeah. I think there was only about 14, I think all told, left up there then.

Is that what happened directly after Trinity?

After Trinity and the Tablelands, yeah.

You went to Morotai?

We went to Morotai on that American transport.

Now what, was that your first trip at sea?

- 34:00 Well since I had been in the navy, yeah.

How did you find it, were you seasick?

No, never been seasick in my life.

You were meant for it then.

I used to go down to Dunwich, Amity Point, Point Lookout quite often. You would go down in the Mirimar or the Mirabel in those days. The Mirimar was taken over by the navy at the start of the war and so was the

- 34:30 Mirabel but they gave the Mirabel back because she was top heavy. You rolled too much in a heavy sea. And I can remember coming back from Amity Point on board her when I was 17 I suppose, and there were three of us and we had been down to spend the weekend at one of their parents who was down there on holiday, and this lad's mother made us some lovely tomato sandwiches on fresh
- 35:00 bread and we had a bottle of rum and we were coming back on the Mirabel and there was a south easterly blowing across the bay which gets a bit rough. And we are sitting up on the rails with our legs hooked around the posts, supporting the rails and we are eating soggy tomato sandwiches and swigging from a bottle of rum and practically everybody that walked past us took one look and went errk.
- 35:30 But even on that Yankee transport when it was anchored for 48 hours, I was never seasick. The only time that I ever felt the least bit seasick was I went out for fishing overnight with one of my ex naval friends who had a 30 foot launch and he said we will go out in the morning and we will fish all day, we will fish all night if you want or you can just sleep and fish again tomorrow,
- 36:00 if we haven't had much luck, and we will come back tomorrow afternoon. Well for the first half hour it was also a dirty day on the bay. And it was so good that he had a gas cylinder anchored to his little stubby mast up on top and the boat was rolling so much that the lashings came loose on the gas cylinder and it was rolling around on this little top deck, bashing up against
- 36:30 the railings which were only about 6 inches high and eventually it undid its connection and flew out over the stern of the boat on one of the rolls. And it took us over half an hour to fish it back out of the water by which time there was very little gas left in it and we had to keep that for his refrigerator.

What was the American transport called?

The Sea Barb.

The Sea Barb,

37:00 **oh you did mention that before actually. So how did they let you know that you weren't going back to Trinity, was it via post. You didn't end up going back to Trinity Beach after your leave did you?**

Yeah.

Oh you did, oh sorry I misunderstood.

Because our friend MacArthur cancelled the operation they had us set up for. He did that twice actually. He wasn't a very nice man Mr MacArthur, or General MacArthur. As

37:30 a matter of fact I think one of the lads I went to school with wrote a book, and declared that MacArthur was a war criminal.

Do you remember the name of the book?

No I don't, the author's name was Gallaway. I will tell you another little one on MacArthur. When he went back to the Philippines,

38:00 and I know this because a lot of my friends were on the barge crews on the three various ships and they have told me that MacArthur was his own censor. Nothing was allowed out unless he said it was ok to go. And he saw film of him landing, "Oh we can't have that we will do this again tomorrow." And he re-enacted his landing

38:30 on the Philippines. Because on the first one every barge that was lined up on the beach was flying a white emblem, they were Australian barges off the three Australian ships. And he did it the next day with all the barges from the Yankee ships flying the stars and strips. He didn't like it known that Australians did anything. They were very seldom mentioned it was our allies. American troops and their allies did this,

39:00 and American troops and their allies did that. And I think somebody said once that he even said American troops and their allies landed on Tarakan. The only American troops there were a small detachment of CBs [Construction Battalion] and a few barge crews.

You are not the first person to say these things.

39:30 You can take it as ribbing can't you.

Unbelievable. So after leave you went back to Trinity for a while.

Went back to Trinity yeah and did another stint up on the Tablelands that was when we went to Herberton and then back from Herberton to Trinity Beach and then into Cairns and then on the ship.

Which was the hardest part of training for you?

Bloody route marches.

40:00 **Route marches why is that, oh your sore toes.**

My feet. You would be loaded up full kit, full army kit, not navy kit which was the big haversack, the small haversack, the side pouches, ammunition pouches, all the other bits and pieces, heavy clodhopper army boots and you would go off on a route march up to Mosman.

40:30 Or on one occasion Port Douglas and quite often just 30 or 40 mile up the coast camp overnight and come back.

Why did they do it, just to keep you fit?

Just to keep us fit, yeah.

We better stop there Ern or we will run out of tape.

Tape 5

00:34 **Ern I was just wondering if you could talk us through your first impressions of Morotai when you got there and?**

Hot, steamy, dusty and crowded. We got off the Sea Barb and I don't how but

01:00 the transport company that came and picked us up to take us to our campsite were American Negroes in the 6 by 6 trucks. And they drove like speedway drivers, no convoy speed of 30 mile an hour, foot to the floor and the only ones that had a comfortable, reasonably comfortable ride were the ones in the first two trucks. Everybody else by the time we got to where we were getting out, wiping mud off them

01:30 and the dust coming off the road and perspiration pouring off us. I don't know if the perspiration was from the heat or the driving style. We were lucky, we had a fairly decent camp site up past one of the aerodromes. The first time we had been camped anywhere near an aerodrome and the number of smashed up

02:00 planes that were there were surprising.

From battles or from accidents?

I don't know maybe some of each. Even liberators probably crashed on landing or something like that and were in a crumpled heap and pushed to one side. I didn't see many Australian troops there. I think

02:30 that most of the Australian troops and the American troops that were on Morotai were further inland or still on the dividing line between the bit that the Japs still held and the bit what we had, because they had built this airfield and these camps and the Japs were still holding part of the island, it was a big island. And I know when the first beach

03:00 group got there my friends told me that they went to the picture show at the next camp, an army camp and the Japs were sneaking out of the scrub and coming and watching the movies. I don't think they would tell me lies.

I heard that in New Guinea as well. What did you know of the Japanese at that stage?

That I

03:30 didn't like them.

But why?

Because of what they had done. News got out. A cousin of mine, her husband was the Deputy Governor of Changi jail before the war and they came and stayed with us in Brisbane in the beginning of '39, that is right, and when they went back they still corresponded.

04:00 And she got out, she was put on one of the ships that managed to get away. And she was landed in Perth and as far as I know she is still there. He was in prison in his own jail. Dolly wrote to the family and told them that my brother had called in to see them over there and that she knew that he had been

04:30 wounded but that was all that she knew. And she and her son, I don't know if they stayed in Perth and went back to England after the war and then came back here, because we lost touch. I suppose I could find out where a Mrs Dolly Russell or a Philip Russell were living over there and hope I found the right

05:00 ones. I don't think I have seen them since that one time they came to see us for a couple of weeks. Because when I was growing up I had no relatives in Australia, not one. All the other kids had Aunty this and Aunty that and Uncle so and so, they would take them places and buy them things, not us.

So through this connection or others what did you know about I guess what the Japanese had done to our fellas?

Well,

05:30 we heard how cruel they were and, how they, well the two hours they robbed and raped their way down Malaya. And other than that, their sneak attack on Pearl Harbour, there wasn't a great deal to find out about them

06:00 until you got some news later on.

So how was it being on Morotai knowing that they were sort of...?

Oh, nothing to worry about there, we knew that it was a good couple of mile between us and the Japs and they would have to go through an awful lot of people to get to us, so we felt quite safe. As a matter of fact our biggest problem there was getting hold of some of the belly tanks of the fighter planes,

06:30 and make them into little outrigger canoes. A one man canoe, and we used to get out on the reef at low tide and get shells, then one day there was an army fella walking across the reef just with a pair of boots on and someone said, "Don't get out there with just your boots on. Get into some sort of a craft don't walk around on the reef like that." "Oh nothing to worry about."

07:00 Five minutes later he was dead. He had been bitten by a coral snake and before he could be got onto the shore he was gone. It didn't take long. No, we were very, very careful that we didn't walk in the water and we watched where we put our hands before we put our hands in the water.

And were they distinctly aggressive or did you have to actually have to sort of?

I think if you got too close to them they would probably go for you. Some sea snakes are very venomous and will attack so I have been told. I don't know from first hand knowledge.

Thankfully.

Because most of

- 08:00 the waters I got into after that you had to get about 3 mile off shore before you got clean water and they would not live under the oil scum that was on the water close to Tarakan Island and Balikpapan. We used to take people with tropical ulcers out in the barge and take them out past the scummy water into the clean water and let them dangle their ulcers in the water and clean them
- 08:30 up. Whereas when they used to scrape, scrape the, like a spoon and get all the muck out of them and then paint them with the gentian blue and it didn't heal. But we discovered, we had a fellow fell through the stairs at Balikpapan that we took over as our headquarters and he scraped his shin, about eight inches.
- 09:00 And he was going to the army doctors and that is what they were doing to him, scraping and painting, scraping and painting every couple of days. And the old bosun that he had, he said to the skipper one day he said, "I want to take him out in the barge, I am a great believer in salt water." And the skipper said, "Yes, clean saltwater but not this." He said, "Oh no, we will have to go outside the scum."
- 09:30 And we got out there and sat him on the ramp, put the ramp down, sat him on the ramp and he dangled his legs in the water as we were going through it at about three or four knots and the washing of the clean saltwater into that opened wound cleaned it up in no time. And we got word that the army doctors wanted to know what happened to this fellow that is supposed to be coming for treatment. He's not turning up anymore? And the skipper said, "There is no need for him to. We have cured him." "How did you cure him?"
- 10:00 "Oh so and so did." "Could you do it with some more?" So we used to have to take them out in the barge and let them run there, let them run their arms and legs through the water.

So you had a pretty wide variety of duties across your time didn't you?

All sorts of things.

What, you mentioned that Morotai was pretty crowded, what was the scale of the camp, can you give us a bit of a picture?

- 10:30 Well in a half mile space, there was parts of a Yankee camp, the Australian camp and our camp. All within this corner of this half mile. And if you multiply that by the thousands of troops that were there, it was crowded. Well all those who landed on Tarakan and then
- 11:00 gained land on Brunei and Labuan, they had all been staged on Morotai. And the ones that went to Balikpapan came through Morotai. Some of them were brought from New Guinea to there and then on. But a lot of them had been camped on Morotai itself for a while.

So what did you get up to in your first few days?

- 11:30 With normal camp routine, keep it clean, keep it tidy, we weren't as bad as the army in a base camp, but we could, if it moved, salute it, if it doesn't move, paint it. We saluted our officer first thing in the morning and sometimes that was the salute, later on in the day if you saluted someone
- 12:00 that was the salute or that. I met up with one of our officers at one of our reunions in '93. I saw this fellow and I thought, god I know you, and I walked up behind him and said, "G'day spud." He looked at me and, "Who are
- 12:30 you?" I had my name up, see Ern. He doesn't know anybody that day, "No, what about if you make it Tim." He was a midshipman when he came to us and the last time I saw him when he was heading back to Sydney he was a full Lieutenant.
- 13:00 There was him, he was Spud Tatum, he know lives down Grafton and Bob Eales, he was also a midshipmen when he came to us, in other words he was only 17. And when I was working as staff office here waiting for discharge,
- 13:30 Bob Eales was my divisional officer as a full lieutenant, but he died in the mid 70s. As a matter of fact I interviewed him when he came into hospital in Greenslopes. He had been crushed between a landing barge and the side of a ship. And he never fully recovered from it and it caught up with him later on in years. And I think
- 14:00 it would have been 77, 78 somewhere round about there that he came into Greenslopes. And he was the second one of my officers that I had seen come through there and the first one had been the commanding officer of the first beach group. And I always reckoned it was his fault that I got transferred out of the first away from my friends, well from most of my friends, because about four of them went with me to the second beach
- 14:30 group. And I got a phone call one Saturday morning when I was on duty. It was the Deputy Commissioner, Alan Grey at that time. And he says, "Oh, is that Greenslopes?" I said, "Yes. Whom am I speaking to?" "Oh," he said, "This is Alan Grey, the DC [Deputy Commissioner]." I said, "Oh yes, Alan how are you today?" Because I had been to a dinner that he had been at the previous

- 15:00 Saturday night. He said, "Who is that?" I said, "Ern Tyler." "Oh, just the man, just the man." He said, "I have a naval officer here in terrible pain. I am going to send him down to you." Well he sent him down in his own private car, well his Commonwealth car, and instead of getting an ambulance to bring the poor so and so down. When he gets here the driver gets out and opens the door and says, "Ok mate, you are here," and lets him find his own way in through the doors.
- 15:30 And I had been waiting for him because Alan said what his name was. He said, "He is an ex lieutenant commando." He said his name is Keg. I said, "Not Ronald McKeg, comes from Cairns?" "That's him, that's him." I said, "Right I will be waiting for the so and so." "Do you know him?" I said, "Yes. He was once my CO." When Ron McKeg walked in through the door, the Sister came and spoke to him and sat him down in the chair in the waiting room.
- 16:00 Took his temp and his blood pressure and she said, "You can have him now." And I said, "McKeg front and centre." And McKeg starts to get up out of the chair and I said, "For gods sake sit still. I will come out to you." And I went out and did the interview and got all his particulars. I said, "You don't remember me?" He said, "When from?" I said, "First beach group, 1944." "No."
- 16:30 He said, "Did you go to Brunei with us and Labuan?" I said, "No, you transferred me out to the second group when they formed them." "Oh well." Talking away for a while, but he just had a little problem that they fixed up in five minutes after the doctor got to him.

So you got to get square with him at the end of all of that?

- 17:00 **Ern I just wanted to go back to Morotai and talk about, how long were you there before you got word of going to Tarakan?**

Well, once again without my little notes it is a bit hard. We were there about a fortnight, then they sent the rest of them back here on leave, and they were away

- 17:30 three to four weeks I suppose, and then they came back and about another fortnight after that and then we packed because we landed on Tarakan on the 1st of May.

And did you have any sense of what to expect?

Not really only what we had seen on newsreels. As I say, mainly of the Yanks who seemed to have an

- 18:00 awful lot of casualties and then I suppose a lot of it was understandable with them. We used to hate being with them.

For that reason?

Well there was a small detachment of Yanks at Tarakan, the CBs. Now like us they were responsible for

- 18:30 guarding the beach perimeter. Particularly at night and we had a whole line of slit trenches dug all the way round. Our boys would get in the slit trench, two to a trench. And you wouldn't hear from them, you wouldn't see them all night. The Yanks would be sitting on the edge of the slit trench, puffing at cigars or cigarettes,

- 19:00 they would sometimes have radios playing, they would be calling out from one slit trench to the other. And they wondered how few throats got cut over night and that sort of thing. Because the Japs knew just where they were all the time.

So how close would you be to the Americans during that kind of detail?

Well, I always used to, always try to be on that side if the Yanks were on that side.

- 19:30 We would have maybe 60 men out in slit trenches, so there would be 30 slit trenches. If I was in No 1, 2 or 3 over there, 29 and 30 were the closest to the Yanks. Because I didn't want to be hit by default.

You had 120 in your company roughly, so what would the

- 20:00 **other 60 be doing?**

You would have your duty, people on the beach still, you would have your sentries along the beach, you would have your duty telegraphist and signalmen on standby, because they weren't all fully trained commandos. Out of 120 men there were probably 60 fully trained

- 20:30 as commandos and the rest were telegraphists, signalists, stokers who had had partial training. They could defend themselves if they had to but they didn't go through all that we did. They didn't do the unarmed combat and they didn't fire all the weapons. Whatever they were issued with that is what they had to learn how to use. Whereas we had to learn the whole range.

- 21:00 They didn't do any demolition or things like that.

Can you give us a bit of picture of the actual landing at Tarakan and I guess your role in that as a beach commando and how that worked?

Well, in Tarakan I didn't go in on the first wave, I went in on the second. That was mainly because I was

earmarked for the

- 21:30 salvage party. I was on an LST, a Yankee LST. On the way over I was acting as look out up on the bow, because even though we were not part of the crew they always found work for sailors to do on any ship they were on.
- 22:00 You just couldn't do as the soldiers did and sit down and clean your weapons. And I am acting as look out. One of my mates looking out on the other side. And a torpedo track coming straight towards us so I called the alarm, torpedo track, red so and so, I forget the angle now.
- 22:30 Anyhow I am standing there and the track is coming straight to where I am standing. God I've had it, I'm gone. Instead of which my mate on the other side called out, "It has gone past." He said, "It went straight underneath us." Because they only drill about this much (UNCLEAR). And they fired us either too soon or too deep a setting, one or the other. And it
- 23:00 just went straight under the bow and disappeared out to sea. That was my first introduction. Second one was that when I did get ashore I had an abscess tooth and my face was out here. I had a toothache while I was on Morotai but they didn't take any notice of it, but it just
- 23:30 got worse and worse and worse. And I said to the skipper what am I going to do, we haven't got any doctors or dentists or anything. He said, "Go ashore and see what you can find." So I got ashore and I went to the casualty clearing station and to the hospital that was just setting up. "No, no dentists here yet, and just rinse it out with salt water that is all you can do." And I am heading
- 24:00 back to get onto the salvage barge and a Japanese plane came over and dropped one bomb and I was the first one to receive a wound of any description. There is a little tiny scar up on my forehead, sometimes I can't even see it myself when I look in the
- 24:30 mirror. But I got hit with either a bit of stone or something like that that just clipped me on the top of the temple and disappeared and I went back to the barge with blood running down my face and that. The next morning we were sent out to recover a Catalina that had force landed.

Just before we go on how far away were

- 25:00 **you from you from the blast when the bomb hit?**

50 or 60 yards I suppose. It wasn't a very big bomb and it wasn't a very big plane. But it was just the one came over and from practically every afternoon while we were on Tarakan that plane came over 5 o'clock every evening.

And dropped one bomb?

And dropped one bomb and tootled off again. Until one day he got caught up and got shot down. Somebody

- 25:30 had decided that they had had enough of him and they were up there waiting. We went out to retrieve this Catalina and take the crew off it and we put a tow rope on it and it was about three or four mile out to sea. And in between where it had forced landed and us, was a tidal rip, a tidal race.
- 26:00 Where this tide was going through there 10, 12 knots I suppose, it was pretty, it was fast compared to the rest of the water. We took the crew off the Cat and we put one man on board and we put a towrope onto the ring bolt at the front and we started to tow it back to shore.
- 26:30 And it got caught up in the tidal race. And somehow or other the Catalina ended up in front of the barge which ran into it and sank the Catalina. Now we were the only Australian people to ever to ram and sink one of their planes.

That is quite a distinction.

And I will tell you something. I don't remember a thing about it.

- 27:00 except for that, that I have been told.

Why is that do you think?

Well about one hour after we left the shore the abscess in my jaw burst and I hadn't slept for over three days and nights and I just collapsed on my bunk in the well of the barge and didn't know another thing until about 10 hours later. We had been out there, they had sunk the Cat, they got back to shore and I still hadn't woken up.

- 27:30 **You slept through your very own plane crash.**

I can never remember, it is funny but I can't remember all of the ones who were on there, on that barge. There was Commissioner Bozen Wacka Paine he was in charge. There was George Hoffman, leading seaman from Melbourne. There was Donald

- 28:00 Lloyd Gill who used to live here at Coorparoo and there was me. But there were three more and for the

life of me I can't work out who they were and I have even asked other people who were there, they can't remember either.

There were definitely three others?

Yeah, yeah, there were six of us.

They must have been a bit quiet.

There was six of us and

28:30 Commissioner Bozen, as the salvage crew.

What other things apart from the Catalina, salvaging or rescuing?

We towed back the floating dock that got away. We patrolled up and down the riverways looking for any damaged craft. We pulled a few damaged barges off the beach and took them to the floating docks to be repaired.

29:00 Finally at Tarakan, and just packed up and went back to Morotai, when we went to Balikpapan it was much the same thing. Except that after just over a fortnight on the barge, the salvage barge, we were taken ashore and I became the ration boss. I used to go to the

29:30 army quartermasters and draw the rations for the whole camp and we had a jeep and driver and me and every time that we went there had been some Japs killed and they had been thrown into a hole at the side of the road and the road had been filled in over them, but after heavy rain which we got quite often, one arm used to come up out of the dirt and as we went

30:00 past in the jeep, the jeep driver was rather a hard case and he would stop the jeep and, "How are you today Tojo?" because it was mummified just about.

I was half expecting that you were going to say that he aimed for it.

No he used to stop and shake hands with it. And then he would report that the road had been washed away again and they would come and fill it up again.

30:30 I often wonder why they didn't take a shovel and cut it off and you know, bury it down.

Ern you mentioned before that there were a couple of casualties at Tarakan.

Yeah.

Were they fellas that you knew?

Yep, well being such a small group you knew everybody. Kev Ryan

31:00 and, oh god here I go again, they were two telegraphists, both of them. They had done their duty watch down on the radios, down on the beach and they were heading, on Tarakan there was a bit of a rise in the ground and we were camped up on top this rise. And they were heading up there to go back

31:30 to their tent and the Japanese landed a couple of mortar bombs on the pathway. Now another one who had been on duty with them, he had gone the other way. He climbed the bank, these two went up the path, the one that climbed the bank he had gone that side, they got killed and he got up the top quite safe.

32:00 And when I say they were killed at Tarakan the navy records probably show they were killed at Madang, because their records were at Madang as same as mine were, and it is a very sore spot, sore point, I'll put it.

So it is good to actually put it down here and clarify it.

I can't clarify it until the navy decides that they are going to sort things out. Now it is quite simple

32:30 I can tell them how to do it. Anyone of us could probably give them a list of the personnel in the beach group. I've got a full list, not quite full list, there is a couple of names missing off it. But they were attached to the second beach group. Now the second beach group landed on Tarakan and landed on Balikpapan. Now if the second beach group landed there all the members of the beach group there,

33:00 which meant we did. "No your records were at Madang in New Guinea."

With that mortar fire, shell fire from the Japanese was that the extent of your contact with Japanese in that area?

No, no.

So what else was going on?

We.

33:30 got shot at when we were on the barge when we were up the waterway. That is where that belt came

from.

How did you get a hold of it?

I took it off the fellow that fired at us.

Not while he was firing I hope?

No, after we fired. You are not going to get up and run or do much else when you have been

34:00 with 50 calibre bullets and you ain't got no legs connected to your body anymore.

Yeah that is a bit hard.

So that is where I got that belt.

Were there any, you showed us your knife before.

Yeah, never used it except to open a tin of jam or something like that.

34:30 We are trained in the use, and as I said, most people would take it and they would have the knuckle duster here and the blade here and they would go to stab somebody and they would stab down like that. It would probably bounce off the ribs but if you have got the blade up here and you brought it up and you come up under the ribs

35:00 and they could be sharpened very, very well. I have never sharpened that knife since I came home. I have cleaned it. But I have never sharpened it.

It is pretty sharp.

I don't think it would shave the hairs off your arms at the moment, it used to.

It would still get you in a bit of strife though. And what about, you were describing the technique across the throat as well.

35:30 Yeah.

Can you describe that one for us as well because I had it around the wrong way?

Well you have got your knife, blade up, knuckle duster here, punched with the knuckle duster and brought the blade back or you came up under the rib cage or you came in, into the kidney area from the back.

36:00 As I said, we were taught all that but we never actually managed to get hand grips.

I would like to go through the, well you mentioned very briefly or touched on, coming across the Japanese while you were on patrol on the waterways and how you came to get that

36:30 **belt, but it would be good from our point of view to I guess to hear just an almost a blow by blow account of some of those experiences just to get a sense of, if it is not too much and I completely understand?**

Well there is not too much I can tell you. He got open fire with a rifle. And just automatically got twin Brownings and went

37:00 woosh, exit.

But then you go and investigate?

Oh yeah, Old Bozen said, "We will have a look at what we have done or what we can find." And that is what we found, so I took the belt, there was nothing else that he had that was worth taking.

Do you check, were you checking the body for

37:30 **papers and that kind of stuff?**

We had a look to see what he had. I think in his pack there was a postcard of a Japanese woman and a bit of Japanese writing and I don't know who took that, somebody took that, but I was the first one to get my hand on the belt so I kept it.

You did well to hang onto it.

Well it has been, until last year it has been locked away in an old steel ammunition

38:00 box that is down under my house and it had various things in it. Originally it had that map, it had a little corduroy bag of coins, it had a couple of bundles of Japanese invasion money. It had a map of Balikpapan harbour

38:30 which was so badly watermarked, falling apart, I didn't think it was worth keeping, with a few other things I threw out, I threw that out. What else was in there, a couple of old pipes because I used to

- 39:00 smoke a pipe. When I first joined up my father gave me a pipe, and it was beautiful French briar pipe, it had a silver band around the top of the bowl, it had a silver band around the stem. And I had that pipe right through until we were coming home from Balikpapan. And because down below in the mess decks on the LSTs, coming home it was so hot,
- 39:30 we were setting up stretchers on the deck and sleeping in them and you would take your boots off and you would put a leg of the stretcher in one boot, you would drop your tobacco in one boot and your pipe and lighter in the other and through forgetting what I was doing, no matter how many times I did it I still went ahead and did it again. I put the pipe in my pocket and I would sit down and I would hear snap and I would break the stem off.
- 40:00 So I would whittle it down and refit it. And I finished up with a pipe, the bowl was about that long and the stem was about that long, so overall it was only about this big, as when it started it was about that size. Oh, it was beautiful it used to gurgle when you, you could hear it gurgling and I didn't have any pipe cleaners. And occasionally I used to poke a bit of pull
- 40:30 through material through it, but very occasionally and it got a little bit on the nose. And I woke up one morning, naturally and I am feeling for my pipe and my tobacco and I find the tobacco, I find the lighter, no pipe. And that was in 1945, October, 1945.
- 41:00 And I found out what happened to that pipe three years ago. My friend Mr Walsh who had been with the first group, he was back at Morotai when we sailed into Morotai on the way home, and we picked up some of them and filled up the vacant spaces on the LST to come home. And he and Mr Town decided that they
- 41:30 didn't like the smell of my pipe anymore so when I was asleep they got it out of the boot and threw it overboard. And I have never had a pipe as good since.

Buggers, we are going to have to.....

Tape 6

- 00:31 **Something I didn't ask you before Ern were you brought up with a particular religious faith?**
- Yes.
- What was that?**
- Church of England.
- Did that help you through hairy moments during the war?**
- I suppose you could say it did. I know that some of the others felt worse than I did. I had
- 01:00 a very good priest when I was young. I was high church incidentally.
- What is the difference, somebody told me that yesterday?**
- Well high church is very close to Roman Catholic except that your service is all English and no Latin as it was in those days, or very little Latin, I will put it that way. And the minister that
- 01:30 was at the local church, when I was old enough to walk a mile and a half to go to the church, was an ex serviceman from the First World War and I never knew until I joined the navy and I had to have references and I went to him for a reference and he signed it, the Reverend Father G L Peters,
- 02:00 DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], MM [Military Medal], MD [Mentioned in Dispatches], plus his theological letters. And I said, "Where you in the service?" And he said, "Yes, I was a an artillery Sergeant at Gallipoli and then in the trenches at France." And he must have done a good job to have a DCM an MM and a Mention in Dispatches as well. And he was running two parishes.
- 02:30 And he, well I'll tell you how good he was. My mother as I told you was an invalid, and one day he came to our house to see her.
- What was his name Ern?**
- Peters.
- What was his first name?**
- I don't know whether it was George or Graham or what, I think it was G was his initial, I think. He ended up, he officiated at my
- 03:00 sisters wedding in 19.. it would have been '44. And he came to our place, he came in, visited mother and gave her communion and said, "Is there anybody that could come and sit with you for several

hours?" And she said, "I don't know. Maybe Mrs Knight from next door might." So he said to me, "Go and see this Mrs Knight and ask her to come and see me." So

03:30 I went over, there was a vacant lot and then this house and I said, "Would you come over home the Minister is there and he wants to talk to you." So she came over and he said, "Would you be willing to stay here with Mrs Tyler for approximately four hours and get her some lunch when it is time?" "Oh yes, I would just have to go home and close my own home up first."

04:00 "And you would be back before the kids came home from school?" "Yes." And he said to me, "Go and get dressed." I said, "What for?" He said, "Go and get dressed, we are going to the pictures." And he took me to the St James Theatre in Albert Street and saw 'The Great Dictator', him and another Priest and me.

What a great story.

He had a little Austin 7 car, which

04:30 is only two seats in the front and the dickie seat in the back, and he lifted the back up and there was a seat in there and you sat in there.

That is a great story.

But that is the type of thing that he would do.

Now we haven't talked about Balikpapan, can we talk a little bit about that?

Yes, if you want to.

How did you know that you would be going there?

When they told us. How else would you expect.

05:00 **What I meant was, sorry I should have clarified, were you aware of any kind of conflict there?**

Well, we knew that the Japs held Borneo and that the first beach group plus 9th Division troops had landed in Labuan and Brunei and they more or less cleared the Japs out of that area but they were still around the rest of Borneo.

05:30 We didn't know that we would be going anywhere, as a matter of fact there was talk that we would be going further down and landing on some of the say, Sumatra, somewhere like that or going back to Singapore. The first group was supposed to go to Singapore but when the war finished they cancelled that out. And

06:00 the next thing we know we are busy getting everything cleaned up and re stocked and making sure all your weapons were cleaned and everything else and the skipper said on parade one morning, "Nobody is to leave the camp area. We are embarking this afternoon, and we are going that a way." He didn't say where he just pointed west.

06:30 He said, "We are going that a way." And somebody said, "We have been that a way." And he said, "Yes but you went that away. This time we are going that a way." So once again we didn't know whether we were going down to the other major islands or not and it wasn't until we actually got to Balikpapan that we were told where we were.

Was there a feeling of fear amongst the men?

No, we had been through one little lot that

07:00 hadn't been too bad. And we had to go through this one, it was just another landing. If somebody got a sight of you and shot you it was just bad luck.

Can I ask you at that particular time when you went to Balikpapan were you aware of your brother having been taken as a POW?

Yeah, I had been told about that before I was allowed to go into the navy.

Yes I know but was he still there,

07:30 **he was there the whole time?**

We didn't know anything, any different that he was taken prisoner in Singapore and was a POW and that was all we knew. But he was taken and he was wounded in hospital when the Japs took Singapore, the walking wounded and the staff were marched out. The unconscious were left there and he was one of them.

08:00 Then there was a full 24 hours before anyone came back to the hospital and they moved them out and took them to Changi jail. And he recovered, he was sent up to work on the railroad. He was bashed a couple of times and then he was sent to Japan himself and was in the coalmines and then in the shipyards. And he said, "If

08:30 the war had gone on much longer the Japanese shipping would have suffered many a loss through slow leakage. We did not punch the river chain properly."

I wonder what happened to those ships?

I don't know. They probably sank in the harbour.

So you were back before him then?

No, he came home, I think it was three weeks before I did and he had been

09:00 taken from Japan to Manila and they were fed up a bit in Manila and then they were brought back to Australia. And he had been home several weeks before I got home and the first thing he said to me was, "What the hell happened to your hair?"

What did you say to him?

And I said something I shouldn't have said and my sister called out, "That is enough of that language."

09:30 **So when you arrived at Balikpapan sorry what was your first operation there?**

I was back in salvage barge. Once again going for daylight cruises up and down the waterways. I came across what looked like a beautiful ship, three or four thousand ton.

10:00 Up one of the little rivers that led into the bay and we just pulled up at the rope ladder hanging over the side and were just going to put our foot on the rope ladder and a rifle came over the edge and a voice said, "Get off our ship." The army had already captured it. We would have been looking at some nice prize money.

Whose ship was it?

It was a Japanese ship but the

10:30 army had got there before us and they had taken charge of the ship.

Do you remember the name of it?

No. No I don't think we even saw the stern where the name was but there we were thinking, you know, this would be worth money, because the navy gets prize money of any captured vessels. But when they came to distribute prize money after the war,

11:00 we didn't get any, because we weren't general service navy.

You are dammed if you do and you are dammed if you don't.

Yeah.

Were you, when you were trained were you actually taught about mines?

Only that they were there, they were dangerous, but if you could get a hit on one of the horns you would probably explode it and

11:30 get rid of it. But we were more on underwater obstacles, which were in a lot of cases mined. Not with the regular big sea mines but with smaller explosive packages that were contact fuses and so forth. If a barge bumped up against it, it would go bang and blow the barge up.

Did you see any mines?

12:00 Not really. Didn't see a lot really.

Well tell us about Balikpapan; what was a day in the life of, you said the cruises up and down patrolling?

Looking for damaged craft that we could haul out and capture and anything like that. That was the only thing that we found that was worthwhile other than some of our own that were pulled off the beaches and taken for repair.

12:30 And there were a few landing barges, a couple of them had picked up lengths of rope or steel wire around their propellers and they couldn't be moved, they could be driven until it was cut away. We did it in the salvage barge one day, we picked up a rope around the screws and we had to skinny dip over the side

13:00 with our clasp knives, cutting the rope trying to get the prop so that it could turn again.

Can you just explain screws?

Propellers are screws, that is in that contact. We are not in America thank god, but these propellers on the landing barge are about so big, the shaft about so big, and if you wrap rope

- 13:30 around them eventually it will all jam up and then if you don't cut your engine out quickly you will damage the engine. And we picked up a floating, just below the surface, grass rope and it was about an inch, an inch and a half in diameter I suppose. And it just wrapped round and around and around and eventually everything stopped. So we are going over the
- 14:00 side hacking away under the water with a knife and of course I had to take my turn and I went down the first time and came up, went down the second time and somebody said, "He is down a long time." Next minute they heard me, "Hey," and then I am floating away and all I could do is, I had my arm sticking up a bit and

14:30 waving to them. I couldn't swim, I couldn't do anything I was just cramped.

How did you get the cramps?

Always have done.

From swimming or cold water?

Cold, cold water but then practically any water in the finish.

Isn't that ironic?

I nearly went over the Barron Falls when I was swimming at Kuranda.

I actually had that written down to ask you, can you tell us about that incident?

Well we went to

- 15:00 into Kuranda for some reason, I can't remember what it was now, it might have been to go to the railway station to pick something up. And there were three or four of us and we decided that we would have a swim in the river, never thinking about the falls being only so many yards, 100 yards down stream. And I got a cramp. And I am yelling out to my friends who managed to get me out and another 10, 20 yards and I would have gone over the

15:30 edge of the Barron Falls.

How long is the drop?

A considerable drop, yes. Well they ran hydroelectric skiing from it. Then later on we were camped at Redlynch, that is right, I forgot that, we went from Trinity Beach to Redlynch army camp, staging camp

- 16:00 and that is where we were when we left there to go onto the sea barge. And I am swimming in the Barron river again, but this time it is below the falls and there had been heavy rain and the river is in flood and I got cramps again. And I was down stream but one of the bridges over the river was very low and there was hardly any bank to the river and the water was only about that far

- 16:30 below the bridge. And I managed to hook onto the bridge with my elbows. My body is hanging underneath and an army truck came across the bridge and I yelled and they stopped and hauled me out. Well then after the episode of getting cramp and getting swept away from the barge the skipper gave me the choice, I could either be transferred back to

- 17:00 Australia to go into a depot somewhere and never ever be in a position to get into the water or I could stay with them but be taken off the salvage barge so that I had no chance of getting into the water again, and that is when I was made the ration boss.

What did the ration boss do?

He got

- 17:30 this list of personnel, numbers of officers, petty officers and other ranks and the cook would indent for such supplies that they wanted for each lot. I would be given the list. I would go off to the army quartermaster's camp and I would draw rations for X number of men, X number of

- 18:00 petty officers, X number of officers. And quite often I thought I would love to put the officers food for the men but there wouldn't be enough and give them some of our food, because they didn't eat bully beef and biscuits and they didn't very often have to eat M&V. They got salmon when we got goldfish,

- 18:30 as they called the herrings in tomato sauce. They were goldfish, baked beans were yippee beans. And as I said, I hadn't eaten baked beans until last year when I had one of my grandsons here and my daughter brought over some tins of baked beans for them to have for their lunch and one of them didn't clean his up, and I had a couple of spoonfuls and

- 19:00 I thought they are not that bad after all. So I started occasionally having a tin of baked beans, particularly if I just didn't want that much for lunch I would just go and get a tin of baked beans and have it.

Where would you live as the rations officer, where would you live as the rations man, did you still?

I was still in the same camp as the rest of the men, which was up on the hill overlooking the harbour at Balikpapan.

- 19:30 You stood on top of the hill and you looked out over the bay. If you looked over to the left you could look down onto the beaches, if you looked down to the right you could look at the bombed out oil refinery where we salvaged parts and pieces of bicycles and built up about half a dozen bikes and we found a roll of solid tyres and some wire and we cut the tyres to fit
- 20:00 the wheels, wired the two ends together and you never went out without a pair of pliers and a length of wire, because the tyre would wear through and your tyre would fall off. And you would be down to the bare rims. The Netherlands Indies civil administration, who I hated worse than I hated the Yank, they came up to our camp and they said, "Where did you get those
- 20:30 bicycles?" "We found the bits and pieces down in the oil refinery down there and we built them." "They are Dutch property you will hand them back." And we said, "Go and get lost." Our skipper came along and said, "What is going on?" We said, "These people want our bicycles." He said, "You got them from down in the oil
- 21:00 refinery?" "Yes." "Well that is Dutch property. I suppose you are going to have to give them back, but give them back in the condition in which you found them." So the handlebars went that way, a wheel went that way, a handful of ball bearings went that way and we eventually got rid of all the bicycles.

What a shame though.

Yeah, it stopped our off duty pleasure rides along the coast

- 21:30 road up to the pineapple plantation where we were getting pineapples from and things like that. But we had a man, he was a half Chinese and he had been a school teacher before the war, and we asked for help for someone to come and work in our galley. So that our men didn't have to clean the pots and pans and things, and they sent this fellow
- 22:00 to us. He was a very well educated man and we used to give him money. But they had them living in a compound and when they went through the gate at night they searched them and they took everything off them, so if we gave him money, the Dutch people would take it away from him when he went into the
- 22:30 camp at night. So we got over it by saying, "Well are you married?" "Yes." "Your wife in the camp?" "Yes." "You tell her to be on the far side behind that hut when we come back at night." And we would take him back at about 6.30 every evening and we would drop him off at the gate and we would drive around the back of the camp and we would stop the jeep and we would throw
- 23:00 a couple of tins of bully beef or biscuits or tins of jam, or tins of fruit, whatever we had over the fence to his wife and they got the benefit of that, whereas they didn't get any of the money we had given them. And they even invited me, after they let them out of the compound, invited me to his house for tea. And their idea of tea was not a meal it was just to drink tea.
- 23:30 And he said, "Go to the cupboard," he said, "look." I thought the Japs might have taken everything but they hadn't. And he said, and I took out a bottle and looked at it, "No, put that one back." And he said, I took out another and looked at it, "This will be a good one." And I said, "How did you know?" He said, "Because of
- 24:00 the date." He said, "We make the tea, we strain it and we put it in the bottle and we cork it and the longer you keep it, the better it tastes."

Is that right, did you taste it?

They drank it cold.

Was it good?

Oh some of it. Some of it I didn't really like.

Is this Chinese tea?

Yeah.

That is interesting I haven't heard of

- 24:30 **cold tea, I mean I have heard of iced tea but I didn't know about bottling it.**

Some of the bottles he had in his cupboard must have been five years old.

Did you have any run ins with the military police at all?

Only one, a couple, a couple. They couldn't seem to understand who these people wearing jungle green uniforms

- 25:00 and slouch hats, army boots and gaiters were. Who didn't have leave passes, didn't have leave books

and all they had for identification was a little navy blue semi circle sort of thing with RAN on it, in white. And that was our only identification. We would get picked up, "Soldier

25:30 why aren't you shaven?" "I am not a soldier, I am a sailor." "Well sailor what are you doing in army uniform?" And several times we were stopped. Once I was frog marched up Queen Street by two MPs, they were going to march me like that all the way down to the depot at Alice Street until they ran into somebody that knew who we were

26:00 and stopped them. They arrested one of the boys over in Perth and threw him in the cells because he couldn't prove who he was.

Isn't that a case of the right hand not telling the left hand?

Yeah, that is what I told you about my mate in the services club that day and the people saying that we never existed, there were never such people

26:30 and what he told them. It is amazing the number of people in the navy never knew that we existed, never knew anything about us. When I went to work at Greenslopes there is an ex navy, and two ex, two ex navy and two ex army officers, ex army people working in the same area and one of them

27:00 looked at me and he said, "I have seen you before." And I looked at him and said, "I don't know, I can't remember you." And he said, "Where were you during the war." I said, "Here there and everywhere." He said, "Were you ever up north?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Whereabouts?" I said, "We camped on Trinity Beach." "I knew it I knew it," he said, "beach group." I said, "Yes." He said, "What service?" I said, "Navy."

27:30 "Wow." And he turned round to the other fellow there and he said, "Careful of this fella they were a bad bloody mob they were."

Was it strange working at Greenslopes and having your old COs come in and people you knew?

No really. The one thing that embarrassed me very badly there was having a fellow I had grown up with come in and cry on my shoulder.

28:00 He had always been a happy go lucky sort of a fella but he was one can short of a carton and he was a psychiatric patient there. And he came in one day and the first time he knew that I was there and he saw me and he broke down and he came and put his arms around me and cried on my shoulder.

What could you do?

28:30 Nothing, pat him on the back and say, "Alright Happy, that is enough, that is enough." Because that was his nickname, Happy.

But he wasn't?

He always was as a youngster but he had a few bad experiences when he was in the army and his happy nature disappeared a lot.

When your dad was at the Eca showground, was he at the Eca?

Yeah.

29:00 **Did you write to each other during the war?**

Yeah, not as often as we should have done I suppose. As I said, I was a horrible writer. I used to write an essay at school and the teacher used to say rewrite it, I can't read it. And I would redo it and he would say it is not much better but I can manage to decipher it. But if I wrote something now I could write it in long hand and tomorrow I would try to read it and I wouldn't know what I had written.

29:30 **You should have been a doctor.**

Yeah, some of them were a bit like that. One I used to have was. He was down at Yeronga and his room was up above and the chemist was down below. And I went to see Doc and he gave me a script and I took it down to the chemist, and the chemist said, "Oh my god, not Burnie again." And I said, "Yes." "Oh hold on a minute." And he picked up the phone and he rang him up and he said, "What on earth was

30:00 this script for?"

How long were you there in Balikpapan Ernie?

Not terribly long. We went in on the 1st of July and left, it was July, August, September, because I had my 21st birthday there and we left in October to come home, and got home in November.

30:30 **Where do you think when you look back on it now, was the I don't know, the scariest or most hairiest moments that you encountered?**

The first night I was ever put on guard duty over 20 odd landing barges tied up at a jetty at Tarakan. And I was doing the midnight until 4 o'clock in the morning and every

- 31:00 little noise. You know, the sound of the water up against the barges, lapping up against the pilings and the pier and so forth. And we had been warned that the Japs had been making a habit of sneaking out and swimming along and landing on the beach a bit further up from where we were and they had found a few people with throats cut. So be on the
- 31:30 alert. But you were on your own. There was nobody else within a 100 yards you know.
- Well why did they do that, why didn't they give you another bloke, I mean have the two of you on?**
- I don't know, a shortage of men I suppose.
- Well you obviously lived.**
- Yeah, just a minute, yeah I am still alive, that is how I tell, I pinch myself. I get bruises occasionally that is to see if I am still
- 32:00 alive when I wake up in the morning. Because I can't do what my sister does, she gets the Courier Mail delivered every morning and she looks up the hatched, matched and dispatched. And if she can't find her name she knows she is still alive.
- So where were you when the war was declared over?**
- In Balikpapan.
- Was there a big celebration?**
- Yes, we made rockets and fired them out over the bay. And
- 32:30 that was were I had another encounter with the MPs. Because we landed some of the rockets on the ships in the harbour, particularly a hospital ship. And they sent the MPs up to tell us to stop and desist and cease or else we would be in trouble.
- Had you had a few rums?**
- I never saw any rum while I was up there.
- Beer?**
- Jungle juice yeah.
- What is jungle juice?**
- 33:00 Well the RAP [Regimental Aid Post] corporal made it. He had a drum, a metal drum into which he tipped some ether and some methylated spirits and some dried fruit, and some fresh pineapples, and fresh paw paws, and fresh bananas and he stirred it all up and let it settle and ferment and it was bubbling away
- 33:30 and he pushed the fruit away that was floating on the service and scooped a bit up and, "Yes it's getting there." And after a couple of weeks it was. He gave me some and I dribbled and I burnt the skin off my lip, the corner of my lip. I don't know why it didn't burn inside but it burnt the lip in the corner there.
- You could always start a fire with it I suppose afterwards.**
- Oh yeah, it was highly
- 34:00 inflammable.
- So were people drinking the jungle juice the day that the war was declared over?**
- We were drinking whatever we could get our hands on. If anybody still had any beer left over from their beer issue which was very seldom that there was any left over because if you got a good brand you drank it. If you got one you didn't like you traded it and you traded it to the Yanks. They would come onshore from their ships because their ships are
- 34:30 dry and they would wander through all the camps trying to get beer and they would give a carton of cigarettes for a bottle of beer, which wasn't a bad effort and we quite often used to get Richmond Tiger. It was vile.
- What is it?**
- A beer came from Melbourne. And it was like soapy water.
- 35:00 And we hated it, we couldn't drink it, so when the Yanks came round the first time, "Oh yes mate, how many bottles would you like? How many cartons of cigarettes have you got?" And we swapped, everybody swapped their Richmond Tiger beer for a carton of cigarettes. The next time they came round and somebody offered them Richmond Tiger, "One packet of cigarettes for that mate, not worth anymore." But we would get all sorts of

35:30 beer. You would get Coopers Ale from South Australia, you would get Swan Lager from Western Australia, you would get XXXX from Brisbane, you would get Reschs from Sydney, I think that is.

Were the beer company sponsoring the war I mean did they give it to people for free?

I doubt it. I very much doubt if they gave anything away for

36:00 nothing. They were like any other manufacturer they were in to make money. But we used to get a ration of two bottles of beer a week. When available. And we only got that when we were up in the islands, we didn't get it here. And we got a beer night in Cairns outside Cairns up on the Tablelands but after the first episode with

36:30 that I didn't want anymore because it was can beer and it was a good beer to drink in cans, but if you put it on the back of a truck and carted it a few miles away by the time you took it off at the other end it was off it was vile. And you didn't have any glasses, you drank out of mess tins or if you would be lucky to get hold of a bottle of beer somewhere and cut the top of it and put a handle on it

37:00 you had a Lady Blamey. I believe she was built a bit like that, straight up and down and rather round.

You mentioned before something about not having a respect for the Americans, did you make any friends or get to know any of them in your travels?

Not really, we didn't come into contact with them

37:30 except as crew on ships; very little contact with their soldiers and marines, we got into a few little fights here and there. Like you come home on leave and you couldn't get into your favourite pub because it was full of Yanks, so you would gang up together and there would be half a dozen of you. And we had one big fellow and his nickname was

38:00 Dumbo and his little mate who was shorter than me would say, "Go on Dumbo, get into the bar." And Dumbo would get into the bar with his elbows going, knocking Yanks out of the way, left, right and centre. And they would see little Snowy and they would pick on him and Dumbo would pick them up by the scruff of the neck, "Anybody else?" Some of their sailors

38:30 were quite alright, as I say, we only come into touch with them when we were on one of their ships.

I had spoken to another ex navy fellow a few weeks ago and he said something about the American ships always going to reef. Always having to be rescued from the reef, did you know about that, was that happening when you were there?

39:00 That was mainly the merchant ships I think. There was quite a number of incidences I think of them having to be pulled off the reefs because they didn't take any notice of the charts. Oh, there is clear water ahead, crash. But if they were any, if the skipper of that Yankee ship that went up to Morotai was any

39:30 indication he was gutless. No other captain I ever come across would anchor a ship because he was running into the tail end of a cyclone. They would either have steamed into it or away from it, one or the other, but they wouldn't have anchored and be caught up in the fringes of it for days.

Were you aware of the Americans as sailors what were their

40:00 **reputation?**

Well, I knew the reputation of the Royal Navy. Now if the Royal Navy was bombarding, every gun that was to fire would fire at the same instant. The Yankees, they might get off one shot altogether,

40:30 but from thereon each gun was loaded so it was fired. It didn't matter if he was five seconds or ten seconds behind somebody else or ahead of them, just the principal of, "Oh well doesn't matter, they are all going to end up in the same place," you know.

So blasting them.

Yeah, see if you get say, 9 sixteen inch guns firing at one

41:00 time, those 9 shells when they land, almost in the same spot, they might be set to cover 100 yards or something like that or 200 yards. They are going to do more damage than 9 sixteen inch guns firing one after the other. It is not concentrated fire.

That makes sense.

Yeah,

41:30 and the British Navy always had a reputation, is the word I am looking for, of firing broadsides and every gun firing at the same time and being so good, that the Warspite which was a British battle ship, her gunnery

42:00 was so good that they could pick off individual Germans.

Tape 7

- 00:31 When we first went into the beach group camp at Trinity Beach, the MPs attached to the beach group headquarters were more or less traffic cops, that was their job to control the vehicles leaving the beach area. And being navy and not having
- 01:00 anybody any great seniority in charge, lieutenant commander was our commanding officer and he was an easy going sort of a fellow, and we used to play cards for money in the mess deck, after the working day was over. And the army colonel in charge of the beach group found out about this and decided he was going to send
- 01:30 the MPs down to stop this gambling on army property. And when he came down the skipper happened to be sitting at the table playing pontoon with several of my friends and myself, and this MP sergeant comes busting through the door. And somebody said, "What the hell do you think you are doing mate? Get out of here." And he said,
- 02:00 "I have got orders from colonel, so I am to stop gambling, this is army property." And our skipper got up and he said, "Do you mind if I put on my gear." And he put his epaulette back on and he said, "Excuse me gentlemen. I know this is wrong but I am going to do it." And he put his cap on his head because it is a sin to walk into a navy mess deck with your cap on.
- 02:30 You're walking into somebody's home with your hat on your head, you don't do it. And he said, "Now Sergeant what is the idea of this?" "Oh sorry sir but colonel so and so said we had to come down and stop all men gambling." And he said, "You go back and tell colonel so and so I am in here. I am gambling and this is not army property, this is a naval establishment and he has no authority."
- 03:00 So that is what happened and we never got raided again. And I don't know why this colonel picked on us because you only had to walk 100 yards up the road and I think it was the 2/2 Pioneers I think it was, had the biggest two-up game in there, was up there.

Crazy.

As a matter of fact I ran into the fellow that used to be one of the workers on the two-up game with that crowd.

- 03:30 My wife, before we got married took me visiting a friend one night and she had two brothers who had both been in the same unit and they both worked on this two-up game. They were excused practically any other duties and they made a fortune. They bought the house that they were living in and they had enough money in the bank that they both didn't get a job for nearly 12 months after they got out of the army. They didn't even
- 04:00 try to get a job.

A lucrative gambling.

Oh hell yeah. The only thing that we weren't allowed, two things we weren't allowed was to play two-up in our mess deck or to play crown and anchor.

Why was that?

Crown and anchor is very much frowned upon in the navy.

Why?

I couldn't see any reason for it

- 04:30 but they didn't believe in it. But I used to love pontoon and poker and I played pontoon one day until 4 o'clock in the afternoon until 7.30 the following morning. And when I got up from the table I said to one fellow, "Here is 100," and another one, "Here is 100." They had been with me all night,
- 05:00 one was collecting money, the other one was paying it out and all I was doing was dealing cards and I had practically, that was in the group. We had been paid and we were paid in Dutch guilders, this was at Balikpapan. And I had over 3000 Dutch guilders and they were worth
- 05:30 I am not quite sure now what they were worth. I know a Yankee dollar was only worth the equivalent of six and sixpence, it was three dollars to the pound. It is a bit the other way now isn't it. The six and sixpence Australian is about what a Yankee dollar is worth. I was told that I could not
- 06:00 send this money home so I wasted it. I never even thought about putting it in my kit and bringing it home when I came home because I wasn't sure I was going to come home was I.

Very true.

We were still on line at that time to go to Japan. I lent money and I never bothered about getting it back. I had to lend money because nobody could buy anything at the canteen, they didn't have any money left.

06:30 And even the officers, most of them had gone broke. They didn't come down and play themselves but they got somebody else to play on their behalf and just bank rolled them. And when I turned up on parade at 7.30 in the morning and somebody went and said something to the skipper and he came down the line and he looked at me and he looked at the other two, "Oh what a

07:00 horrible looking trio. Go and get your bloody heads down, I don't want to see you today".

That was kind of him.

As I said, before I had my 21st birthday in Balikpapan and I said to the bosun, the bosun store is one of the buildings we had taken over, I said, "It has got a fairly vacant space there, can I have a birthday party in there?" he said, "What have you got for a birthday party?" I said, "Well we have got

07:30 about half a dozen bottles of beer. I have got a cake sent to me last Christmas, it has only just arrived a week ago and everybody told me to throw it away because it stunk to high heaven." It was sealed in a tin with the calico covering on the outside and it was rotten and they said, "Oh if the outside smells like that the inside is not going to be any good but I cut the calico off and threw it away, opened the tin up and the cake was beautiful, big boiled fruit cake. And

08:00 a couple of little packets of other things. I said this was posted and my sister wrote and said she had posted it to me last October. I said here it is September and I only got it a week or so ago. So I said, "I have got a cake, half a dozen bottles of beer." "Oh well, what is the cake like?" I said, "I haven't cut it yet." He said, "When you cut it I want a piece."

08:30 I said, "Ok." So I cut about a third of the cake out and cut it up into small slices and that was, we started to eat the cake. He had a piece, he went away, came back, a bottle of gin. "Another piece of cake." So he put in the bottle of gin in for the drinks. And

09:00 then so some of the other officers came, and the skipper came down, and each one that came down brought a bottle of something and had a piece of cake. And at the finish they were getting a piece of cake not bigger than the top of a thumb, because that was all that was left. And once again the next morning he took one look at us and he said, "You are excused duties today."

And this morning we talked, touched briefly on

09:30 **a few sea songs that you learnt on the way up, now I have heard quite a few songs from Alexandrian brothels and peoples time in Syria and the like but not many navy's.**

Well no.

How did they go? Would you like me to leave?

Oh dear what a... I am not going to sing because I can't sing

10:00 these days. "Oh dear what a calamity, three old maids got locked in the lavatory, they were there from Monday to Saturday, nobody knew they were there. Now one old maid she left a trail of white paper hoping that someone might follow and rape her, she was there from Monday to Saturday, nobody knew she was there." Now I can't remember much more of that but there were quite a few verses that covered all three of the old maids. I think that one did something

10:30 anyhow. And nobody followed her but she found some implement.

You would have had to get out.

There was another one, once again only a verse or so if it is still in my memory it was, "Side, side, tiddly ship side, the captain looked on her with pride, but he'd have a blue fit if he saw all the shit on the side of the tiddly ship side." And if you know what tiddly means.....

11:00 **Drunk?**

No, when you got dressed up to go on leave and you put on your tiddly suit, your best, usually tailor made clothes. I had a tailor made uniform, that was the one that had the very wide leg on the trousers about this wide and that was your tiddly gear.

11:30 "You can speak of the Rodney Repulse and Renown. You can't say the Hood because that bastard went down..." There was something else, "but then these funnel so and sos are getting me down." Now that is an English Royal Navy song. I can't even think who taught me that one. It might have been one of the sailors on the LST coming home because

12:00 we had a party when we got into Australian waters. I had been bottling rum every day, issue, rum issue would (UNLCEAR) and I would go up on deck with a jug. And somehow or another I drew rum for 26 men and it was put in this jug neat. Whereas the sailors, the English sailors and others from the other messes that were drawing

12:30 rum that were having the rum issued were getting their's and had to drink it on the spot. They would get a glass of rum and a little glass of water and they would, and that was their grog issue. And I still can never remember how it was that I could draw it straight without everybody going up on deck. Well

of the 26 there were maybe seven or eight

13:00 that would have a drink of rum. The rest wouldn't touch rum. And we would all have a drink, sometimes two and we would have some beer bottles and we would fill the beer bottles up and our own water bottles from our gear until we had quite a few bottles full of rum. And when we got back coming down the passage outside Cape York there,

13:30 we decided we would have a party to celebrate returning to Australian waters. And who could we get for someone to supply us with something to eat. So we picked on the officers cook and the officers steward. All the rum you can drink if you bring down something to eat. So they made sandwiches and they must have got onto one of the cooks because he made some little pies and we had

14:00 plenty of little things to eat. In navy terms, tiddy hoggies, and they had plenty of rum to drink, but unfortunately it came time for them to go on duty the next morning and they were incapable. So smarty here who was an acting, temporary, on probation, unpaid, leading seaman at the time, in charge of this mess,

14:30 decided that we would go up and take charge of the officers breakfast. And we served them burnt toast, burnt bacon, burnt tomatoes, burnt sausages and the captain of the LST looked at my skipper and my skipper looked at him and he said, "To each his own. You take care of your men. I'll take care of mine." I don't know what happened to the cook and the steward but I was given seven days stoppage of leave

15:00 and lost my acting rating. I became a naval seaman again. And after he sentenced me I am out on deck and he came along and as he went past he said, "We get to Brisbane in seven days." So I didn't lose any leave time at all. Seven days stoppage is only counted while I am still on board the LST.

Were there much, because you were in such a unique

15:30 **position of being kind of navy, army in a sense, did you see much strife between the AIF and navy at all?**

Nope.

They got on?

I believe that over in the Middle East there was a little bit of strife occasionally. Mainly who had the rights to get into Sister Street first, and things like that. Or down the Gut at, where was that, Malta I think, they used to say they went down the Gut,

16:00 the same type of fare. But that would be the only reason. Navy, navy used to say we take you everywhere you go and the army would say, and yes you leave us bloody there.

Can't live with them, can't live without them.

No. As I said earlier, the navy had a name for never leaving their men behind.

16:30 And it came out once as never leave your mates behind. And somebody said, "Well that is the navy all over isn't it. They are a bunch of poofters anyhow."

Speaking of, was there any homosexuality in the navy that you came across, I mean we have heard tales?

The only one that I ever heard about, I heard about the ones on board the Australia. I don't know whether you have heard about them.

17:00 Well I heard about them and I knew somebody who knew an old chief stoker who was retired and had a garage in Sydney and the sign outside his garage says, 'Back in and get filled up.' But I was told that he had been quite

17:30 busy showing young stokers where the golden river was on board the ship, when he was in the navy. But we had no problems like that.

Very apt sign as a garage sign....

The only one that ever got close to qualifying, he I suppose I could say, he captured or rescued a Japanese pack horse,

18:00 and it happened to be a mare and he used to go and feed it every night after dark and he would carry a case with whatever he was going to feed it on down to where he had it tethered, and he fed it from both ends.

Whereabouts was that?

Where, that was in Balikpapan.

18:30 **As I said, sounds as though he is very broadminded.**

Yeah, well that wasn't, that was the first time I heard about that. But this chap I worked for down here

in Keats Street, first one Ozzie Castle. He was coming into work one day and he sees a fellow in a paddock and open paddock and he is right up against his horse. And Ozzie said, "Hey what do you think you are doing there?" And "Ssshhh quiet," he says,

19:00 "It is people like you that get a man into trouble."

So what about I guess, some of the more raunchier sea songs, do you have any of those that you can recall?

Well which ones have you heard?

Well not many navy that is why I ask. I have only heard the ones by the army guys on land.

19:30 **But I thought the navy would have had quite a few with all that time spent at sea without any women.**

The first on deck, but I can't sing that.

Heather [interviewer] can leave if you, if that will make it easier.

20:00 "The first on deck was the captain's wife."

Sorry.

"The first on deck was the captain's wife and she was dressed in pink sir, and in one corner of her cunt she stowed the galley sink sir. She stowed the galley sink well there, and she stowed it there with ease, and in the other corner was the stokers formed in threes. She had dark and dreary eyes, she sang a song, a love song, she was one of those black eyed blondes,

20:30 she was one of the old brigade. And the next on deck was the jimmy's wife and she was dressed in blue sir and in one corner of her cunt she stowed the ships boat crew sir, she stowed the ships boat crew my lad, she stowed it there with ease and in the other corner was six months supply of cheese." And then again the chorus and it goes right through, captain, jimmy, navigating officer, down to sub lieutenants and the

21:00 master at arms and the chief petty officer and all of them.

Quite a long song.

Well it would be yeah. But I can't remember too many of them.

That is incredible.

One in pink and there was one dressed in black but don't ask me what she stowed. But the funny thing was they only had the one storage area. And then ring dang doo. I

21:30 can't remember the beginning of it but anyhow this girls father caught her with a boy and he kicked her out of the house, "So she came to town to become a whore with a midnight sign out above her door, and all night long there was a queue, awaiting their turn at the ring dang doo. Now the ring dang doo was nice and fat got hair all round like a pussy cat, got a split in the middle and a hole

22:00 right through that is what they call the ring dang doo." And then I miss a bit, "And they came to town the son of a bitch, he had the pokes and the seven year itch, he had gonorrhoea and syphilis too and gave it all to the ring dang doo. Now the ring dang doo is a thing of the past, and all the people..." and all the...shove it up her arse, anyhow.

22:30 It come to the last verse and, "All young girls I am warning you never make your living with the ring a dang doo." "Tiddley winks old man have you ever seen a queen, everyone has seen a sailor up an idle marine". You

23:00 sing that one to the Royal Marines and run like hell. Other than that I can't think of any.

Sorry I will wait until Heather comes. Were there any times were that song would get sung to the Royal Marines?

23:30 I don't think so, not with anybody with any sense. Because they were a tough bunch and as one fellow described us as a tough bunch I think they were worse. And his reason for saying we were a tough bunch was that he was on the platform at Townsville railway station and when the troop train stopped and they had a couple of hours to

24:00 wait before they could carry on, and there were a party of our group on board the train going back from leave, and they went down town and got some grog, and they came back and there was a petty officer and a lieutenant in charge of them and they had been drinking of course and the lieutenant said, "I hope you haven't got

24:30 any bottles." And somebody said, "But we have." And he said to the petty officer, "Confiscate them and break them on the edge of the platform and drop the broken glass down on the line." And one sailor

objected and the petty officer walked up to him and swung a hay maker and hit him under the chin and knocked him cold. "Anybody else got any objections?"

25:00 Well you are not supposed to do that, you are not supposed to hit anybody.

And what were the Royal Marines I mean known for as being a tough crowd then?

Because the Royal Marine commandos, they were the ones that went into Dieppe and places like that. And they were pretty well known as being rough and tough. Even today,

25:30 what is his name, Prince Edward, wasn't it, he joined the Royal Marines and couldn't hack it and had to get out. I don't think Charlie would have hacked it either. It would have been too much for him.

How about, once the war was over and you were back in Australia and discharged,

26:00 **how was it I guess sort of settling back into civic street?**

Civic street you have got no clothes, you are wearing parts of your uniform, you were allowed to wear parts, you could wear a shirt without the trousers, oh you had to have trousers on. But you couldn't wear a green shirt and green trousers, green shirt, khaki trousers, green shirt, white canvas trousers yes, or blue trousers. A navy boy didn't want to

26:30 wear his top of his navy uniform but he would wear his trousers. So I used to wear blue trousers green shirt or blue trousers and white t-shirt. You couldn't wear your white navy shirts with the square neck and the blue band around, which I found a couple the other day actually and I put one through the wash, it came up reasonably except for the paint I had splattered over it.

27:00 Clothing coupons to get clothing but then again it was still in short supply. And I think I got conned into buying a sports jacket that was more suitable for wear over in the northern hemisphere. It was tweed and it was a hairy tweed and it even had like the little burs stuck in the wool

27:30 and it was rough. I only wore it a couple of times, and I gave it to my sister and she said, "I can't do anything with that." And I said, "You couldn't even make a skirt?" "No way am I going to make a skirt out of that, my legs would be rubbed raw." Tobacco was rationed. Some food was still in the rationing, things like tea and butter

28:00 but you managed. And when I went to work at Greenslopes, there was no rationing there and sometimes there would be a bit of stuff left over, that was when I was working as an orderly. There would be a bit left over you might get a quarter of a pound of tea and you would take it home and the senior orderly would say, "My turn

28:30 next week." And you would have to give him what you saved the following week. That was about the only two things you managed to get a little bit of, and a little bit of butter and a little bit of tea. Most other things were still rationed and it took a while before that stopped. I left Greenslopes

29:00 Hospital at the beginning of '47 and went to the rehabilitation school, just down the road here in Hamilton Road and trained as a wood machinist. And I worked as a wood machinist until 1974. I was married in 1951, had two children, one born in '55 my son, and one born in '58, my daughter.

29:30 We got this home, which is a war service home in 1969 and previous to that we lived in my wife's old family home at Yeronga and had her mother living with us. Who was old and partially blind and needed a bit of help. I would have had a war service home a lot earlier if I hadn't been down there because it cost me thousands

30:00 in that old house. I had to replace the floors because they were eaten out with borers. Which we didn't find out until one day we went to shift the piano and it fell through the floor, one end of it. I had to replace stumps under the house, I had to replace roofing iron, I had to replace guttering, I had to paint it and, as I said, it

30:30 cost me a lot of money, a lot more as it cost me a deposit on this house. This was \$2,500 deposit.

What year was that?

1969, total cost of the house \$11,800, house and land. The one over in the corner is a lot bigger than this house but it sold recently

31:00 for \$369,000. The one next to me, which is only part brick and part timber it sold for \$229,000 last year. So I think we got a bargain.

I think you did very well.

And I finally paid it off at the beginning of this year. It only took me 34 years. But I had 40 years to do it in.

Ern

31:30 **you just, there are a couple of questions that just came to mind, taking you back to just before**

you got our, or at the end of the war you mentioned this morning that you were ear marked to be part of the forces going over for invasion of the Japanese mainland. What did you know of the plans for that operation at the time?

Oh we were told, we were given the

32:00 name of it. And I can't think of it now, but it will be 'invasion on the main island of Japan. The full group will be going and at the moment, from all intelligence gathered we predict 75% casualties', which didn't make any of us feel any good.

32:30 Because as they said, the Japanese people, to protect their emperor, will be waiting for you on the beaches, even if they have only got spears they will still be there. Which didn't make us feel very happy at all.

No, that you would actually be opening up, I mean you would have to be defending yourself against absolute civilians.

33:00 Which you had always been taught, no you don't shoot at civilians. Anybody in the enemy uniform yes, but nobody else. Even though hundreds, possibly thousands of people were killed during the war through bombing or friendly fire we were lucky that we didn't lose a lot more at Tarakan. Because, as I said, we were camped up

33:30 on top of the hill and the army called in the airforce to strafe the hilltop beyond where they were and they put out recognition panels which were coloured canvas out on top of their hill, and the Yanks were supposed to strafe the next hill over and instead of which they strafed our hill and the one that the army was on, but luckily nobody got,

34:00 nobody was hurt on our hill. Because where our camp was, say here, they came across there, 50 yards or so away and they were only firing cannon and machine gun. But I never heard of what casualties were caused up on the hill where the army were. But the Yanks were always like that, shoot

34:30 first ask questions later. At one stage we were in Townsville for a short period of time and there was a Yank who, I don't know whether he had been drinking torpedo juice or what, but he was a bit, and he was hiding out up on Castle Hill and he was sniping down into the town. And we were told you do not go into town on your own, two or three of you,

35:00 and at least one of you must be armed at all times. So she dropped.

So what happened to the Yank who was sniped?

I think he was sniped at and killed by a Yankee military police.

Looking back over the time you had in service

35:30 **Ern, how do you think it added or contributed to you as a person?**

Well in the words of one fellow who died last year or the year before, a fellow by the name of Keith Fitzgerald OAM [Order of Australia Medal], Keith said, "We went into that depot at Assault as boys, and we came out as men."

36:00 And I think the whole thing right from start to go made us grow up very quickly because 17 and 18 year olds today know a hell of a lot more than 17 and 18 year olds knew in my day. We were innocent about a lot of things and today it is all taken for granted.

36:30 **So do you think you would have to actually train or treat 17 or 18 year olds today differently to get them to do the same things?**

I don't know whether you, from some of the comments I have heard from the youth of today, they would have to be marched in under armed guard to get them to even join anything.

37:00 I don't know about you, but that is the way a lot of them strike me today. They don't believe in anything, they don't want to do anything to help their country. Whereas with us it was a natural reaction, country is in strife you jump in both feet and help out.

37:30 One way or another.

Do you believe in or what is I guess your feeling towards conscription?

Well it was the only way you could get them in. It has got to be.

38:00 As a matter of fact I am a firm believer that every lad, the moment he leaves school should go into the forces and do two years, not six months, you can't teach them enough in six months.

What are they going to get in two years?

They are going to get trained

- 38:30 in all sorts of things. They are hopefully going to become more of an adult, they are going to learn the basic principles of patriotism, which is a dirty word with a lot of them. I saw people on TV burning the Australian flag.
- 39:00 Now if some of my friends had been there, old and crippled as we all are, I don't think they would have got very far before they were knocked down one way or another. There would have been walking sticks and walkers flying in all directions. Because these are very handy instruments, you get them in the right place.
- 39:30 You can do considerable damage and we were taught to fight dirty. You can't be clean fighters, you have got to do to him before he does to you. And if that means kicking him in the crotch you do it.

(UNCLEAR)

- 40:00 And that was Sammy Burnister an old wrestler who gave that little talk. He said, "In a fair fight you have got to keep your hands to yourself except that you are hitting him." he said. "When you get down and dirty if you have got to get a handful of Christmas nuts you do it."

That is a beautiful note to end on.