

Australians at War Film Archive

Derek Holyoake - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1115>

Tape 1

- 00:30 **Thank you Derek, from everyone involved with the archive and thank you very much for donating your time to us today, we couldn't do it without your help.**
- 01:00 **The first question is just a summary of what we are going to talk about today. Taking us through without any real detail at all can you tell us where you grew up and your family?**
- I grew up in Victoria, but my father and mother migrated from England under the soldiers settlement scheme run by the
- 01:30 Victorian Government. We sailed from Tilbury on September 1924 with my old brother who was a year and eight months older than me. I was approximately three months of age when the ship sailed and arrived Melbourne. Under this scheme, quite a few of the English soldier-
- 02:00 settlement people were given forty eight blocks in a township called Murrabit on the Murray River near Kerang. The idea was they were to be given tuition in farming, at a training farm at Lara and then sent on to their farm. When we got there and naturally me being a baby I didn't know much about it, but things were very, very primitive, they had no running
- 02:30 water no electricity, no telephone just a little house on a forty eight acre block not even with any water. I can remember my father saying that they had to cart water from the Murray for our household use. We lived there and things were pretty hard. In 1933 or 1934 my mother needed to have an operation and
- 03:00 she had to go to the Royal Melbourne Hospital and took the four youngest children to Melbourne and put us in a home while she went to Royal Melbourne Hospital. Whilst she was in hospital as a result of the operation she developed peritonitis and died. That left us in limbo at the home in Melbourne and eventually my Dad had moved out of Murrabit and gone to Kerang
- 03:30 and my eldest brother was still living with him and then I had to go there too. I went to school in Kerang and around about 1936 I think we moved to Kangaroo Flat and I went to school at Bendigo. Then when the war broke out and my father, being an old World War I veteran, wanted me to go into the army,
- 04:00 but what was he going to do with Derek? He enlisted a friend of his with a car to drive me to Melbourne to see one of the old boys at the Victoria barracks and he then sent me off to Port Melbourne naval depot and had a medical examination and from there they said we had to wait. My father thought that it was a good idea because coming from a very military background he said, "I'm going to put you into the navy son," he said, "I know
- 04:30 that you will be safe there." In the meantime jobs were pretty hard to get in those days and I finished up getting a job in a place called Apollo Bay and in July 1940 I got a message from the navy saying I was called up to go to the training depot in Victoria. I did six months basic training there and
- 05:00 when I was drafted to cruiser HMAS Hobart, which had just returned from an operation in the Red Sea and was just finishing a reef in Sydney. So on the 20th January I joined the Hobart. For the first six months the Hobart was engaged in
- 05:30 convoying, we were escorting the troop ships going to the Middle East from Sydney to Fremantle. The Hobart incidentally didn't have the range like some of the other cruisers so the Sydney to Fremantle hop was probably more suitable than the Fremantle to Aden or Fremantle to Colombo, which is a pretty long hop. That occupied the first part of
- 06:00 1941 and in the meantime one of our sister ships had been operating in the Mediterranean and was damaged during the evacuation of Crete. We were detached to replace the Perth so we operated in the Mediterranean from July to December and on December the 7th, Pearl Harbor and on December the 9th the Australian government recalled us out of the Mediterranean. But we didn't go straight home we

- 06:30 operated from Singapore doing convoys from Colombo to Singapore. In our last convoy we arrived at Singapore on the 1st February and we left there on the 2nd February about fourteen days before the surrender. Then we operated in Java that was
- 07:00 a pretty hectic time. The road back to Fremantle and back home and on the way around the captain announced the ships company over very strict detail that we would be ready to operation on the Coral Sea
- 07:30 on the 1st May. We had a quick refit and seven days leave and we set sail and joined up with the Americans for the Battle of the Coral Sea. After that we were based in Brisbane, which is a forward base, and we were then in the following July went to New Zealand to join up with the American invasion forces for the Solomons [Solomon Islands]. That took place on
- 08:00 the 7th, 8th and 9th of August, we were lucky we didn't run into the Japanese force that came down and sunk the Vince, Quincy and Canberra. From there we went to Noumea and refuelled, rearmed and then joined up with the American co air force for another battle in the Solomons. After that we were then based in the Barrier Reef
- 08:30 doing patrols between the east coast of Australia and New Guinea while the troop ships were going up to New Guinea and the fighting was going on there. That continued on until July 1943 and then we were part of Halsey's force in the Solomons and they lost so many ships in the Solomons that they decided they reinforce them there. We were with the Australia,
- 09:00 Hobart and three American destroyers and we were patrolling between the New Hebrides and the Solomons when a Japanese submarines fighter torpedoes and one hit the ship but didn't sink it, but we made it to Espiritu Santo and got back to Australia undergoing repairs for a few months.
- 09:30 Then I got drafted to a corvette called HMAS Rockhampton, which was refitting in South Australia and then we sailed up to and operated up at New Guinea, Morotai and the islands and that was in 1944. We returned in 1945 refitted in Adelaide and during that period the war had finished but we still had to go back
- 10:00 up and surrender the Japanese forces in the Malaccas and bring out prisoners of war. After we finished that we then formed up with minesweeping Clitella and we swept the channels around the south east coast of Australia. Then in 1946 the ship paid off and I left and went to Williamstown to do a job.
- 10:30 I was selling off forty foot work boats and they couldn't get them started so me and a motor mechanic was detailed off to get these boats going so that the owners could drive them away. From there I went to Geelong where they had half a dozen corvette ships in reserve and I was on there for about six months and I went to Cerberus to do a course. When I had finished the course
- 11:00 I went to England on the Kanimbla and commissioned the aircraft carrier Sydney, after that we returned to Australia and then I was sent down to Cerberus as a depot maintenance. In 1951 was sent back to the Sydney for our stinted career. Then after that I was sent to Jervis Bay in Nowra
- 11:30 to the naval station looking after the search and rescue boats and in 1953 I left the navy, my term had expired.

A very eventful term in the navy. The Sydney did two tours in Korea were you with just the first one of those? Were you in Korea on the Sydney for six months?

Yes.

- 12:00 The Sydney was engaged in the air to ground warfare supporting the troops. The Sydney was flying aircraft when the land aircraft couldn't fly because of the weather conditions, particularly during the winter on the west coast, it was extremely cold.

You were on board when Typhoon Ruth?

Yes.

- 12:30 **That's a great summary of your wartime service what briefly again go through your post war career what happened to you when you left the navy?**

When I was in the navy I was in the electrical branch and as a result of that they had a very good scheme called the Commonwealth Reconstructional Training Scheme. That meant that you could

- 13:00 take up a subject, course or trade or whatever you wanted to do and if you wanted to go to university you could. I wanted to become an electrician. In those days the State Electricity Commission of Victoria controlled the trade very rigidly, you couldn't work in the trade unless you were an apprentice and you couldn't become an apprentice unless you worked in the trade, so it was sort of a 'catch twenty-two' situation.

- 13:30 I had to go and see the registrar of electrical mechanics and he looked at my service certificate and said, "On the basis of your experience we will give you a two year apprentice course." So virtually I was a second year apprentice then the department of labour and training put me with an electrical

contractor. All the contractor had to do was pay me second year apprentice money

- 14:00 and the government made up the award rate for an electrician, as well as that they paid my school fees, I had to go to night school at RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology] and complete the course. The books, tools, slide rule and all the rest of it that was needed they were able to provide for me. Then every three months the subsidy decreased so
- 14:30 by the end of two years I was fully qualified and by that time I had passed all the licensing requirements and I was a fully qualified electrician. I stayed with that firm for another five years or so and I got a job nearer to home at Nylex products plastics manufacturer in Mentone. I stayed there for another five years I think and then a friend of my,
- 15:00 one of the fitters and I was a shift electrician we decided because the Victorian education department were recruiting rapidly because there was a rapid expansion of technical skills in Victoria. We decided to go in and he was a fitter and machinist so we'd go into the engineering part of it and I applied to go as an electrical trade instructor. I got knocked back the first year but in 1963
- 15:30 I was accepted and then in 1964 I spent two years at Footscray Technical College, part time teaching and part time at the teacher's technical college. Then from there I was posted down to Frankston Technical School and I spent twenty years at Frankston Technical School and then I retired. I had a bit of a bad time, in a lot of things stress
- 16:00 the old saying 'it caught up with me' and I had a very bad accident at the college and I had an ill health retirement in 1984. I retired and Val and I by that time had had a disastrous marriage or the marriage broke up mainly because I wasn't a good husband. It was pretty hard
- 16:30 for both of us because I was still suffering from post war problems. I met Val and went to Tuross Head after I retired and had about ten years there and moved up to Queanbeyan about eight years ago and have been quite happy living here.

Any children?

Yes I had six children.

- 17:00 **Grandchildren now?**

Yes, I've got six.

That does bring us up to the present and with that structure in mind we will go right back to the beginning. You came over from England as a very young child, you obviously don't have much memory of that?

Yes.

- 17:30 **You said your father had a military background can you tell us about that?**

My father's family were all pretty well involved in military in one sense or another. His father was a doctor in the Royal Army Medical Corps and spent quite a lot of time in India, and India was a colony in those days.

- 18:00 My father use to visit there in school holidays, the family were sent to school in England and they were allowed to go to India during the school holidays. Some of his other relations, one was a commander or captain in the Royal Navy he talks about doing trips on navy ships during his holidays.
- 18:30 One of his sisters was married to a colonel in the Royal Artillery and he later became aide to the Governor-general. Then he had another brother who was also in the army so he had a pretty long line of military people in his background.
- 19:00 I can't recall the exact sequence of the events I don't think he fitted into the family mould of what the family wanted to do with him. I'm not quite sure whether he got interested in aircraft through working in an aircraft factory because I know he did work in an aircraft factory.
- 19:30 He joined the Royal Flying Corps and I don't know why he left the Royal Flying Corps, but then he was in the British Army. In the meantime apparently his father was stationed in France and in 1918 a German shell hit the hospital he was working in and he was killed. Don't know if there wasn't enough money in the kitty or what
- 20:00 to carry on I don't know. He spent a fair amount of time in the Territorial Army and from there he must of got the idea to migrate, he didn't think there was much hope for him in post World War I in England so that's when he decided to make the break.

What service did he see as part of the Royal Flying Corps?

It's something that I don't know,

- 20:30 I knew he had a pilot's license, I have sighted it, and he was about number twelve I think. In those days I think you got a pilots license if you could put the aircraft into the air and down again without bending

it. Funny enough he never ever took any further interest in flying, and I don't think he had never been in an airplane from that moment on.

What sort of a personality was your father?

21:00 Very British, very rigid in his discipline, never really assimilated into Australia, and in any conversations it was always, "They wouldn't do this back home," or, "It's not like this back home." I was brought up as an Australian kid, running around with Australian kids and I wasn't always the most popular

21:30 young boy because it was pretty hard to live in two worlds. Live in an Australian environment with British parents.

You mentioned he was very rigid disciplinarian can you give us some examples of how that effected you growing up?

I may have coloured my thinking, I don't know it's pretty hard to say, but mind you it's easy to be wise after the event,

22:00 but as far as I was concerned that was just normal.

What sort of things would he do to enforce discipline in your household?

The most obvious one would have been that he said to me, "I'm going to put you into the navy son and I know you are going to be safe there," and I didn't question that.

22:30 **You mentioned you had some sort of conflict between the Australian in you and your British heritage as a child?**

In the sense I wouldn't have been aware of it at the time but now looking back I can see that there was.

23:00 Particularly when I left school and started to knock around with the other lads, the neighbours, and boys around about the same age. We use to do some weird things like getting onto our bikes and riding into a town twenty mile away or something, and spending all day out instead of doing useful things like gardening or practicing on my euphonium, My Dad was a great band person

23:30 and said that everybody should play an instrument. I did play in the Kerang town band at one stage and then the Bendigo Boys' Band when he moved up. When I came out of the navy I joined him in the Mordialloc Municipal Band.

What sort of things were you interested in as a boy

24:00 **at school?**

At Murrabit as a boy I suppose our greatest joys were weekends in the summer was going down to the Murray and having a picnic on the banks of the Murray River. When we were kids the Murray was pristine, the water was clear and you could swim and fish until your hearts content and it was always

24:30 a great pleasure. We had a family living on the river, the Humphrey family and Mrs Humphrey and my mother were very close and the two families use to have a Sunday picnic on the river. The kid would throw a line in and pull up a Murray cod and have a swim and really enjoy the day. Apart from that it was very very hot and

25:00 we had three miles to walk to school and on a muddy road in the winter and we didn't have shoes in those days and it was pretty hard. We went to this two teacher school and it was rather fascinating alongside the school was a horse paddock and quite a number of the kids from neighbouring farms use to ride two or three on a horse, although we didn't have a horse we just walked.

25:30 The house was surrounded by snakes, not uncommon on a summer's day to see three or four snakes on the road going to school. In those days we use to arm ourselves with a piece of number eight fencing wire and kill them on the way, they weren't a particular specie in those days, we had them under the house, in the wood heap, in the dairy and we sort of learnt to live with them.

26:00 **You said that they were hard times, what memories do you have of the Depression and the hard times?**

The lack of money, the forty-acre block couldn't sustain the family. My father had relied on what they called the 'sustenance scheme' where they were digging irrigation channels, three days a week

26:30 I think they got, there was very very little money. One of the things that I do feel very badly about was my poor mother, an English girl from an office arriving in a very hostile environment having to make do. She used to make our shirts, clothes out of unbleached calico the cheapest material you could get. We never

27:00 had luxuries, we did have a telephone that was about all and a radio when radio came in, but we lived on bread and dripping, bread and treacle, sort of very, very basic meals. The biggest event of the year

27:30 was just before Christmas we'd save up a penny a week pocket money and there was a train that ran

between Murrabit and Kerang so we'd have a day in Kerang to spend our pocket money. This train consisted of a Ford tractor engine and old guards van converted into a carriage and it's maximum

28:00 speed would have been eight miles and hour. There's fourteen miles from Murrabit to Kerang and it took two to three hours but that was a big occasion apart from our picnics on the river.

What was your mother's background?

I don't know and this worries me a little because

28:30 when my father knew I was going to England he gave me all the information about his family and who to contact but didn't give me any information at all about my mothers family, and much to my regret I didn't pursue it either, so I really don't know. Whether there was a riff in the families I don't know' but to my internal... Sorry, I don't know anything about my mother's background.

29:00 **What strong memories do you have of your mother?**

Very strong memories about how hard she had to work, cooking, making clothes and helping with the farm

29:30 and being very, very brave about taking us to home and going into hospital and dying.

30:00 **How did things change for you when your mother passed away?**

30:30 It changed dramatically, instead of being part of a family I was just sort of in no mans land. I can't even remember how long we stayed in the home, it may have been six months. I would have been around nine or ten,

31:00 I don't know but some how or another I had to be taken out of the home, not because I had done anything wrong, it was a lovely home and it was Flemington Road and it was run by a church. They were very very sympatric and very nice and caring people, so there was no problem as far as ill treatment was concerned,

31:30 that was quite a happy period. I was taken to one of father's military friends at Brighton and I live with them for about twelve months and finished up going to a school in Brighton in suburb of Melbourne. Eventually I went back home and I was living with

32:00 my father and my elder brother in Kerang, so we were sort of a disjointed household you could say.

Can you tell us a little bit more about the home you were in and what your life was like there?

32:30 It becomes pretty vague, all I can say is they treated us well and the food was good and sufficient. We had a school within the grounds so that wasn't a problem. Every Saturday afternoon they allowed us to go over and play in Moore Park, just where the children's hospital it now.

33:00 We had Saturday afternoon playing in the park so that was the only time we were allowed out. On the whole it was a happy period and the other children that were there it was little family in a different home.

What did you thing about the city coming from the country?

I didn't see

33:30 the city in a sense because it took us all day to travel to Melbourne and I didn't have a clue by the time we got to Melbourne and mother had dropped us off at the home it was dark, I didn't have any impressions at all except from a train window.

When you arrived back with your father what

34:00 **was your life like then?**

It's pretty hard to describe, I just went to school and came home and helped get the tea and all the other

34:30 bits and pieces, we had to do our own washing.

Who looked after you in the way your mother did before and how did you manage?

We looked after ourselves, Dad had to work he was working in Kerang.

Were you a tough kid do you think, how would you describe yourself at that stage?

35:00 I don't think so I was a bit of a softy I think, very much like my mother.

What about your brother?

He was entirely different to me he was very much like Dad. I was always the one getting into trouble and he was always the good boy.

What sorts of things did you get into trouble for?

That's a good

35:30 question, I can't remember now. There's a lot of those things where the mind blots out.

You said you were very different, how did you get along with your brother?

There was an age difference, one year and eight months I got along all right because I didn't see very much of him he was going to high school when I was going to

36:00 primary school. We only lived with him for probably a couple of years anyway and then my father moved to Kangaroo Flat in Bendigo and John stayed behind because he got a job there and stayed there so there was only my father and I in Bendigo.

What did you enjoy

36:30 **about school?**

Which school are you talking about?

You obviously went to various different schools, what sort of subjects or things did you enjoy studying, were there things that stand out in your mind?

I always like English and Science, English was one of my pet subjects in fact I've got a little certificate out there from

37:00 Kerang High School with something about English and Science, I liked school. I didn't stay on at school when we were at Bendigo I didn't go beyond Year Two, so I left at age fourteen.

37:30 **What did you know about the outside world at age fourteen?**

Very little, no TV coverage of world events, we had a radio that was all, I didn't know much at all. What my father told me about England and being in India, Ceylon and places like that, not a great deal.

38:00 **What was your attitude towards the military attitude of your father?**

Not having any other family members to judge it by just accepted it and that was the way it was

38:30 **Was there anything you wanted to be when you grew up, did you have any ambitions?**

No I didn't, I didn't have any ambitions. All I wanted to do was get a job and be self sufficient but it was pretty hard because you couldn't be self sufficient on the wages they were paying a fifteen year old boy.

What was your first job you got when you left school?

It was in a

39:00 little grocers store in Kangaroo Flat, it was a branch of a big store in Bendigo and there was a manager and myself. It was pretty busy because pre supermarket days everything had to be weighed up, if somebody wanted half a pound of butter you had to cut a pound in two and weigh up, weigh up sugar and weigh up

39:30 mixed fruit, nothing was pre packaged. The routine was the manager use to hop on his bike on Mondays and take the orders from his customers and then we'd spend Tuesday making them up. I'd go to the

40:00 stable and pick up the horse and cart and deliver the groceries around the town, there could be boxes of groceries, bags of chaff, wheat and so forth for chocks, it was pretty heavy work. A bag of wheat weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds, that's pretty heavy, sore feet and poor old back.

40:30 This was nine until six week days and nine until nine on Friday late night shopping, then nine to one on Saturday and then I had to feed the horse on Sunday, all for thirteen and six pence a week. I didn't like it so I stuck it out for about six months then I got a job in a market garden and that was a bit better there it was fifteen shillings a week and I didn't have to work Saturdays.

Tape 2

00:30 **You just told us you then got a job in a market garden, what was that job?**

It consisted of just cultivating, weeding, watering and growing vegetables, hoeing just attending a large market garden.

You got a slight increase in pay at that stage?

Yes fifteen shillings and that was good.

01:00 **What did that money go to?**

I paid my father ten shillings board and I had five shillings to myself.

What sort of things would you spend your five shillings on?

I suppose going to the pictures, it was going to cost

01:30 two shillings to go to the pictures in those days, but also ice cream, lemonade.

I just asked because having had a very tight growing up you must of felt like a rich man at times?

Yes, but there was better to come. When war broke out I can always remember this because my

02:00 father and I were sitting at home listening to a broadcast from Bob Menzies when he said, "It is my melancholy duty to state that as a consequence, Australia is now at war," and that was the moment that Dad decided he was going to join the army. That's when he put in train advance to get me to Melbourne to do the interview with his old

02:30 boy network in Victoria barracks and go on to Lonsdale to go on for the medical examination.

How much did your father talk to you about what he was going to do?

That's all said, he said, "I'm going to put you into the navy son," and he said, "And I know you will be safe there," end of story, no more discussion on it, so I accepted that.

03:00 In the meantime living next door to us was an old widower and her husband had died from a minus complaint and her daughter was married to a policeman from a coastal town in western Victoria called Apollo Bay. He came down with his family for Christmas, that's Christmas 1939 and we were friendly because they use to often visit while we were there.

03:30 He said, "There's a job going in Apollo Bay would you be interested?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "When I go back I will let you know." He finished his holidays and went back to Apollo Bay and then wrote me a letter saying, "There's a job going with Jeff Thomson the baker and it was thirty shillings a week and your keep." I couldn't take it quick enough so I

04:00 packed up my suitcase had a bike hoped on the train got to Melbourne went to Geelong I got to Geelong in the afternoon and thought, 'What am I going to do now?', the bus didn't leave for Apollo Bay until seven o'clock the next morning. I just pedalled around Geelong on my bike and down Wilbur Street I saw a sign 'Coffee Palace, two and six a night'.

04:30 I got myself a bed in the Coffee Palace and they woke me up they put me on the bus and went to Apollo Bay then and spent a rather delightful six months there working for the baker. The baker use to get up early in the morning and light the bakery oven and put the bread in the oven and then I'd have breakfast

05:00 and by that time we'd get the bread out of the oven and then I'd go and harness up the cart and do the deliveries around Apollo Bay and it would be lunchtime by the time. I got the horse and cart away and then we'd have lunch and the rest of the afternoon was free. Until after two we'd go into the bake house and make the dough and it was all done by hand, mixing up the dough, and making the loaves and then we'd get all the loaves and tins ready for

05:30 the morning, that was sort of the routine that went on. During the afternoon that was free and if it was warm enough I'd go for a swim or go fishing or whatever. It was an idyllic little coastal town at the time and that was great but there wasn't much to spend my money on. They had a very good house keeper who use to cook these huge meals and of course being a hungry young teenager and I thought it was

06:00 great until the letter came to report to Cerberus.

What interest did you have in girls in those early years?

Not a great deal, they were there. I didn't form many attachments well you didn't normally at fifteen then.

06:30 **Most people at fifteen don't today, just something to spend your money on?**

Yes.

What had happened, can you explain your fathers application for you to go into the navy, what had he done?

First of all as he was older he put his age down, I don't know how he did it but he put my age up, other wise I would have never of gotten in the navy. So theoretically I was always

07:00 a year older than I actual was. I found out from a couple of the other boys that I joined up with that because the war had arrived and the navy wasn't taking the sixteen and a half year olds they were

waiting until they were seventeen, so that's why I had to wait those six months.

07:30 At the same time they were recruiting for hostilities only so they weren't taking many permanent service. I was in one of the last permanent class to go through Cerberus.

How did you feel to get called up after spending six idyllic months in Apollo Bay?

Just accepted it and caught the bus to Coolac

08:00 and caught the train to Melbourne and fronted up to Lonsdale at Port Melbourne and went through the rig and rolls hand on the bible and swore the legions to the king and country and off we went and on to a train to Cerberus down at Crib Point.

I know that's a tradition that you have to do to swear the legions to kind and country, how much did you feel that in your heart?

08:30 I think I felt it. We weren't as cynical about the king and country then and really I would of had great attachment to England through my parentage, although I still felt Australian.

09:00 **It's hard to put yourself back there as a fifteen or sixteen year old but what did you think about what you were doing at the time, did you feel like you were going off to serve your country or did you feel like you had been put into the navy beyond your control?**

There were things that weren't under my control so I suppose in my own way I just accepted that that was going to be my life.

09:30 **What pride did you have about being accepted into the navy?**

I was quite proud to the fact that I was, once I got over the apprehension that I felt. The train from Flinders Street arrived at Crib Point Station around about six

10:00 or seven at night and in July it was dark. I remember there were quite a few, a big recruit of recruits and they marched us from the station down this long windy road at the entrance to the depot passed the big accommodation blocks. I can always remember the tradition there when the new arrivals came the sailors would stand up at the end of the balcony

10:30 of the first floor and say, "You will be sorry, you will be sorry," and that was par for the course. It didn't take long to settle in by the time we got kited out with uniforms and had the usual injections and formed up into classes, it was probably just like being in school I suppose.

What was different or surprising about

11:00 **naval life for you when you first went into the navy?**

It was an entirely new experience because the first six weeks of navy I think it goes through any service is the parade ground work even though we were sailors we still had to wear gaiters, belts, have a rifle

11:30 and bayonet and march around all day, left turn, right turn, about turn, quick march, double march and all the rest of it. This went on for six weeks, this basic drill and the object of that was to instil into you immediate response to an order. If somebody said, "About turn," when you first went on the parade ground

12:00 the boys would look around and say, "What was that, what was that," but by the end of six weeks when somebody said, "About turn," you about turned very smartly. So I think the idea was that if somebody gave an order then you distinctively carried it out without any hesitation. During that period we also

12:30 went to the rifle range and learnt how to fire a rifle, stick bayonets into straw bodies. After our six weeks of training then the group split up, there were cooks, Stewarts, telegraphers, stokers and seaman. They put me into the seaman branch so I went to the seamanship school and we did seamanship training learning all about

13:00 sailing boats, tying knots, about anchors. After we did our seamanship then we went to the gunnery school and we learnt how to pull a Lewis gun apart, Vickers guns and load a six-inch gun. They had a gun very similar to the one in the War Memorial that was on the Sydney

13:30 some of those old guns. We use to practice gunnery drill and unfortunately it was getting to a period when it quite warm so we were sitting while the instructor was droning on about the four-inch breech or whatever and you tend to nod off and they didn't like that very much so they'd say, "Grab that six in shell," and it weighed about one hundred pound and we'd have to double around the parade ground

14:00 and that certainly was a good cure for going to sleep. Also amongst all that we had physical education and that was always a pretty strenuous time too. We had an old physical instructor trainer who we all use to dread, we use to look at the notice board and say, "Who is on today?" "Saltmaster." "Oh no," and he was pretty hard. We had another one Petty Officer Patching,

14:30 "Oh good," he was quite human. That's the same Jules Patching who is involved with the Olympic

movement today, he's a fabulous man and he was in the navy for quite a number of years. After the gunnery school we went to the torpedo school. The torpedo department in those days looked after mines, explosives, torpedoes, and depth charges as

15:00 well as the electricals on a ship, the electricals were fairly primitive by today's standards but it was quite ok. We had a fortnight in the torpedo school and I really enjoyed that and I thought 'this was better than being shouted at by chief gunners mate', I really enjoyed that course. I had pretty good marks I finished up with ninety three per cent for my course. As a

15:30 result of that I was recommended to be a seaman torpedoman and that changed the course of my life, and it really made a huge difference.

How did you find the mix of people who you went into the navy with?

Good.

16:00 We had boys from all states in Australia, we all mixed in good, like in any other group.

What particular friendships did you strike up at that stage?

I had

16:30 two friends, there was a young fellow from Northcoate a cook, Keith Buckley and another one from Tasmania Bill Bell. I will always remember after our six weeks at Cerberus we were allowed to go ashore for leave, we all went up in the train and stayed at the

17:00 YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] across the bridge from the station. The train didn't get in until around half past five or six o'clock and in Victoria in those days it was six o'clock closing. Somebody had the bright idea that the three of us would go out to the 'Merry Chief' in South Melbourne and us big brave sailors we'd get suck

17:30 into the rum and raspberries and made a bit of a mess of ourselves but it was fun.

Was that your first experience with alcohol?

Yes it was.

Were these mates older than you?

No we were all the same age, I was a year younger than but they were exactly the same age because they both were seventeen when they went in.

Was that a known

18:00 **thing that you were a year younger, how many people knew about it?**

Nobody knew, I didn't tell anyone. If the navy had found out and put me out what was I going to do, my father had already sold the house and joined the army, I wouldn't of had anywhere to go.

Was that the case throughout your entire wartime service, your age always kept a secret?

18:30 Yes because I didn't need any documentation saying how old I was it was on the service certificate and that was that.

You mentioned all the training you went through from all the initial training, gunnery training, torpedo training, when was the first time you were actually exposed to being out at sea,

19:00 **when did you get on a ship for the first time?**

When we were doing our seamanship training we had a small sea training vessel at Cerberus that they use to use for training for say steering the ship, heaving the lead, have you heard of that?

Can you explain it?

19:30 In the navy in the days before echo sounders to find the depth of the bottom we had a lead line and it had marks of knots with pieces of leather and it was about a seven pound piece of lead with a hollow bottom and in the bottom was put tallow. You had a little device on the side of the ship called the 'chains', and a little platform.

20:00 The idea was you swung the lead ahead of the ship and when the ship came abreast of it you could read off the mark and how deep the water was. You probably heard of it from the old steam ships days 'Mark Twain', by the Mark Twain that was one of the two fathoms deep. When you pulled the lead up you could inspect the bottom, you could tell whether there was gravel, sand, mud or if there

20:30 was rock there was nothing on the tallow. Then of course we sailed across Hans Inlet to Phillip Island and pulled into cows on a jetty and had a picnic lunch and then sailed back again, that was my first experience at sea. I had been to sea mind you when I came out from England but I didn't know much

about that. I use to always tell people,

21:00 "I arrived here as a 'boat person' [refugee] and I couldn't speak a word of English."

As you say apart from the experiences when you were too young to remember you lived away from the sea most of your life?

That's right.

What did you think of the sea and now you were in the navy?

I didn't know much about it but I remember being down at the Apollo Bay in pub and anchored in the bay was a warship, I think it might have been

21:30 the Swan and they were doing mine sweeping down there because a ship had been sunk off Cape Hopway in 1940, sunk by a mine that had been laid by a German raider. No I didn't have any preconceived notions about the sea, I didn't know what to expect. When we finished the course we got Christmas leave

22:00 and I went down to Apollo Bay and I stayed with a policeman friend because I didn't have anywhere else to go. I didn't have a house and I didn't have anyone at home, that was great. When we finished up back at Cerberus after leave then they had all the postings on the notice board. There were quite a few of us that finished up on the Hobart

22:30 including my two friends Bill Bell and Keith Buckley. We arrived in Sydney and we were taken from the central station down to Man o' War steps, down where the Opera House is and there was this huge grey monster tied up at number one buoy at Farm Cove and I looked at it and said, "Oh, that's my ship."

When the postings were

23:00 **put out, what were the ships that people wanted to go to?**

Not that I'm aware of we didn't know we just sort of had to accept what we got I think, it was the luck of the draw.

Can you describe in a bit more detail your first sight of the Hobart this massive cruiser?

23:30 There was this huge grey ship, five hundred and fifty five feet long and laying at Farm Cove and it really was an awesome sight, it really was. We caught a boat and got on board and it was more awesome because it was big and

24:00 long passageways and little compartments, it was pretty hard to find your way around. They put us up in an ordinary seamen's mess because that what we were ordinary seamen, I was ordinary seaman second class and so we had a locker. We lived in messes and that meant a very long table with stools either side

24:30 and around about twenty persons per mess. Had a small locker for all your belongings and originally my locker was right up foreign in the fo'c'sle that's the sharp end of the ship.

What belongs did you have?

Just the kit that had been issued and that's it, I had no personal

25:00 belongings and I had given my bike to the boys in the Wilbur family and I think I threw my old suitcase away in Cerberus so I didn't have anything just the kit that I was issued with.

Can you describe that kit, what was in it?

We had serge uniforms, number one and number two, overalls,

25:30 a white uniform, underwear, socks, shoes, an overcoat and a blue serge jumper.

What was the uniform that you wore for general duties and what were the different colours for?

The first

26:00 thing when we arrived we just had on our normal what they called number two uniform. That consisted of blue jumper, white shirt, blue pants and a white cap. Then we were shown around the ship.

26:30 Also when we were kitted out we were also supplied with gas mask and a pith helmet, much to my amazement. I don't know what they thought the pith helmet was for, when we got to the ship they kindly took the pith helmets away, they must of thought we were going to the tropics. This weird thing called 'cholera belt', which was suppose to ward off cholera.

27:00 **I've never heard of a cholera belt, what is that?**

I think it is a sort of wildish belt that you put around you and I think it protected your kidneys or

something, the navy was still back in Captain Cook days,

- 27:30 they hadn't sort of gone much further than that. It was only twenty odd years between the Great War and this war so the navy hadn't changed a great deal in it's thinking.

What introduction did you get to this ship and who gave it to you?

- 28:00 There was a petty officer who was detailed to show us around and show us where we were going to live, our action stations, and cruising stations, abandon ship stations. That took most of the first day that we were on the ship. The second day we were over the ship's side painting it. Of course being the new recruits they gave us

- 28:30 a pretty hard time the old sailors, they were over on the side on the stage particularly where the bar flares and you are sort of dangling over the ship side two of us on a stage with a paint pot and a brush trying to paint the ship side. Then there's a couple of sailors up top tending the lines so when you wanted to be lowered down they use to

- 29:00 put their foot on the rope and uncoil it from the ball and just leave about that much slack and just take their foot off. So you'd go down with a bang and you'd hang onto the rope for dear life, that was very interesting. I think we spent two days painting the ship.

How in general were you treated by the older hands on board?

- 29:30 Very well, I was surprised there was no bullying, accept a bit of good natured banter about being green. After that they then allocated us to a part of the ship, the ship was divided up

- 30:00 into four parts as far as the seaman goes. You had the fo'c'sle, the midship was part of the ship and it was divided into two with the portside and the starboard side, that was four top and main top, then aft part was called the quarterdeck. In that structure you usually worked in that structure, I was detailed officer to the quarterdeck, I was down in the quarter desk

- 30:30 mess deck with probably twenty or thirty sailors. There was an older AB [Able Seaman] and he had been in the navy for a number of years sort of took me under his wing, Old Jake Lewis a terrific bloke. He sort of showed me the right things to do and what not to do. He said, "You will have to get rid of those daggy old underpants."

- 31:00 We were issued with terrible old underpants and they were not kosher. We went ashore and brought some boxer shorts, the cotton boxer shorts and little details like that to conform with the major of the ships company.

- 31:30 He was very helpful to me.

Would he or anybody else tell you about what the Hobart had been doing over in the Red Sea?

Yes, we knew it had been in the Red Sea and we knew it had done quite good work in the evacuation of the British Somaliland, at a place called Berbera

- 32:00 and quite an interesting little side effect to that. The captain called for three volunteers to man, a little twelve pounder Hotchkiss mounted on the back of a truck, I think they mounted it on an oil drum or something like that. They went up to a pass and the idea was to hold up the Italian advance, while they evacuated the town.

- 32:30 They weren't killed but they were taken prisoner by the Italians but when the British captured British Somaliland they then came back unscathed but hardly sick of the sight of spaghetti.

What was your role on the ship at that stage, you had your interaction stations and cruising stations what were they?

- 33:00 During the first six months during the day we had what they called cruising stations, that meant that you had three watches so you were virtually four hours on and eight off. If I was assigned to lookouts because we didn't have radar and consequently we had

- 33:30 lookouts posted on the surface and also lookouts in the air from the air point of view and that's what I did. Then my action was in Whytie, which was the furthestest arc and I was on left gun.

- 34:00 From normal working time when you weren't on watch then it was just working on the ship, just scrubbing, cleaning and polishing. That's one of the first things that impressed me was how nice and clean the ship was then I realised how it was so clean, that's what we had to do. On the decks, they were timber decks and the quarterdeck was where the officers

- 34:30 lived and had all their functions and we had an admiral on board too so consequently everything had to be polished and clean. We had to holy stone the decks, it's a piece of pumice shaped like a brick so we had to go down on our hands and knees and they'd sprinkle sand

- 35:00 and sea water. With the grain of the timber you'd rub the deck with the pumice stones and then the

sand and pumice would be washed away with the saltwater hoses and the deck would come up gleaming white. After capstan and bollards they had these timber gratings to cover them and they had to be polished

- 35:30 and done the same way. The gangways we had to clean the brass work on them and polish that, and do the handrails with shark skin, clean and polish them up. The painting it was a never ending battle against rust, red lead in paint and scrubbing down below and up top.

When you weren't

- 36:00 **at cruising stations or when you weren't working what could you do on the ship?**

Normally if you were at sea when you were off duty you could play deck hockey. After our afternoon tea around about four o'clock the only gambling game they allowed was called tombola, which

- 36:30 is what people call bingo now so we'd play that, or write letters, read or whatever.

When the Hobart went to sea how did you shape up to being out at sea, any problems with seasickness?

As I said after

- 37:00 we arrived on board we painted the ship and then as the ship just came out of a reef they just had to swing the compass, there's a special range in Sydney Harbour where they go over and swing the compass to make sure everything is right. Then we sailed for Auckland the next day escorting troop ship loaded up with Empire Air Training Scheme air force

- 37:30 people to Auckland. Going across the Tasman [Sea] I was very sick, I don't know how I survived it. It was really bad because the ship was going into these waves and at that particular time my locker was up forehead. If you went to your locker and stood there the next thing the ships

- 38:00 bows would be up in the air and then come down again and your stomach was sort of compressed, so that took about three or four days and I was pretty sick the whole time.

How do you manage when you are that sick?

You have to because you still have to keep your watches, you can't say, "I'm too sick today I'm going to lay down," no.

- 38:30 **What about the other recruits around you, how were they fairing in general?**

Not everybody but most of them were in the same boat.

What would that boat be?

All sick.

How long did that situation last for?

It is probably worse

- 39:00 the first three or four days and then returning to Sydney wasn't too bad then, I was still sick, I just felt sick I didn't vomit. After a while you just got use to it, it didn't matter how rough it got you were able to not worry about it.

Tape 3

- 00:30 **I'd just like to pick up that story about going to sea and all of you feeling a bit seasick, where did you go to to be sick?**

The nearest point over the side, usually in the waste, on port waste, or on the starboard waste not the

- 01:00 windward side otherwise you'd get it thrown back at you.

How else would you manage, were there other ways that you could quickly make sure that you had somewhere to be sick?

You usually know if you want to vomit, you usually made sure you

- 01:30 had an exit somewhere and that you are able to make it, I've never ever not made it, you certainly had a little bit of a premonition that something was going to happen. You feel pretty crook, you had a headache and a terrible feeling but unfortunately you have got to keep on working you just can't just stay there.

- 02:00 **I'm wondering if there were occasions when there were sailors that didn't quite make it to**

the side?

Not to my knowledge, they may have done but I doubt it, we were all able to find somewhere to go.

I'm wondering if there were any sailors that

02:30 **never got over it, who were just too sick to be a sailor?**

Yes there were, because down on the quarter mess deck we had the band on the ship and one of the band players as soon as we left the buoy and the mooring lines were cast off from wherever we were based. As soon as we started to get on the way

03:00 he was sick, and he was sick so he was absolutely hopeless, he'd just laid on the mess stool and stayed there for the rest of the time. He couldn't work or do anything so eventually they sent him ashore. That's about the only one that I've seen who has been absolutely immobilised through seasickness.

03:30 **Was there any kind of right or passage for you in finding your sea legs going through a stage of being really sick?**

I think there would be very few sailors at some stage wouldn't have been sick to varying degrees. You worked through it, I suppose it would take in my recollection I'd

04:00 say a week or so and that was that. The only time that we tended to, say during the period I was in Hobart at the time after a while it never bothered me. The only time you would feel crook was the ship would come back for a refit, you had been on leave, you had been eating different foods and the first time at sea you might have a bout of seasickness

04:30 for the first couple of days but after that you were ok and you settled down to a normal routine, in my experience.

You mentioned an older sailor by the name of Jack Lewis, who kind of took you under his wing a little bit. You were very very young at sixteen, what did he teach you about what to say and what not to say?

05:00 He didn't really have to teach me much but in more of a protective role I would say. Just virtually explained about wearing the right clothes, most important having the right underwear, how to wash your clothes because things were pretty primitive. Usually a sailor shared a bucket

05:30 and three or four might own the galvanised bucket and you'd washed your clothes in the bathroom and stuff like that. We use to call them sea daddies. But this Jack Lewis was great, he worked on a different part of the ship

06:00 than me in the ordinance party where he looked after the guns. Where I was just a little ordinary seaman but we happened to share the same mess and his locker was next to mine and that's how that came about.

What type of feelings did you have towards him, did you look upon him like a father?

Yes,

06:30 I can't recall any problems that I had, if I had problems I suppose I never talked about it, I tended to bottle things up a lot.

I'm wondering if he gave you advice about who to avoid on the ship?

He did in a nice sort of a way though,

07:00 in amongst the crew there was six hundred and fifty to seven hundred people there is always got to be someone that you can't get along with.

It sounds from your description that he was a guide to you?

Yes. That would have only been

07:30 necessary for the first twelve months or so after that there is no need for him, after twelve months at sea you become a seasoned sailor I suppose.

You've mentioned where your locker was but can you describe your living quarters and where you were sleeping?

08:00 The compartments on a warship are fairly small, in our quarterdeck mess deck there were three long tables each containing around about twenty persons seated and we had a bank of lockers alongside of them for our own personal gear. We slept above the tables in hammocks and

08:30 we had hooks and you'd sling your hammock and then in the morning, or whenever you woke up then you lashed your hammock up and they stowed like a large banana in a special rack in the mess. So you virtually ate, slept and sat down and wrote letters or whatever you were doing in the same area.

- 09:00 At each mess there was a person allocated at meal times to go to the galley to get the meals down in trays and dish it out and then wash up the dishes afterwards but that was on a rotational bases. There was a leading seaman in charge of each mess to see that all of those jobs were carried out.
- 09:30 **What was it like for you living in such close quarters with a lot of other guys?**
- It didn't worry me just accept it and that was it. You were in the navy so you did what everybody else was doing and as far as we were concerned there was nothing abnormal about it.
- 10:00 **How would you find privacy?**
- There was very little privacy because like I said you slept, work and you couldn't even lock yourself in a toilet because they were sort of open too. You would stand up on the deck I suppose in a quiet spot somewhere
- 10:30 if you wanted to be alone but I didn't seem to worry very much about privacy.
- How well do you think you got to know each other?**
- Very well, particularly your own little group because you worked, ate, slept and went to your action stations with the same people so you knew everybody's stories and jokes, but
- 11:00 we all tolerated it.
- Were there any favourite jokes that stand out in your mind?**
- I can't think of any and I'm a terrible one for remembering jokes, I can't even remember on that I heard yesterday.
- Going back to when you first set sail you mentioned you picked up Air Training**
- 11:30 **Scheme troops?**
- The air force people they did their initial flight training on Tiger Moths and then they went over to Canada and did further training there and a lot of them went to England to fly with the RAAF and bomber command fighters and what have you. We did a couple of those trips to New Zealand and we did that one
- 12:00 in January. That was the time when there was a very large movement of troops going over to the Middle East, I think the 9th Division. We were involved in escorting those troop ships and there were some of the biggest ships I'd ever seen like the Queen Mary, the Queen Elizabeth, Mauritania, Aquitania, New Amsterdam huge passenger liners.
- 12:30 When we came back from New Zealand I think and there was the Queen Mary in Sydney Harbour and it looked so huge and we sailed alongside it and virtually looked up at it and it was so vast. Yet when we escorted it across to Western Australia that was the run we were on from Sydney down the south of Tasmania to dodge the mine fields in Bass Strait
- 13:00 and across the Bight to Fremantle, so that was our first hop. I can always recall the Queen Mary going across the Great Australian Bight and it was such a magnificent sight and it was so rough. The Mary wanted to travel at maximum speed and it virtually had to slow down for the cruisers, I think it was the Sydney and the Hobart escorting them. To see a wave
- 13:30 breaking over the bridge of the Queen Mary was something to see it's so huge and the force of the wind and the water on the ship really battling through huge waves about twenty eight knots I think and it was just flattening guard rails, did a heck of a lot of damage and we were very glad to get to Fremantle.
- 14:00 It was a pretty rough stretch of water and then other times it's quite smooth. There was a very interesting little incident that took place, this must have been in March and I think we had gone to New Zealand with another convoy. We were hurriedly sent back to Sydney
- 14:30 where we refuelled and met up with the other cruiser Sydney and we hurriedly pulled into Nelson Pier at Williamstown and then headed off to Fremantle and refuelled there and we joined up with the Mauritania and the New Amsterdam, these liners with troops. We sailed out into the Indian Ocean and we took up a formation with the two cruisers
- 15:00 in a line abreast with the two liners, the cruisers were in the centre approximately eight miles apart and on either side of the cruisers the Mauritania and the Aquitania took station at ten miles. The object of the exercise was if we sighted a ship then the liners would turn inwards and get away and then the cruisers would turn outwards.
- 15:30 But at that particular time I didn't know the possible enemy was, I thought at the time it might have been the Penguin or one of the other German raiders. When I was at the War Memorial I was looking through the documents from the ports of proceedings and it was a German pocket battleship Admiral Von Scheer which was
- 16:00 operating in the Indian Ocean and it had been sighted by an aircraft and British cruiser. I didn't know

about this it would have been a bit frightening against the two little six-inch cruisers against a pocket battleship, we might not have gone so well if we had met it but we would have done our best I guess.

I would just like to ask you about those trips that

16:30 **you did and stopping off in Fremantle. What would you do when you stopped off in Fremantle?**

We'd only stay a day and refuel and get back to Sydney, so we didn't have much time but they did let us ashore in Fremantle. There was always people willing to entertain

17:00 sailors, there was always on the notice board 'would a couple of sailors like to go on a picnic' or do this or do that and it was pretty well organised and the people were pretty friendly. I do recall I had a weekend there and they let us off and there was a family in Perth and he turned out to be I think

17:30 the assistant commissioner of the police or something, but they were very hospitable and very good. They had a daughter and she was older than me but she looked after me and took me to the beach and so forth. It was really nice to be in a family situation again, a bit of a break from being at sea.

Were you

18:00 **homesick at all by this stage?**

No, I didn't have a home as I said my father sold up and joined the army, the ship was my home and I loved it.

I'm wondering had you heard any tall stories about sailors visiting the Rowe Street brothel in Fremantle?

18:30 That's in Perth. As a matter of fact one of my friends said, "Let's go have a look at Rowe Street," not go there so I don't know how we got there we might of got a taxi out there but there wouldn't have been any hope for us getting in there because there was a queue of about three hundred yards

19:00 long of soldiers wanting to have their last sexual experience before they were killed, but that was rather amusing.

I'm wondering how you acted towards that as a young sixteen year old?

It was a bit funny.

19:30 **As you said the Hobart in a way was home away from home or was your home?**

It was my home.

What was it about the ship that made you feel secure do you think?

20:00 First of all there was nowhere else to go and secondly by that time I had been at sea and you are well and truly into the routine, you knew what you had to do, you made your life around your action station, cruising station

20:30 so it was all just as normal for me as anyone living in their own home. You went to work and you left work.

How did you stay in touch with what was going on in the war at this point in time?

21:00 In harbour we use to get newspapers and of course we heard on the radio, we didn't have personal radios but if there was anything eventful happening it could be monitored on the ship and then printed out and put on the notice board

21:30 any events that were happening.

I'm wondering how you reacted when you got the posting about going to the Middle East?

There was no reaction it was just another adventure.

22:00 What had happened as I said we were operating doing those troop convoys so in May and June were bad days in the Middle East because Greece and Crete had fallen, Perth had sustained bombed damage. Therefore it was decided that

22:30 the Hobart would replace the Perth, I'm not quite sure if it has been made clear to you the actual relationship between the Australian squadron and the British Admiralty?

Tell us about it?

I'm proud of the war and I think around about October the Australian government virtually gave British admiralty the

23:00 Australian squadron, in other words to use where they saw fit. The war wasn't in Australia at that

particular time so we finished up most of our warships serving British squadrons somewhere around the world. We had British ships were manned by Australian sailors, sometimes we had British officers, Royal Navy officers

- 23:30 on board as signalling our procedures and everything else was identical to Royal Navy practices. Therefore it was very easy for an Australian ship to slot into a British squadron and I will give an example of this. The Eastern Mediterranean Fleet we had we had three Australian cruisers , the Sydney, Perth and Hobart and they were all six-inch cruisers
- 24:00 and each one of them did a stint in the Mediterranean. The Sydney was first in 1940 followed by the Perth and then followed by the Hobart. The Hobart was the last to actually do that and in the meantime we had Australian soldiers going over to England to commission destroyers either as RN [Royal Navy] ships or RAN [Royal Australian Navy] ships. There were quite a number of Australian sailors serving on British
- 24:30 ships overseas and that's how it came about. Virtually I would image if I can think back to the time it wouldn't have been very unusual to say 'yes we are going to the Middle East', it didn't worry me unduly, it was just another sea and another place.
- 25:00 In June they had very very rapid refit up till that time in 1941 we had an aircraft on board, the cruisers all carried one of those war aircraft and they were spotting aircraft and so forth. It lived in a catapult between the two funnel and it's catapult was removed
- 25:30 and the aircraft was taken off plus it's dangerous fuel tanks. On that little structure the catapults they built a four-inch pom-pom mounting. Also the bridge was opened and then they covered that with a steel roof and put a splinter netting around it to protect it from bomb threats.
- 26:00 They went right through the ship and took out curtains, took cushions off our mess stools ripped up a cortisone which is like a tug lino to minimise the dangers from fire. That was a pretty extensive little refit so we sailed on the
- 26:30 20th June at approximately 2200 hours about ten o'clock at night and I will never ever forget that scene. Sailing out of Sydney harbour we past one of the ferries they use to have the showboat ferries with dancing on them and as we sailed passed this showboat with all their lights on was playing music, we sailed out of Sydney harbour and
- 27:00 by Fremantle and fuelled there. Went to the Seychelles, Port Victoria, Seychelles and refuelled from a tanker there and then went to Aden and then on through the Red Sea to Suez, Port Tewfik.

Just going back to the lovely image that you painted of sailing out of Sydney harbour I'm wondering

- 27:30 **where you were standing as you sailed?**

When you leave harbour you usual you form up on your part of the ship, being quarterdeck we sort of lined the rails facing outwards. As we leave the wharf we have to recover all the mooring lines and put them away and then fall in

- 28:00 for leaving harbour so that's is sort of routine, so I was standing on the quarterdeck as we went past and that's when I heard the music and saw couples dancing. It was a beautiful sight and all the lights of Sydney, it was really a magnificent sight. Wondering what was going to happen, just wondering.

- 28:30 **Perhaps then you can describe the trip over and what happened?**

It was fairly uneventful, the only uneventful thing was an incident that occurred on our passage between Fremantle and the Seychelles but to digress we went from our

- 29:00 three watches to a two watch system where we had a greater state of readiness in other words. We manned one gun on each turret during the daylight hours and at dawn and dusk we went to full action stations. Apparently going back in time that's always the time when the enemy attacks at dawn or dusk. Then after that dusk action
- 29:30 station one guns crew would go to tea and then at seven o'clock the other guns crew goes to tea and then at eight o'clock at night. Then the whole guns crew would then stay in the turret overnight until dawn, we had to keep watch on the telephone for one person and the others could lay down and doze.
- 30:00 You weren't allowed to take any bedding in just a bit of canvas on the steel deck to lay down and have a bit of a snooze and it was pretty tiring. The incident that I'm going to describe is significant in the way that our skipper handled unidentified ships. I can't remember what time but it was some time during the night and suddenly the alarm bells
- 30:30 rang in the turret and we all stood by and loaded the guns. We were just standing by ready and being near the stern we could feel the stern vibrate as the screws increased and the speed increased. What was happening was we had sighted a ship and it was

31:00 challenged by the light and it didn't reply. Every ship had a code word number, and a code would change everyday and every little square of the ocean was plotted so the powers at be, headquarters at probably Canberra or Melbourne knew exactly where every ship was. This ship didn't reply to the identification so we increased speed

31:30 we circled that ship at about twenty five to twenty eight knots at range of seventeen thousand yards. This is significant in what should have been done later perhaps by another ship. It wasn't until finally somebody roused the radio operator or signalman on the ship and they gave the correct identification signals

32:00 and we relaxed and continued on our way. This was how our captain handled it, think of an incident a little bit later on in 1941 in November.

Who was your captain?

Captain Harry Howden.

What type of respect did he have?

He had an enormous amount of respect,

32:30 enormous.

Was the Hobart a happy ship?

Yes definitely. That was just an incident and to our way of thinking the sailors on the ship at the time when they heard about the Sydney and wondered why they didn't do what we did,

33:00 it was just a thought. Nobody knows what happened to the Sydney but obviously the Sydney got too close. In light our experience when the skipper kept the safe distance and the idea being it was out of the range of any of those known raiders guns, all they said was their identity.

33:30 That was a good decision on his behalf?

As it happened the ship turned out to be an ordinary ship going about his business and not a disguised German raider.

Perhaps you could tell us what your main role was when you got to the Middle East?

34:00 First of all we anchored at Port of Tewfik on the Red Sea end of the canal and we endeavoured to go into the canal, we had the British destroyer called Kipling in the lead and started into the canal but the Germans had been dropping

34:30 magnetic mines in the canal so we couldn't proceed, so we had to reverse out of the canal and drop anchor again. During the night around about midnight of that night the Germans attacked the harbour in great numbers, I don't know who many aircraft were involved but all I know it was pretty hectic.

35:00 They were dropping bombs and there was a ship there called Georgic, which was about a twenty eight thousand tonner and it had just unloaded troops. The aircraft were attacking that ship, they hit it and set it on fire and they also dropped numerous bombs in the harbour. That was my first experience of being under fire.

35:30 My defence station at that particular time was on the four-inch gun deck, we had two, twin four-inch mounding on either side about mid ship and they have five fixed ammunition. So you had to go from a locker grab a shell and put it on the fuse machine to set the right fuse and then punch it into the breech and you'd stand back when the

36:00 cartridge exploded. The gun went off and there was this blast of a flash from the back, which disorientated you a bit so you didn't know which direction the locker was. I can always recall we were firing away at these aircraft, they were putting up a barrage and I heard this whistling noise, I said

36:30 to my other mate there, "Oh we shot one down there," and he said, "No you silly bugger that's a buoy," so that was my introduction to war. The raid continued until about four o'clock in the morning and in the meantime our boats and a doctor had gone across to the Georgic and

37:00 tried to give first aide to the crew. It was on fire and the captain endeavoured to run it aground and in the meantime he collided with another ship called the Glenurn set that on fire and they were both burning. The next morning we towed the Glenurn off the mud and

37:30 then we proceeded through the canal. That was a bit dangerous because there were around about eighteen magnetic mines been sown by German aircraft in the canal so it was a very narrow water way. Where the mines were they had a red flag just before you got to where the actual mine was they all had to stop chipping or using a chipping hammer and they shut down

38:00 the main engines and with as many ventilating fans as they could to minimise the noise and we just glided gently over where the mine was. This took us about four hours I think to get to the great bit of

lakes, it was pretty traumatic actually you didn't know if a mine was going to go off under you or not. We got to the great bit of lakes

- 38:30 we had to wait there because what they were doing was they were taking ships through in convoys with an Egyptian pilot to go the rest of the way. When we got to the great bit of lake the skipper Harry Howden said, "Hands to bay on ship side." He let us all have a jump into the sea, we dropped anchor and we all had a swim in the lake. It was very salty but
- 39:00 it was a welcomed relief. The rest of the trip was uneventful and we duly arrived in Alexandria and then we were operating under Admiral Cunningham with the Eastern Mediterranean Fleet.

Tape 4

00:30 **You were telling us your next move in Alexandria?**

In Alexandria harbour there was quite a large fleet, there were three battleships, there was the Queen Elizabeth, Valiant and Barham, and a large number of cruisers and destroyers and about seven submarines in there.

- 01:00 Our task in the Mediterranean [Sea] consisted mainly of trying to intercept the Italian fleet when it was at sea and covering convoys to Malta or acting as a distraction. For example our first trip to sea we went to sea with a battle fleet and tried to distract
- 01:30 the Germans from attacking a convoy which was going to Malta from the other end. During this period also the Germans had air bases in the Greek Islands and we were sort of always within aircraft range at sea, which was something that we had to be very careful about,
- 02:00 apart from going to sea with the fleet and trying to intercept the Italian fleet. Shortly after we arrived after this we went to Haifa which was Palestine which is a British mandated territory and it was suspected I think that the Germans were going to try and land in Cyprus so we
- 02:30 sort of stood by there. From Haifa we went to Port Said which is on the Mediterranean end of the Red Sea and loaded up nine hundred odd British troops and took them to Famagusta a high speed trip and landed there about two o'clock in the morning, took about two hours to unload the troops and back to
- 03:00 Haifa again. We did that a couple of times. Also while we were in Haifa the captain decided we'd organise the troops to have a look at Palestine. The chaplain organised a couple of bus loads and we visited Nazareth
- 03:30 and that's where Jesus was born and then on to the Sea of Galilee, they had us all have a swim in the sea with Galilee. It was very fascinating to have a look at the countryside of Palestine at that particular time. The farmers were still farming in the old age old fashion of piling the corn in a big heap and
- 04:00 beating with plows and throwing up the husks in the air and having them blow away in the wind. They sort of a donkey ground around and around in circle around a well with little buckets on it and putting water plume type of a thing it was very very primitive. It was a pretty enjoyable trip actually.
- 04:30 I was up on the upper deck standing next to one of the boys we were just chatting away and looking and all of a sudden he said 'oh what was that' I don't know where it was from but somebody had fired a rifle at us and the bullet went through his arm and I don't know if it was Jewish terrorists or what but at that
- 05:00 particular time the Jewish refugees from Europe were trying to get into Palestine. An interesting thing there was a ship in Haifa harbour laying on its side and when the tide was low you could swim across to it and just stand on the side. What had happened was apparently that ship was loaded up with refugees from Europe and got into Haifa harbour and it was the
- 05:30 British mandate at the time and they were trying to keep them away. So they decided to scuttle the ship in the harbour but unfortunately their scuttling went wrong and instead of sinking it to the bottom it rolled over and they all drowned. That was a rather sad ending. From Haifa
- 06:00 we went back to Alexandria and then we started doing bombardments. For example there was a large gun up the coast from Tobruk which shell, they had destroyers running supplies and re-enforcements and taking the wounded out of Tobruk
- 06:30 it was called a 'tobruk Ferry'. You have probably heard the old 'scrap iron flotilla' boys talking about that. This big German gun and apparently it was on rails and embedded in a cliff and they were trying to dislodge it so we went up with a 7th Squadron and there were three cruisers and we all had a go at bombarding this particular gun. I don't know whether
- 07:00 we succeeded or not. On two or three other occasions we also did shore bombardments at Halfaya Pass and Bardia. The routine there was the cruisers would steam line ahead from a range of about fourteen

thousand yards we had aircraft dropping flares over the target area. Then the leading ship would fire

07:30 one or two shells and the spotting aircraft would say whether they were on the target and then they would all join in. We would probably fire about thirty rounds a gun and then every now and again they'd say 'shift target' and we'd get on to another target. By that time the range would have increased and in some case about twenty two thousand yards and on the quarterdeck

08:00 when the last round fired you could feel the stern vibrators we got up to full speed to get out before it was too late. On one occasion the Germans opened fire at us with their shore batteries and some wag said up there, "I think our shots are falling short?" Somebody else said, "No that's the shore batteries opening fire at us."

08:30 But anyway they didn't hit us. It's pretty hard hitting a moving target. After you have fired thirty rounds of gun the gun house was full of fumes so the skipper use to let us out of the turret just to get a breath of fresh air just outside the turret and look at all

09:00 the flames and fires we started with our shells. In later life I thought to myself I wondered how many poor buggers we killed during that bombardment but at the time we didn't think anything of it. That was our so journey into the Mediterranean.

Could you describe your turret?

The turret itself weighs

09:30 about six ton, it's like a big mushroom. The visible part on the top is the gun house has two guns in it and it's got a large long stork on it, which goes down into the shell handling room. It rotates on rollers so that it can be rotated, and we have about ten men in the turret all told.

10:00 It can be controlled from the searching director, which is a little tower just above the bridge. Each gun is controlled by a lever to elevator or to press it so we had a dial with a pointer on it, which is the director pointer and a pointer for the gun. So when the two pointers are lined up our elevation is right.

10:30 In the little compartment in the front of the turret there is a training and he has the same thing he has a little steering wheel and drives the turret left or right. The ammunition is separate ammunition and the shells themselves are loaded and they come up through a hoist onto a tray and this was my job. The tray then was pushed

11:00 forward after the breech was opened, and then there were two people who rammed the shell into the gun and after that there is a little trap door in the floor. One of them would then pick up the cordite charge, which is about that long and that would go in behind the shell and the breech loader would operate and close the breech and insert a cartridge in the breech. Then

11:30 when the gun was loaded he had a little switch on the side which completed the firing circuit to the gun. The people in the director would see by their lights whether left and right gun were ready in each turret, so he had a set of four lights and when all the lights were on he knew that all the guns were loaded and ready to fire. He would have a trigger up there and just press it and

12:00 the guns would fire. They could also be fired in local if the director was shot away or something like that.

How many guns in each turret?

Two and then we had four turrets and they were numbered front end of the ship, there is A, B and X and Y, so my turret was Y turret.

12:30 **As you have just mentioned it must of gotten fairly claustrophobic and quite smelly after you had being in action?**

Yes but we all must of smelt the same I suppose so it didn't make much difference. One thing I will say about sailors and they were all very clean, and that's one thing at least we had

13:00 was a shower which was great, or a bath in a bucket which is what we use to do, our personal hygiene was very big.

You were just describing earlier your shore bombardment tasks. I'm wondering you mentioned that you could

13:30 **see the shore from where you were when you came out of the turret?**

I couldn't actually see the shore but I could see the fires on one occasion. They would have been around about twenty thousand yards, that would have been about fifteen mile away or something like that.

I'm just wondering what you knew of your

14:00 **targets at that time?**

There they did tell us because we had a speaker in the gun house and whoever was up in the gunnery

- control position was able to tell us 'field workshop or roof of tanks in a
- 14:30 compound could have been huts' and things of that nature so we knew what the target was. On that particular bombardment was clearly defined because when they said, "Shift target," we knew we had destroyed the target we were firing at.
- 15:00 **Perhaps you could take me through the procedure of called to action stations?**
- We were already closed up in the turret as I said at eight o'clock, we were there and we knew we were going to carry out the bombardment, we were told we were going to bombard a certain thing. We were ready but it was just a matter
- 15:30 of them saying, "All guns load, load, load." Depending on the type of ammunition we were using for example if we were firing at the gun near Tobruk we used our ordinary armour piercing shells. But if we were bombarding shore establishments we used what we called high explosive shells that would exploded just on impact.
- 16:00 The armour piercing shells wouldn't have been much good. There was a problem called 'sympathetic detonation' you couldn't fire the two shells simultaneously from each gun so what we had to do when we were using the non armoured piercing shells. There was a faction of a time difference
- 16:30 between say one gun firing and the other gun firing when the last shell come out of the barrel it would hit the shock wave of the first shell that had been fired and could explode outside the turret. When you used those kind of shells we use to fire the left guns then the right guns, left guns, right guns.
- It has to all be very highly coordinated?**
- Yes,
- 17:00 but that was sort of accounted for.
- Going back to that gun emplacement that you were firing on near Tobruk, can you describe that gun emplacement?**
- No I can't and I don't know anything about it, all these bombardments took place at night, it wasn't safe to be there in the daylight so
- 17:30 we use to try and arrive on the scene at about one or two o'clock in the morning and being in the gun house you wouldn't of seen anything and there was nothing to see anyway after we completed out shoot. Accept for that one occasion when we were able to watch our results of the shot off Bardia.
- What was the scene like when you came out?**
- 18:00 We just had our breath of fresh air on the quarterdeck and we were just able to see firers in the distance so we knew that we had done something.
- What was the threat of aerial bombardment?**
- At both sea and harbour
- 18:30 we were under constant air attacks, not to the same extent as the ships that were evacuating Greece and Crete. For example I think in June of that year Russia attacked Germany and the Stukas were operating in the Mediterranean were called to the Russian front so we didn't have to contend with the Stukas which were a pretty fierce dive bombers at the time
- 19:00 so we just had ordinary Italian and German aircraft. We were attacked by torpedo bombers, high level bombers and dive bombers, but we evaded those. It's a bit frightening in the harbour though because each ship had a ark of fire, when the bombers use to come over and bomb the harbour
- 19:30 we all had to open fire with our high angle gun. I've seen some firework displays on Sydney Harbour but I haven't seen anything to resemble the fire works display that was put up by the fleet in Alexandria harbour. The actual noise and variety of big guns and small guns and there were all kinds of weird and wonderful rockets and goodness knows what going off. It was really frightening
- 20:00 in a way. The next morning the ammunition barge would go chuffing around the fleet to replenish your ammunition again ready for the next night. It was an unusual set of circumstances in Alexandria because all our operations seemed to take place over two or three days we never stayed at sea
- 20:30 very long we just did our mission and then came back into the harbour because you couldn't stay at sea too or go too far away. You were well within range of quite heavy concentration from Greece, so that was always hit and run.
- 21:00 **You mentioned a little bit of time you spent on shore in Palestine. I'm wondering about shore leave in Alexandria?**
- Yes we use to get leave until ten o'clock at night. It is a bit dangerous in a way you couldn't just stroll around back streets when we were in Alex [Alexandria] because you'd finish up with a knife in you

somewhere.

21:30 The Egyptians weren't all that friendly although they were in some ways but our main place of interest was the Fleet Club. The Royal Navy in all the bases around the world always established these very good clubs. You could go there have a meal, have a drink, play tombola have some very big games

22:00 too which was good and they were worth a lot of money, so that use to be the pattern.

Did you win any money on tombola?

Not that I know of. What was interesting they had served Egyptian beer but they didn't have glasses they had these beer bottles cut down

22:30 so you'd finish up with half a beer bottle full of beer. They were known as 'Lady Blamey's', have you heard that term before have you?

Perhaps you could describe what was in a 'Lady Blamey'?

The main thing was the glass. Sir Thomas Blamey was the army officer in charge of the troops in the Middle East.

23:00 Tom was a character, you probably know a little bit about Tom Blamey so I don't think his wife trusted him very much in the Middle East she was attached to the Red Cross and she decided to go over there too. So for some reason these cut off beer bottles were called 'Lady Blamey's', I think it might have come from the troops. That was a method of

23:30 drinking our beer. We didn't ever drink from the bottle in those days like it's common now, we always had to have a glass of some description. Even though Alexandria is a very very cultured city with many races, there were Greek quarters and people in the shops were

24:00 multilingual, they could speak Arabic, French, Italian, Greek, English it was rather a cosmopolitan city but a beautiful city. As I said we didn't get to see a whole lot of it and there was a fair amount of damage done to it during the air raids.

I guess I know I asked this question about your time in Perth but I'm

24:30 **going to ask the same question about the Middle East?**

You want to know about Sister Street, you do, I can see that. They were brothels run by the British Army.

Can you tell me your experience or how you came to know about it?

I went there, I had to have a look,

25:00 didn't everybody, 'when in Egypt do as the Egyptians do'.

Were you nervous?

Yes I was.

I can image you would have been, you were very young?

I was yes and I don't know what all the fuss was about and I don't know why I bothered. It's sort of a pretty

25:30 sorted sort of a thing isn't it in a sense, to pretty much go on after it, they favoured their blue ointment and washing your penis and all this but anyway it is necessary. I think with the out of bound ones that VD [Venereal Disease] was very predominant.

You managed to avoid VD?

Yes I did.

26:00 **I'm wondering if you managed to avoid the provos [Provosts - Military Police]?**

Yes, we didn't have any trouble with the provos, not in the Middle East anyway.

It sounds like you were growing up pretty fast and got to know your way around, did you have mates

26:30 **that were with you?**

Yes you always went ashore with somebody it wasn't safe to be on your own. Although on one occasion I don't know what I was doing but I was in a part of Alex, I was going shopping or looking at something and I was on my own and I was surrounded by

27:00 some Egyptian men, they were very menacing and they wanted my money and so forth. I sort of took to

the heels and ran, it was pretty dangerous to be on your own.

Were was Sister Street?

I wouldn't have a clue, it was in Alex somewhere.

27:30 We use to go by boat to the landing and then there'd be a fleet of gharries, those horse drawn vehicles two or three of us would hop into that and go to the Fleet Club. I only went to Sister Street once just to see what it was like.

28:00 **Who went to the Fleet Club?**

We all did, nearly all the sailors off the ship and all the English sailors were there too, it was a huge big place. Another reason for going there too was the food because if you went off in the afternoon and had your evening meal there you at least knew

28:30 it was pretty hygienic where as you wouldn't know what the conditions were if you ate outside of there.

If you don't mind me asking how much was it for a visit to Sister Street?

Forty piastres

29:00 its around about four shillings Australian. One good thing about being in Alexandria was we were paid in Egyptian pounds. An Egyptian pound was worth twenty five and nine pence Australia, so it was a big incentive not

29:30 to spend too much money in Alexandria. We had a Commonwealth Bank branch on board the ship so every time you banked an Egyptian pound you were credit with twenty five and nine pence, that was very good.

So you were a young sailor with some money in your pocket?

Not a lot of money because when I first went to sea I was on one and nine pence a day,

30:00 which didn't leave you very much. For example when I was in Sydney and being under the age of eighteen we only had what they called 'boy scouts leave' we had to be back on board at ten o'clock. You could have a couple of drinks go to the pictures, have a meal and that was it for the fortnight just about.

30:30 When I became an able seaman the money got a bit better, I think we were on six shillings a day I think, so that was a lot and you could do more with it.

I'm just going to ask you just one last question about the Sister Street. I know that as a young teenager you get real clumsy you don't know what you are doing sometimes. I'm just wondering

31:00 **did you get a condom given to you at the brothels?**

Yes. I can't remember what nationality she was but I think she might have been anything, but she was a bit on the dark side they had all nationalities.

31:30 **Were you shocked or surprised?**

I was like the lamb to the slaughter. I wanted everything done for me. After all they knew more about it than I did.

32:00 **That I can image would have been quite a life changing experience?**

It wasn't actually life changing it was sort of 'oh, that's what it's all about', but it was a start.

I'm wondering just going back to the action that the Hobart was involved in

32:30 **with shore bombardment. Did the Hobart sustain any damage during that?**

No. I did tell you that they did open fire with their shore batteries but a fair way off the mark so we arrived unscathed. We were lucky in other ways because

33:00 always around us there was always a ship being torpedoed somewhere particularly on that Tobruk run, there were quite a few Germans submarines operating in the Mediterranean too. I know in November we lost the Parramatta, which was hit by a German torpedo, there weren't many survivors off that either, so it was a bit dangerous

33:30 at sea apart from the aircraft.

When did you get news of leaving the Mediterranean?

We had just come back from one of our operations, bombardment I think on the 7th December and of course we heard about Pearl Harbor.

- 34:00 On the 9th December we sailed out of Alexandria because the Australian government had recalled all our ships and troops. We didn't come back to Australia we went from there to Colombo. That was an interesting thing if I can back track a little. When we relieved the Perth the ship had very little in the way of close range weapons but
- 34:30 the Perth had guns on loan from the fleet gunnery officer of four barrelled pom-pom and if you remember I mentioned that during the refit there the aircraft was taking off and made for the pom-pom. So that gun was transferred to us plus a couple of twenty millimetre cannon and also some Italian Breda guns that had been captured during the push
- 35:00 through the desert and modified for anti-aircraft work on the ship so we had those. When we were about to leave the Mediterranean and the fleet gunnery officer wanted his four barrelled pom-pom back and Harry Howden said no. The fleet gunnery officer said, "You won't need them where you are going." He said, "They can't fly anyway," meaning the Japanese.
- 35:30 They were pathetic words. "They can't fly, they can't shoot straight," and all that silly rubbish and that was that. In the meantime, we had been alongside a wharf and there was another one of these four barrelled pom-poms in a crate on a wharf. So Harry being Harry hooked the crane
- 36:00 on slings and hoisted it up on board so we nicked off with that one too. When we got to Colombo and went into the dockyard they made a mounting on the stern, on the quarterdeck to put this four barrelled pom-pom on which was just as well because we needed it. We zoomed through the canal and
- 36:30 on our way to Colombo we were contacted to say the navy was on a little island called Minicoy were becoming restless so we applied a little bit of 'gunboat diplomacy'. We sailed up to the island and we landed a landing party with arms and had a
- 37:00 little pow wow with the chief and told him to pull his head in and we sailed on our way. You probably have heard that term 'gunboat diplomacy', it's the way that the British use to solve their problems, so there was no problem after that. We sailed on to Colombo and we were still operating convoys from India and places
- 37:30 to Singapore, from Colombo to Singapore we did that run quite a few times. Then I recall we came down to Fremantle and picked up another convoy to Singapore but we arrived at Singapore the same time the Japs were arriving on the other side of the island on the 1st February.
- 38:00 In the meantime we had had a few bombing attacks on the convoys but so far nobody got hit. We had a few raids on the naval base.

Tape 5

- 00:30 **Just going back a bit, you were a very young lad when you went onto the Hobart as we have already talked about. You mentioned the air raid at Port Tewfik was the first time that the Hobart came under attack. How much did that**
- 01:00 **experience change the war for you, it was on from that point, how did you respond to the threat of being killed perhaps?**
- It was a culture shock, it was a rude awakening I suppose because up to that period we had been sort of cruising around the coast of Australia and apart from the fact that we might of struck a battle ship in the Indian Ocean, no the war
- 01:30 really hadn't come home to me. That's why not that Hobart hadn't been under attack before it had, but that was my first experience.
- How was your reaction at that point?**
- Possibly my reaction was, "So this is what it's all about,
- 02:00 and just get on with it."
- From there on in in the Mediterranean you were under fire more and more often, what frightened you as a young seaman?**
- I suppose it is more apprehension than fright, I don't recall anything
- 02:30 that I was specifically that I was frightened of. I didn't want to die but I can't recall any other emotions other than doing what I had to do. I think that's probably the benefit of the intensive training that you do to instilling in you that whatever is happening around you you still do your job. In my case
- 03:00 shells had to be fed into the gun and I know that it is terrifying, but I don't think I had any other emotions than that.

Was there anybody on board the Hobart during your time that you heard that lost their nerve?

I'm always

03:30 mindful of the fact that I was always in a very isolated position because during action stations I was locked in this turret, so what went on around us I didn't know anybody else's reactions except our own reactions in the turret. From my experience of that turret we all did our job whether the people were frightened you wouldn't be known by just looking at them.

04:00 Probably frightened inwardly but outwardly I'm not going to show that I'm scared, there's a peer thing there I'd say.

What about hearing the news of the Sydney can you tell us what happened there?

At that particular time there wasn't a lot of news

04:30 we knew in November that the Sydney was missing, but we didn't know. I think it took quite a while before they even came across the survivors of the Cornwell to put the story together. Apart from knowing the ship was missing presumed sunk by whom we didn't know. It was a loss yes, the whole of a ship's company that went down with it and

05:00 they were people that we had known, people from the service. You felt a sense of loss.

Did it also make what you were doing seem a little bit more real perhaps knowing that the Sydney had gone missing?

I don't think so as far as I'm concerned. While you are concerned

05:30 about that you are also concerned about your own survivals. I think at that particular time we were too busy to be worrying about anybody else, but we were sad about it. The same with the Parramatta the few survivors who were able to come on board and had a meal with us, some of them we had already done our course with

06:00 and we were sad about that. Life sort of goes on, you just get on with it.

Did you personally have any particular mates from your training that went down on either of those ships?

Not that I know of on the Sydney, and not on the Parramatta. I did have in a

06:30 couple of the chaps that I joined the navy with were drafted onto the Hobart and then when we were in the Mediterranean they were drafted to the Yarra.

Just one last question from what you and Kathy [interviewer] were talking about before. You mentioned VD and that was a big problem

07:00 **for the navy, was there any formal education from them about that?**

The formal education was 'don't do it'.

Was it a big problem?

Not that I know of there were only a small percentage of people that I know of who contracted VD.

07:30 **Moving on back we will go back to when you arrived in Singapore. Did you hear about the news of the Japanese entering the war, was that a shock at the time, how did that news come to you?**

I suppose it was a shock in a sense although those last six months of 1941 it was

08:00 expected. I can recall in the turret one night because we had lights on inside the gun house because it was completely sealed so we could actually read and we used to get magazines from home. I always recall in November I was sitting in the turret reading Pix magazine and in

08:30 the centre page was all about the Brewster Buffaloes and the Royal Australian Air Force they had in Singapore and it showed a picture of eighteen aircraft men standing along the wing and Brewster Buffaloes saying how strong they were and how they fly and how the Japanese pilots are myopic and couldn't fly so forth and forth all about these Brewster Buffaloes. I think of old Brooke-Popham was the British

09:00 air commander in Singapore saying, "Brewster Buffaloes is good enough to me," famous last words.

How quickly did those words and the other intelligence that you mention become clear to you that this was not the case?

On our first convoy from

09:30 Colombo to Singapore they were buzzing around about a day out from Singapore the Buffaloes were

buzzing around, 'good o', next trip there weren't so many of them and the next trip none, except a couple of Catalinas so quickly disappeared off the scene very early in the piece. By that time we were starting to be attacked by

10:00 their aircraft at sea and also in Singapore Harbour. I'm not quite sure it might have been Christmas Eve and we were at the naval base and that's where I saw my first Japanese air raid over Singapore. They are like little silver wings up in the sky and they were coming from Vietnam, Cam Ranh Bay so they had a pretty good range,

10:30 they could cover the whole of the Malayan Peninsula and Singapore Island.

Can you describe to us what you could see from your advantage point on the Hobart?

All we could see was just these little silver butterflies in the search lights.

What were the celebrations for Christmas that year?

11:00 No Christmas celebrations at all, it just became another day.

Can you describe a bit more about Singapore harbour and what you saw of that when you arrived there a month later?

When we arrived as I said on the 1st February because Singapore naval base had been abandoned so we tied up at

11:30 Colin Wharf at Keppel Harbour. It was pretty chaotic and at that particular time my day job was motor boats crew we had one of our motor boats as our sort of water taxi, general purpose.

12:00 I would be on the wharf and we had to tend the lines because the tide was in and out pretty high so we had to keep on slacking the line or whatever. My recollection is quite a number of soldiers wondering up and down the wharf someone said, "Mate is this ship going to Australia?" and I said, "No I don't think so." Sort of disorganised chaos, in other words.

12:30 But that was only from the prospective of looking from the wharf we didn't go anywhere apart from that. The only other people that sort of went anywhere was the skipper had got some commandeered army trucks and we had a couple of truck drivers so they were allowed to go to the naval base to salvage

13:00 any equipment that we needed and they were able to get quite a large amount of diving gear. Also the captain decided that he didn't want the British coat of arms on the dockyard gates to fall into Japanese hands so he had them removed and brought back on board on the ship. Also some of the parties that were actually doing this were salvaging around the sheds

13:30 and doing a little bit of looting on the side. I know there was one shed that contained the whole heap of Singer sewing machines in little wooden crates and there was this spectacle of about twenty or thirty sailors coming down off the wharf up on to the gangway with a sewing machine on their shoulder and being told that that was looting and to put them all back. Some of the other sailors found quantities

14:00 of grog and got stuck into that and it was a bit funny. But there was no looting we weren't allowed to loot. Later on when I was living at Tuross Heads I was doing a bit of electrical work and I was doing a job in this ladies house and she introduced me to

14:30 her father who was living with her and he been in Changi Prison and he lost a leg. I said, "We left Singapore on February 2nd," and I said, "I will bring you a couple of photos to show you." At the time I had the photo of all the sailors with the sewing machines. He looked at it and burst out laughing and I said, "What's so funny?" He said, "See those sewing machines?"

15:00 He said, "I was on a working party loading those sewing machines onto a ship going back to Japan."

What other examples of the chaos around the wharves?

That's about it, I can't say too much about it because I didn't see too much. We weren't allowed to sort of move away from where I was. Apart from the ships off

15:30 the dock yard and also the truck people brought back two truck loads of tinned peaches that they had scrounged from the dockyard, plus all this other diving gear. We were very thankful for the peaches later on.

How was morale at this time on the ship?

The morale was always good on the ship,

16:00 it may not have been so good ashore. Morale was always high at that particular time, we had a good ship, we had a good captain and we had a pretty good crew.

You weren't winning the war though?

No we were losing the war, we were definitely losing it but never mind.

- 16:30 We left Singapore and the next day we came across a merchant ship being attacked by three Japanese aircraft. We were the British destroyer called the Tenedos
- 17:00 so we full steamed ahead and opened fire with our anti-aircraft guns and drove them off. In the meantime they set fire to this ship so we sent the Tenedos alongside the ship to try and put the fires out which they temporarily did. They had about fifty to sixty people on board, they were the crew
- 17:30 plus passengers who were getting off in Singapore. They told them to load their wounded and the fit ones into the boats and to bring them alongside our ship and they sent a doctor over too because some of them were very badly burnt and injured.
- 18:00 The doctor was in the boat administering morphine to the sick ones. We didn't drop anchor we just stayed on the way because while we were doing this, the aircraft came back and dropped a few bombs around the ship, I think the nearest one was about one hundred yards away. We kept on unloading but what
- 18:30 sticks in my mind is when this life boat from the Noramola that was the name of the ship, came alongside the quarterdeck and we had to grab these people and bring them up over the side on to a lower gangway. But I can always remember grabbing hold of this Chinese seaman or fireman and all he had on was an athletic singlet. As I grabbed his shoulder and arm
- 19:00 to bring him up his skin peeled away in my hand he was so badly burnt. We got them on board and they administered first aide to them, we had quite a few, I think we had about fifty seven people on board. A lot of these people were Chinese or Indian the crew and about half a dozen of them died so we buried them at sea and the rest of them we off loaded
- 19:30 at Tanjong Priok.

What sort of sea burial did those survivors from the Noramola get from the Hobart?

Just the same as it had been for hundred of years. They had a sail maker who laid out a piece of canvas and at the feet

- 20:00 they put two old cannon shots, old balls of iron and then sewed the whole lot up. Then we had a board, which we suspended over the side and put the corpse on the board and slowly slid them down over the side. We had a chaplain
- 20:30 who said a few words as they went down, 'commit this body to the deep' and so forth. That was sort of a standard naval burial.

Were you personally involved in that?

No I wasn't personally involved because the sail maker was involved in sewing them up.

What were the rules about going to one of these services?

- 21:00 It was not a service as such because the ship was still under way and it was still in a dangerous area, so it was done fairly quickly, it had to be for safety reasons. It wasn't a matter of stopping the ship and having a memorial service, it was just a matter of getting the bodies down there and setting up the board and then sliding them off and just the chaplain saying
- 21:30 a few words as they departed the ship then on we go.

What did the crew know at this stage about where they were headed and what was happening, it was all a bit confused?

It was confusing. We were under orders from Commodore Collins who was the captain of the Sydney.

- 22:00 He was the naval officer in charge but the officer in charge of the Dutch East Indies from the British point of view was General Wavell so we were under his orders. Also because it was a Dutch colony when we were at sea we were under the command of the Dutch.

22:30 How were these orders communicated to the Hobart and then within the Hobart to the crew?

I don't know much about that side of it but all I know is we were told what we were doing, there was one around about the 4th February or something like that, we had sort of a mixed

- 23:00 bag of ships there, some of the destroyers that had been in the Mediterranean we had the Exeter and that's an eight-inch British cruiser. On our first operation was supposedly to stop a Japanese landing around Banka Strait, that was
- 23:30 a bit convoluted because we had British ships, American ships we had half a dozen American destroyers, old full frontal destroyers and then we had about half a dozen Dutch ships so we formed up into two lines with the British ships on one side and the Dutch on the other. We sailed through this Banka Island, the

24:00 Dutch had aircraft on their ships and they were doing reconnaissance and they sighted this force, which was what we were suppose to be attacking but we didn't actually sight them. We finished up just being heavily attacked all day under air attacks.

Can you describe one of those air attacks?

During that particular time the Japanese were using

24:30 high level bombing only and they fly in formation and they are sort of in multiples of three. There could be say nine, eighteen, twenty seven and they fly in formation and eluding aircraft would sort of flash an orange light under it's undercarriage somewhere. Then they'd all simultaneously pick out a target and they might attack one particular ship

25:00 and then they'd drop a stick of bombs around that particular ship, and then they'd repeat it. They got very adapted to watching the aircraft and watching when the bomb doors opened but when the bombs started falling they could see and then they'd take evasive action. So it was a case of sailing every which way

25:30 when you are under attack.

What would happen on the ship at that stage?

In those days we didn't have radar and that particular time there was a fair amount of cloud about, it was hot, humid and overcast and sometimes we wouldn't have any warning

26:00 of an impending attack. The first thing an aircraft engine might be heard and the next thing there would be a stick of bombs falling around the ship, but if we were able to detect them. We were lucky in one way because the Exeter had radar and she was able to detect the formations before they arrived. So we devised a plan of using the six-inch guns against the aircraft, the six-inch guns had a limited elevation

26:30 and they couldn't fire if an aircraft was over head. If the formation was a fair way away we could get in say two shots each gun. What we did was load a long fuse, a fuse setting which was estimated when we fired the gun and hopefully the shell would explode in about the area where the aircraft were in the intervening

27:00 eight seconds or so it took to reload we would load the second one with a shorter fuse, that was our lot. Then of course by this time in the gun house you could hear the four-inch gun high angle guns firing in the pom-poms depending on how close they got. Then you'd hear the bomb blast.

Was there a

27:30 **siren or a warning that alerted you to your post?**

First of all for action stations when I first joined the ship they had a bugler boy who use to sound the alarm, but that was too cumbersome because by the time they summoned the bugler and blew the alarm it was too late. Up on the upper deck near the gangway they had a little box with a

28:00 microphone in it, that was where a lot of the announcements were made particularly when we were in harbour, so affixed to that box they had a little siren. When aircraft were approaching or were they had been sighted they would switch the siren on and swing it around in front of the microphone. As soon as that siren was heard you had to run like hell to get to your action stations.

28:30 **Can you still hear the sound of that siren?**

Yes I can't still hear the sound of that siren.

What sort of emotion does that bring back to think about that sound?

It's deafening, I will tell you a bit more about that when I get down to my post war period. Quite a few of these

29:00 fruitless chases of these Japanese ships and with this combined Dutch, British and American fleet on this particular time that we are talking about we came under some of the heaviest attacks we had ever experienced. We had thirteen actual attacks during the day, with varying amounts of aircraft

29:30 and on total they say that there were one hundred and nine aircraft that attacked the ships, and drop upwards of six hundred bombs around us. The bombs fell very close to the ships and did a bit of damage to the super structure and caused injuries through flying bomb splinters. The skipper use to say, he was very detached and he could stand on the bridge

30:00 and calmly manoeuvre the ship and on occasions he said, "We went from twenty four knots ahead on the port engine to twenty four knots a stern and full ahead on the starboard engines." So he turned the ship like a speed boat and got out of the way of the bombs, they either fell down that side or down that side or astern.

30:30 **What was your station at this stage?**

I was always in my turret, so as I said we had our moment of glory when we had our chance to fire two rounds and we had to just sit there and listen to the noises of the other aircraft guns going off and the bombs, it was frightening.

What about cruising

31:00 **stations at this stage for you, what was happening when the ship wasn't under attack?**

We were in what we called 'defence stations' and that meant the armour was closed up, that meant we had one gun on each turret closed up. On that particular occasion the attacks

31:30 were pretty continuous right through the day so we didn't get a chance but on some other occasions when we only had two or three attacks during the day. I know the crew that wasn't actually on watch at that particular time, there was always a race down to the mess deck to make a cup of tea, the good old cup of tea and a smoke.

Was that something that was

32:00 **able to calm you down, how did you think that worked?**

Yes, it worked ok up to a point. Cigarettes were plentiful in the navy it was easy to get cigarette than a feed.

How much did you smoke back in those days?

We use to smoke twenty or thirty a day I guess. We couldn't in the turret but we could down the mess deck, mind you it was a bit muggy but then again

32:30 we all did it.

The ship was headed for Tanjong Priok, what was your next port of call after this?

We were operating out of Tanjong Priok or the Port of Batavia.

Can you describe that for us?

33:00 The harbour itself was sort of crammed with ships, convoys that had arrived and what do you do with them? This is only hear say but it was pretty strongly rumoured that Howden, the captain of the Hobart really went over Collins head and got into his motor boat in Tanjong Priok and the Port of Batavia and went around to all these merchant ships

33:30 and said, "Get out, go to Australia, go to Colombo, but get out." He said, "I'll give you a couple of hours to clear the harbour or I will open fire on you." Otherwise they would have just fallen into Japanese hands.

How far away were the Japanese at this stage?

We don't know, they already

34:00 got Singapore but they were already involved in landings around Java so we didn't actually see. Even though we were chasing these very large concentrations of shipping and transports to do these invasions. They were always one jump ahead of us because they had control of the air

34:30 and they knew exactly where we were so they could take any kind of avoiding action they needed. In our limited resources we were just relying on the few aircraft that was available in the Dutch hands and the little aircraft the Dutch on the ships. In other words the information was very very sketchy.

35:00 There was one occasion you might recall some of the returning 7th Division were diverted into Java, in fact Winston Churchill wanted to send them to Burma but Curtin didn't like that idea.

35:30 I don't even know where it is on the map a place called Oosthaven and I think it's in Java and there was a beautiful ship called the Orcades it had a portion of the 7th Division on board. The captain was pretty wary of where he was actually, and he was a bit worried about the danger. He had just unloaded on to the island these troops

36:00 and I think if I can recall that they were only fitted with their rifle and packs, all their other headquarters and artillery and goodness knows what was on other ships but he wanted to get out. They just dropped these poor unfortunate soldiers and we were detailed off to escort the Orcades out through Sunda Strait and well into the Indian Ocean and then return to Tanjong Priok. When we got back to

36:30 Tanjong Priok the Perth, Exeter and the destroyers had formed up and they were waiting for us to refuel and join up with them to join Dorman's forces. We had to go alongside a tanker called Warserter and refuel. We had just got

37:00 tide up alongside the tanker when the air raid signs a shore went and we closed up and I can recall running from the four-inch gun deck to the wide turret and just making it. Because coming across the harbour were nine Mitsubishi twin engine bombers followed by another nine, followed by another nine.

These twenty seven

- 37:30 aircraft attacked in turn and dropped bombs around the two ships, one of the bombs hit the oil tanker that we were pumping from and exploded from underneath and just threw us up in the air. Apart from that no other bombs hit us but they reckoned they dropped about sixty bombs around the ships. I know the upper deck was actually
- 38:00 drenched with mud and dead fish and there was shrapnel marks all around the place and a couple of people were hit with shrapnel. We cut ourselves adrift from the Warserter and went around in the harbour and we went back into the Port of Batavia alongside to refuel because we were running low.
- 38:30 In the meantime after we galvanised the port authorities into action to try and get some fuel by the time we sailed out again the other group of ships had gone, so they took part in that that first part of the battle at Java Sea. Then Wavell had already departed and left Collins in charge and Collins said to form up as western striking force with two old cruisers the Danae and the Dragon
- 39:00 from World War I and two old destroyers and we were to intercept the western landing force. This was on the 27th I think of February and we were instructed to try and contact the enemy and if not then proceed through Sunda Strait so to be off Toppers Island
- 39:30 at six am or something in the morning. Luckily we only got with in about fifty or sixty miles from this Japanese force. We sailed out through Sunda Strait out into the Indian Ocean and we had to go to a place called Padang on the coast of Sumatra and bring off refugees. There were quite a few thousand people of all races,
- 40:00 soldiers, sailors, Europeans, Chinese and so the destroyers went in and picked them up and then we brought them on board. We had about six or seven hundred people on board and by that time not only was our fuel running out our food was running out too. We these extra six hundred people on board so we finished up using
- 40:30 that cargo of tin peaches that we had. All the bully beef we had left, we raided all the live boats with all their provisions. We had bully beef stew, bully beef baked, bully beef casserole and tinned peaches. We got these people to Colombo and then we returned to Fremantle.

Tape 6

- 00:30 **You were telling us about the Hobart receiving a message or a signal from the Perth?**

We were receiving a signal from the Perth saying she had sighted a ship, I think a cruiser or a destroyer. What we think is that the

- 01:00 western striking force that we had been looking for were the ones that the Perth and the Exeter ran into and of course they were just over whelmed and sunk.

When did you receive that news?

It would have been probably shortly after and that was a shock to us to, that was the second of our sister ships that

- 01:30 were sunk. The unfortunate thing about it was the survivors went into prison of war camps and a couple of hundred of them died as a result.

I'm just wondering if there was any way that your ships company could mark that great tragedy?

- 02:00 No, I suppose you can say in those days of not instant communication news was very disjointed and we didn't now all the details but we knew the ship was lost but we had our own problems. You just get on with it.

- 02:30 **What did you get on with?**

This was after we got out of Sunda Strait and we picked up refugees at Padang and dropped them off at Colombo, then from Colombo to Fremantle we escorted some of the returning ships with the 7th Division on back to Fremantle. When we got to Fremantle

- 03:00 there was all the tattered remnants of the Java Sea tied up alongside the wharf. We had a couple of destroyers, the Dutch light cruiser Kromp and half a dozen corvettes. We had a big Thanksgiving service on the and all the ships companies joined in that we had saved.

- 03:30 Also waiting on the wharf was one hundred and ninety tons of lead ingots. In morning and after lunch we'd fall in and grab an ingot and go back on board and take it right down below to the engine room. The idea of that was to compensate for the extra weight of radar that they were going to put on the ship, also extra

- 04:00 anti-aircraft guns, so we needed extra balance down below. That was rather funny one of the American sailors walking passed looked at the lead and looked at us and just spoke in general, "Say guys, what are you doing with that lead?" and Bill Campbell one of my mates said, "We make our own bullets." The American said, "Hey, Jesus." He said,
- 04:30 "I knew you could punch them out, but I didn't know you could made them as you went," he was staggered but of course that wasn't true at all but it sounded good. We sailed with another American troop ship, near the corvette had a submarine contact so we returned back to Fremantle and the next day we sailed again
- 05:00 with that troop ship and dropped it into Adelaide. We let the Adelaide natives off and the captain had been given a signal saying that we had to be ready to operate the Coral Sea on the 1st May and he said over the ships broadcasting system, "Don't mention a word of this get out because if a word of it gets out," he said, "I'll be instantly court-martialled,"
- 05:30 so nobody said a word. Then we called into Melbourne on our way around and I think we got to Melbourne around about half past eight at night and he had already arranged to have a train at Port Melbourne to take us into the city and to go home, because we only had a limited time because that have only been March getting into April, so we arrived in Sydney in April. The Western Australians, South Australians and the
- 06:00 Victorians were on leave and the Sydney's and Queenslanders sailed the ship around to Sydney and went into a dockyard then to have an extensive refit. While the ship was in Sydney the captain decided we'd have Christmas in April so he detailed off a couple of officers to arrange this with a big Christmas tree
- 06:30 and all our families were able to come, they found beer and everything so that the families could have a belated Christmas in April. We heard of Christmas in July but that was a long way before that. That was the kind of man Howden was he was a terrific bloke.

Can you perhaps tell us a bit more about why he was

07:00 **so well regarded?**

He was a stern disciplinarian but he also had a human side to him. He had very good sailors on the ship but the trouble is a lot of them use to drink too much and some of them would come on board drunk

- 07:30 and a drift as the old saying goes late. If you were late for getting back on board you were immediately put on captains report. What Howden use to do was he probably use to have the captains report the day before we went to sea and so he would give him seven days stoppage of leave,
- 08:00 it didn't matter anyway because we were at sea so he was a very human man in that way. He was also very skilful in the way that he handled the ship both in the Mediterranean and in Java, his ship handling was absolutely superb. He became very well liked.

I'm wondering whether you got to meet him at all?

- 08:30 No. The only time I ever came face to face with a captain was rarely, now come to think of it I can't even remember meeting him personally. The captain and even to the officers you were remote a figure above everyone else. He had his own cabin, his own staff and he was just as remote
- 09:00 from the officers. He doesn't go into the boardroom with the officers unless he is actually invited, so he was a very solitary man with all that responsibility. The only time we did meet him face to face while he was a captain was when he was leaving the ship, he left the ship on the
- 09:30 8th June 1942. He decided that he would like to have farewell party and farewell as many men that could go there. They arranged a function at one of the hotels in Brisbane and they found beer from goodness knows where and he mingled with everybody and thank them all. It was a very moving experience
- 10:00 and they presented him with a model of the ship, so he was remember very fondly. He use to turn up also at other functions they had, I didn't go but when the Hobart was finally broken up and sold he came over from the west, he had retired and joined in with the other ex sailors
- 10:30 in farewelling the old ship, to the ship breakers in Japan. So they finally got it after all.

Just returning to the story, you are now in Sydney having a refit?

Yes and seven days leave of watch. Back on board and they put in more

- 11:00 Oerlikon guns, they put a little mounting in front of the bridge with two Oerlikons, a couple more on X turret and fitted a new radar to the mast. As I said we sailed on the 1st of May in company with the Australia and the Canberra the other heavy cruiser. We refuelled at Harvey Bay and we then sailed out to

- 11:30 rendezvous with the American fleet on the 4th of May. Right on queue the time allotted there were these ships, huge cruisers and aircraft carriers Lexington cruisers and destroyers, aircraft flying around and it was a great sight so we joined up with the Lexington. The Yorktown had been detached to
- 12:00 attack the Japanese who had already established a sea base on Tulagi and then they came back rejoined the fleet on about the 6th. The Japanese had three aircraft carriers, and a landing force that had left Rabaul for Port Moresby to invade Port Moresby.
- 12:30 That's why we had to be ready to operate because they knew that the Japanese were going to do something, we didn't quite know what, and they didn't quite know where they were. It was a case of the blind seeking the blind. We refuelled from a very fast tanker the Neosho and apparently at the same time about sixty miles away the Japanese carriers were refuelling too from their
- 13:00 tankers, either of them didn't have aircraft up so neither of them sighted each other. The tanker was detached with a destroyer, the Sims to rendezvous further north but in the meantime the Japanese carrier aircraft decided the Neosho the tanker and the destroyer and thought they had seen an aircraft carrier and a cruiser.
- 13:30 They sent out a pretty big force of bombers and they sunk the tanker and the Sims, but they expended a lot of ammunition and a lot of time on it. In the meantime Fletcher who was in charge of the operation knew that the Moresby force had left Rabaul so he detached the Hobart,
- 14:00 Australian and the Chicago and three American destroyers to cut off the invasion force as it came through Jomard Passage. The fleet detached on the 7th of May at about eight o'clock in the morning resumed high speed around twenty eight knots and steamed towards our rendezvous. But shortly after we detached ourselves a Japanese reconnaissance
- 14:30 sighted us. Around about a few hours later we had around about twelve torpedo bombers came in low and attacked us, and dropped quite a few torpedoes and three or four whizzed down the side of the Australia and we dodged a couple.
- 15:00 One of those twelve I think only two made it back to Rabaul. Incidentally it was the same 25th Air Group that had sunk the Prince of Wales and Repulse off Malaya. The Japanese said that they had lost a lot of pilots and that they weren't as skilled as they were then and it was a pretty worrying time because as soon as they had dropped their torpedoes they raced down the ship side strafing us with cannon and
- 15:30 machine gun fire, so it killed a couple of men on the Chicago and wounded a few on ours. After they went another nineteen I think high level bombers appeared and dropped bombs around about three o'clock and then shortly later another three high level bombers appeared were flying very high and also
- 16:00 dropped bombs around near the Perkins, one of the destroyers. When they flew back to Townsville they had pretty good photographs of Task Force 73 under attack. They were American Flying Fortresses B-17s and they had
- 16:30 seen the Japanese bombers blow them and they thought they were American and thought that the ships were Japanese. So they decided to join in too, and at twenty five thousand feet it's pretty difficult to identify or even hit anything, there bombing was pretty lousy anyway. To this day they still deny it and even though they have photographic proof.

I was going to ask you what was the kind of buzz

- 17:00 **on your ship about the Yanks [Americans]?**

We were happy working with the Americans and particularly with the navy, but we were a bit worried about the air force. They sort of shoot first and ask questions afterwards, they were relatively more a strained in that regard. On the whole our relationship with the Americans as far as the

- 17:30 sailors was concerned was very very good. What was rather disappointing from the captains point of view he didn't know what was going on, because Fletcher on the carriers didn't say 'how the battle was progressing' or 'what was happening', or 'whether we should withdraw or what', so he just
- 18:00 guessed on what was going on. The information was very very sketchy and of course it came the time about the 8th or 9th we were starting to run short of fuel and the destroyers were running short of fuel. Harry decided it was time to break off the action and we virtually went back to Brisbane to refuel. That was the furthest base,
- 18:30 Townsville or Cairns we couldn't use as a base because it wasn't big enough so virtually Brisbane was the front line.

I would just like to take you back a step if I may, you did mention that the Hobart got a bit of a refit

- 19:00 **in Sydney and I'm wondering if you can tell us, I understand you had radar equipment fitted?**

Yes. As far as the Australian navy was concerned we were the first ship to be fitted with radar but

unfortunately as it turned out as soon as we fired the six-inch guns the radar wouldn't work.

19:30 So the poor old radar operator had to be told where the aircraft was and in which direction to point his antennae. We didn't have a radar mechanic at times so it was pretty much useless. Although later on we did get a better setup from the Americans and it worked very well but early in the piece

20:00 it wasn't much good.

When was it upgraded?

It would have been sometime later in 1942 I think we got one from the Yorktown if I remember rightly when we were operating with them, it would have been well after the Coral Sea, it might have been later. I don't know exactly when but it would have been in 1942.

During this time and these actions

20:30 **what were you doing?**

I was still in my turret doing the same old thing when the formation bombers were far enough away we were using our six-inch in the same way as I described before we got our two rounds off. But what was a bit worrying, the next aircraft guns you heard were the four-inch and they were going 'hammer and tongs' [full speed].

21:00 Then we had four barrel pom-pom on the quarterdeck and when you heard that open fire plus the one between the funnels you'd think 'gee they must be getting close'. Up on the after structure there was someone with a Lewis gun, and when we heard that firing we thought, "Gee, they have got to be close." What was happening the Lewis gunner was having a little bit of a dwell with the

21:30 machine gunner on the Mitsubishi aircraft, when he was spraying the ship he was having to go but his bullets were just bouncing off, I don't think he did much damage to it. We did shoot down a few of them.

I'm wondering did you get opportunities to get out of your turret?

22:00 No not during that period, we were there all that time, so you didn't know what was going on.

The only information we knew the gun trainer in the little compartment in the front of the turret with his field of view could see and he'd yell back what was going on, but apart from

22:30 that no, everyone else was too busy to tell us anyway.

How many hours or days did these actions last for?

This was only on the one day, that's when we had the high level torpedo bombing and the American bombing, that was just on the one occasion.

23:00 After what we had already experience in Java it was all pretty ho hum, we were sort of, "Been here, done that." It was just we were doing it and we weren't particularly worried about it.

It's interesting to hear you talk about how

23:30 **you might have gotten use to being under fire?**

Yes. The circumstances are entirely different where as say in Java the Japanese had absolute control of the air and the sea and we just didn't have any covering aircraft. In the Coral Sea at least we had

24:00 a modern ship with plenty of fire power, we didn't have air cover but it was there possibly with the carriers, so we weren't too greatly worried about it. By that time we were all pretty experienced and we all knew what to do. There was still the odd twinge, like when we heard the

24:30 Lewis gun we knew that they were pretty close.

How much did you rely on the sounds of the guns firing to know what was going on on the ship?

That's about the only indication and you knew that we were manoeuvring pretty violently because being on the stern you could feel the vibration and the movement.

25:00 **These days people would wear ear-muffs to block the sound did you wear any kind of protective equipment or gear?**

Yes we did. From pretty early on we were all issued with anti-flash gear and we all had to wear boots, long sleeved shirts, long

25:30 sleeved pants, we weren't allowed shorts or anything like that. It was mainly because one of the biggest worries even with near misses is the heat and burns.

Did you suffer anything like that during your time?

No because we were pretty well protected inside the gun house, a few splinters hit the walls of it.

26:00 We had one particularly large chunk of metal that must of hit it and the walls of the turret were one inch thick and it had a gauge in it just similar to say putting your finger in a pound of butter and scooping out a piece, it just looked like that just sort of melted the steel away with the force of it. We were pretty well protected which was lucky, not like some of the people

26:30 on the upper deck that copped a little bit of it.

At the time you might not have known and it was a long time ago but were you aware of how significant the Coral Sea battle was?

No it wasn't until well after

27:00 the battle that we found that the battle had saved Australia, no we didn't we weren't aware of any significance, all we were aware of was the Japanese were trying to take Port Moresby. I suppose the implications of that might have been a bit clear at the time a step closer to Australia. I don't think at that stage the Japanese had any intention of invading I don't think they had the resources

27:30 but they would have made it very difficult. They could of rendered all those northern ports absolutely useless. That's for the historians to decide.

I'm just wondering you say that you were just doing your job and it was a little bit 'ho hum' [mundane] by the time you got to the Coral Sea. Did you have a personal sense of

28:00 **the real threat of the Japanese invasion?**

I don't think so. The thought was there that it could be a possibility but we didn't know at the time how far they were going to come down, we had no idea of what there plans were all we knew they had already established a seaplane base in the Solomons and they were building an

28:30 airstrip on Guadalcanal. Apart from that we didn't know a great deal about their strategies, or the sailors didn't whether the captain did I wouldn't have a clue, he never confided in us about anything like that. After we left there we returned to Brisbane and Brisbane was the front line

29:00 it was a bit like Sydney. Like when we returned to Sydney for example in the April there were sandbags outside Wynyard Station and Town Hall Station and there was a blackout, there was a totally difference scene to the one we had departed in June 1941, no ferries, no dancing. So Brisbane was much the same with thousand of troops.

29:30 I will always remember the salt water mains up and down the street for fire fighting these big water pipes running along the streets and footpaths. We stayed in Brisbane waiting further orders. We tired up at the meat works up the Brisbane River and the

30:00 captain had decided that we should have some kind of patrol in case midget submarines getting into the river. We manned a motor boat and I was just an ordinary seaman and I had a machine gun, we had a couple of sailors with machine guns we

30:30 had a torpedo man with little harbour depth charges. At dusk they lowered the boat into the river and we patrolled up and down the river all night. We took our portable gramophone with us, played records, Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters. This went on for a few nights and then they decided that it was a bit too dangerous up the

31:00 river so they decided to anchor us out at Morton Bay so we did the same thing out there. We had a quick trip back to Sydney to fix up a few defects and we went back again. Then in July we sailed in company with the Canberra

31:30 and the Australia to New Zealand and we went to Wellington and the 101st Marines [1st Marine Division] call for the landing in the Solomons. We joined up with the American force there was the North Carolina the battle ship, there was cruisers and aircraft carriers and of course

32:00 the landing ships. The Americans rehearsed the landing on Coral Island and spent a couple of days there rehearsing and then we sailed for the Solomons. We had two groups, x-ray group who were to do the landing on Guadalcanal and the yoke group to do the landing on Tulagi. Unfortunately at this time I

32:30 had developed a pretty nasty cold and I finished up with a bout of tonsillitis would you believe which made it a bit awkward. Under pretty good cloud cover we sort of snuck up on the Solomons and around about two o'clock in the morning we were within sight of Savo Island.

33:00 Around about four o'clock I think we were at our action stations with me still in the turret. Our breakfast was sent around, a cup of coffee, two hard-boiled eggs and a bit of fried bread that was breakfast. From that moment on we didn't move out of the turret except to go to the toilet or have a quick wash and come back again, for the three days that we were there.

33:30 I had this rotten tonsillitis and I found it pretty hard to eat the hard boiled eggs and fried bread and

every now and again when it was all quite they'd let me go up to the sick bay and have a gargle or some to fix me up a bit. The morning passed and during the landings we stood off looked after the

- 34:00 seaward side of the landing ships and the cruisers commenced the bombardment, aircraft zoomed over the island and dropped their bombs so it was a pretty wild sort of a scene. Around about nine o'clock the landing barges lined up with the troops and headed into the shore, that was a terrific sight to see.
- 34:30 In the meantime around about a quarter past eleven we got a message from one of the coast watchers on Bougainville that 'there is a large formation of aircraft coming your way'. They halved the gunners and told them to go to lunch
- 35:00 and they thought it would take a couple of hours to get there because it was around about three hundred and twenty miles away. We duly had our lunch some way or another and around about one o'clock the first of the aircraft was sighted. It was a large formation of aircraft and they dropped a stick of bombs around the stern of us. There were huge and tremendous explosions
- 35:30 and also dropped bombs around some of the other ships. The aircraft from the carriers engaged them and we also engaged them with gun fire naturally. That attack passed and then later on another group came over with torpedo bombers and they hit
- 36:00 one of the American destroyers was torpedoed and another dive bomber attacked another destroyer and hit it. There was an American aircraft that was trying to shoot down the attacking Japanese but unfortunately he got in the fire of the destroyer as it was firing on the Japanese ship and he finished up having to bale out.
- 36:30 The two guys in the aircraft baled out and they were rescued by an amphibious tank that chuffed into the shore so they were saved. On that take they lost one destroyer, one destroyer damaged and one of the supply ships was set on fire on that one and that one was on day one. Much about the same thing happened on day two which was I think was the 8th August.
- 37:00 There was a rather funny feeling, that night around about one o'clock in the morning their aircraft flares dropped overhead and for some reason nobody sort of took much notice of it.
- 37:30 Then later on we were guarding this group of ships we were just patrolling on our little track and we heard gun fire in the distance about twenty mile away and everybody thought that it was just somebody calling for a shore bombardment at Tulagi. What it was was those five cruisers and one destroyer that had come down from Rabaul and sunk the Vince,
- 38:00 Historian and the Quincy that's three American destroyers and torpedoed the bows of the Chicago and put the Canberra out of action, so it was a pretty devastating night. They called it the battle of Savo Island, I we didn't take any part in it. Except the scene the next morning we could
- 38:30 still see the Canberra on fire, they had taking the crew off. The American commander said that if it couldn't be under gone by eight o'clock it had to be sunk so the American destroyers spent a fair amount of ammunition trying to sink it. To cut a long story short they put enough torpedoes into it
- 39:00 and it finally rolled over and sank. By that time we were running short of ammunition and fuel so we then went to Noumea, which the Americans had a big base there so we waited a couple of days for the ammunition ship Poyang to come up and re-ammunition.
- 39:30 The ammunition between the Americans and the British was incompatible so we had to wait for the ammunition ship. Shortly after the details that I'm not very clear on but another aircraft battle emerged because what had happened was the Japanese now were trying to dislodge the Americans. So they brought up about three carriers
- 40:00 and the Americans had their three carriers, so we were sort of between the two, we were screening the carriers, they had like an air defence around the carriers and we'd see the American aircraft fly off to do their attacking and then the Japanese would come over and attack the Americans. A little bit later on the American aircraft would come back,
- 40:30 you've probably seen them they'd circle around the carrier and wait their turn to land. As they passed us they'd fly over us and there would be holes in them, bits of wing and tails and the engines would be spluttering. Some of them would make it to the carrier and some would just crash on the deck and it was really sad to see. Even though they had made it back to the ship some of them
- 41:00 didn't make it and some of them were too badly shot up to operate the hook, the landing gear and all of the controls were shot away so they had to just crash land on the deck. If they could get them out they did and then just push the aircraft over the side. It was pretty sad actually to see that happen.

00:30 **You mentioned Harry Howden left the Hobart, when was that?**

That was the 8th June 1942 in Brisbane.

Who was the captain that replaced him?

HA Showers.

How was the difference in style between the captaincy of those two men?

Quite a difference.

01:00 As far as his competency goes I'm not in a position to judge but as far as his attitude, you might remember in an early tape that I mentioned Harry was very lenient with good sailors who went ashore and drank too much and came back and hour late. He use to let them off lightly be given them punishment while at sea,

01:30 stoppage of leave, which is pretty important to a sailor. When you say 'seven days stoppage of leave' and you are only in port for just a few days it's a deprivation but Showers didn't see that side of it. He just handed out the full punishment and according to Kings rules and admiralty instructions, so in that way he was probably

02:00 harsher than Harry.

How did that change at the top influence the morale of the Hobart?

I don't think it made a great deal of difference it would of only affected those who transgressed, they weren't at all happy about it but they soon learnt that it wasn't a good thing to do, we get back on time, not that we had many chances.

02:30 **Where was the brig on the Hobart?**

We had two cells up foreign, right up on the bows of the ship.

What occasions would there have been people in the brig, during your time?

It would have had to have been pretty serious I would image. I just can't recall the circumstances

03:00 in which anyone was in there. It might have been just a holding problem, but you would have had to have done something serious to be awarded cells. But the main punishment area earlier in the war was at Garden Island and that was pretty drastic.

03:30 **What were the stories of what went on there?**

Discipline was pretty ridged and harsh and they had to pick seven pounds of oakum a day, they had yanks of tarred hemp about a foot long and they had to unravel them into strands, so this picking oakum took up most of their

04:00 day and they were only confined to very small cells. The idea of that was on the wooden decks the space between the timbers was filled with this oakum and it was hammered in with a little flat chiselled and then it was tarred over with pitch to make it a water tight seal.

You obviously had little to do with the captain

04:30 **as most people did, who was the officer that you looked directly too?**

In my case it would have been my divisional officer, that was the officer of the quarterdeck. We had one particular officer whom

05:00 I liked was Lieutenant Band, Royal Australian Naval Volunteer Reserve he was sea going man and he transferred to the Royal Australian Navy. He was sort of a mentor in a sense. I can always recall when we tied up and

05:30 we used three and a half inch and four and a half in steel wire hoses and we had two or three of those on the quarterdeck and we were responsible for getting them out and getting them back in.

I can recall we just left harbour and I was trying to coil up this huge four and a half inch steel wire rope and I'm trying to wrestle it into a nice coil. Jack Band came along and said, "Holyoake." He said,

06:00 "This wire is like a woman. You have got to treat it gently," and he proceeded to show me and he said, "You just do this." I said, "Thank you sir," and off he went. That was the kind of man he was.

What was the worse trouble that you found yourself in in the navy, or on the Hobart specifically?

I got myself into trouble a couple of times, twice.

06:30 It must have been early in 1941 and I was scrubbing the deck down below on the wardroom flat just near the officers quarters and I suddenly needed to go to the toilet. There was no one around that I

couldn't ask and when I came back standing alongside the bucket was the petty officer of the quarterdeck. "Where were you?" I said, "I've just been to the toilet."

- 07:00 He said, "On cap and up on the quarterdeck." He ran me in to the officer of the watch for leaving my post without permission. So I got 'five days number eleven' and when you are at sea that means extra duties. The second occasion was when we were in Brisbane after the battle of the Coral Sea.
- 07:30 I had been to a dance and I was with this girl and I took her home, but unbeknown to me a call went out, it was called 'call for Lady Hamilton', that means all the sailors that belonged to the Hobart and the Australia had to get back to the because somebody had thought there was a suspected Japanese aircraft
- 08:00 in Brisbane and it was only the waves breaking on a reef somewhere. In the meantime I didn't get the recall and I was on the other side of the river from where the ship was. I had a heck of a job trying to find a taxi to try and get back to the ship so I got back to the ship I think about two hours late. I finished up with three months leave,
- 08:30 you got your leave, but you had to be back on board at eight o'clock at night so I couldn't go to the movies or anything, so that was a bit boring.

How does the recall work when people are on shore?

People at the pictures and the pub it's easy enough because they just flash on the screen 'call for Lady Hamilton', and immediately after the audience filed out,

- 09:00 they all knew what it was, anyone that happened to be near shore. But I was a little but further away than that. It spoilt what might have been a nice night.

While you are on that topic of Brisbane and the Hobart, are there any more occasions that stand out in your mind from that period after the Coral Sea battle when the ship was in Great Barrier Reef?

No,

- 09:30 particularly after the Coral Sea and the battle in the Solomons. In between the two as I said Brisbane was virtually the base, there was no where else for the big ships to go. What was interesting around about this time there were thousands of American troops in Brisbane and thousands of returning Australian troops so there were all these fights in the pubs between the Americans
- 10:00 and the Australians. There was a big one and I think somebody wrote a book about it, The Battle of Brisbane. What was interesting if we were in a pub and we'd be drinking with the American sailors and if any of the Aussie soldiers picked on any of the Americans sailors we use to stick up for the Americans. Because we worked
- 10:30 with them and we got along famously with them and they were all enlisted men anyway.

How was the relationship between the various difference services then?

Mind you we didn't have much to do with the different services, the few times that we did at that particular time our relationships were all right. When it came to a choice of choosing between your fellow sailors or

- 11:00 the army well of course that had to come first.

What occasions apart from time on shore in Brisbane, what occasion did you have contact with the American sailors?

I met a young sailor who was also in the turret on one of the American cruisers.

- 11:30 We just use to exchange visits we use to in Brisbane we'd work to a tropical routine we'd start early and then we'd have lunch, then we could go ashore. We were in two watches so every second day you could go ashore. I just remember going on board
- 12:00 and he invited me on board to have a look at his turret and he said, "Would you like an ice cream?" and I said, "What," or, "Would you like a can of coke?" we didn't have that sort of thing. They were very hospitable and very very generous, as I said we got along famously with them when we did met them ashore. In the end we were operating with them all the time because after the
- 12:30 Solomons we were then setup a forward base in the Barrier Reef and we were doing these patrols into the Coral Sea. We use to do ten days at sea and have three days in harbour. We virtually right from the word go from the Coral Sea we virtually had the same destroyers
- 13:00 and we knew the ships, we didn't know all the fellows but we sort of mixed with them. It was during that period we had rear Admiral Crutchley who was the commanding officer for the Australian Squadron who was on the flagship Australia at that particular time and he thought
- 13:30 the Royal Navy for example have a title of rum and why can't the sailors have a drop of beer. We had a refrigerated cargo ship called the SS Merker and that use to have our stores in it and it also had

refrigerated cargo and beer. He said that we could have one

- 14:00 bottle per day while we were in harbour between two men. It was lovely sitting up on the Barrier Reef at Dunk Island or Palm Island in the sunset with a glass and a half of beer just contemplating the lovely tropical evening. That was how it started but once we were at sea we weren't allowed any grog.

It's a pity there is a war on.

- 14:30 It is quite an interesting interlude because there was nothing much to do, there was no population on Dunk Island, but we were allowed to go ashore and we'd take some kind of a container and a chipping hammer and chip these beautiful oysters off the rocks and have a big feed of oysters, but it had its perils too.
- 15:00 At one stage one of our young mid shipmen and he was only about nineteen jumped out of the boat and went to swim ashore and swam into one of those stingy creatures, I think they called them Portuguese man o' war. He became unconscious so they took him on board the Australia and the doctors worked on him but he died and he was flown to
- 15:30 Townsville, so that was a sad moment. Apart from that we used to go shark hunting, we'd get some old meat and catch a shark or two.

You talked about the Solomons battle, at the end of the last tape you

- 16:00 **were talking about being in Noumea, can you tell me a bit more about that?**

There is not a great deal to tell from my point of view, I only went ashore once and all I can remember was it was like a gigantic American sort of city. The only thing I saw was the big American PX [Postal Exchange - American canteen unit] store in one of the big buildings, and they had these all over the place. Just buy a can of coke

- 16:30 and that was about it, not a great deal else to do or see it was just a matter of getting off the ship and walking around.

You mentioned already the coke and the ice cream the Americans had what other things did they have that were not available to the RAN?

At

- 17:00 this stage nothing really but later on one of the things they did set up that I saw was refrigeration units so you could just go up and get a nice cold drink of water or something. I will tell you a bit more about that a bit later on down the track.

Was this while you were in Rockhampton?

- 17:30 No, I'm talking about when I was on the Hobart now.

Was there any trading that went on between the American and Australian seamen?

No, nothing we didn't have anything that they wanted, obviously. First of all we didn't have any dollars they were in scarce supply.

What happened

- 18:00 **after the Solomons engagement for the Hobart, after you were in Noumea where too after that?**

We came back and that's when I said we formed up these patrol groups to patrol, so we had two groups of ships and some went down to Sydney to have a refit and some came back. But in essence we did this ten day patrol and three days leave. One of the

- 18:30 anchoring points was Palm Island about forty to fifty mile out of Townsville. It was like an Aboriginal detention centre and there were Aboriginal people living there. We found the Aboriginals really good, they'd arrange a football match with the sailors off the ship and one time we had a big picnic afternoon.

- 19:00 They sort of showed us how to throw boomerangs and shimmy up a coconut tree, we didn't do it of course but they had coconut races with half a dozen of the young native men sort of shimmering up a coconut tree and throwing the coconuts down for us.

What were they doing on Palm Island?

They had obviously come from Queensland

- 19:30 for various offences probably they were just sent to Palm Island. There was an aboriginal settlement there and people did live there.. It was a bit out of the way so they couldn't escape because they didn't have any boats and it was surrounded by sharks so there wasn't much of a chance of them getting away.

How did the navy football team go?

I can't remember now,

20:00 I think it was just a fun game.

Where else did you go during that time?

As I said there were three bases and we use to alternate them because just in case the Japanese submarine penetrated the Barrier Reef. There was Palm Island, Dunk Island and Shute Harbour I don't know where exactly Shute Harbour is, but it's along the Queensland coast somewhere,

20:30 and it's beautiful, probably in the rainforest area there, it was just like a little bay. By this time can you recall earlier that I mentioned about the torpedo school, and how I liked it and it was my ambition to become a torpedo man. As soon as I became an able seaman then I applied.

21:00 They had a system of requests, you'd put in a request to your divisional officer to see the captain through the commander and divisional officer to be recommended for a seaman's torpedo course. As soon as I became an AB I did that. When we were doing these patrols it was an ideal time so they decided to run a class on the ship because

21:30 we had a chief torpedo man who was an instructor and we had various other torpedo men, petty officers and chiefs in the various departments that could teach. While we were on our patrols in harbour our afternoon was devoted to our course so we did our instruction in the afternoon. It took about

22:00 twelve months to complete. In April 1943 I passed and two of us stayed on the ship and the rest of them were drafted off, because there was a big ship building program of corvettes, frigates, merchant cruisers and the like so they needed these men. Then I immediately on completion of the course and passing

22:30 then I changed from being an able seaman in Y turret to an able seaman torpedo man. So I changed from the quarterdeck mess deck down to the torpedo mess deck and I changed my job from Y turret the starboard torpedo tubes and in the event of damage I was then damage control party. So that was a real

23:00 big change, a very significant change in my life.

Tell us about moving house, how would describe that change?

Because the torpedo men were sort of an elite group on the ship. We all wore tailor-made overalls, we could be anywhere on the ship we were all issued with a tool bag and you could be anywhere. Were as on the quarterdeck during working hours I couldn't

23:30 go up to the fo'c'sle and say, "G'day," to a mate, I'd be in trouble I couldn't be there. But with my little tool bag I could be working on anything, so that was great and you had the run of the ship. We were allocated specific duties and they rotated every three months so I had a stint in whitehead in the torpedo workshop, then on high power and fans and different duties around the ship but it was really great and I really enjoyed that.

24:00 **You mentioned briefly before that the torpedo section was responsible for the electricals on board?**

Yes.

Can you briefly describe the different roles that you played in the torpedo section and what your job involved?

There was general power, lighting and ventilation. The ships were run off two twenty volt DCs [Direct Current] so was strictly DC

24:30 for radio, radar and other specific uses. We use to have motor generator sets or motor alternator, like a DC driving an alternator to give AC [Alternating Current] a different voltage, and a different frequencies for say gun sights, radio or radar.

25:00 We all had different compartments around the ship. We had low power we had batteries because everything sort of had backup batteries, for turret lighting and gunnery control if the main power went out then we could switch to emergency power, the whole of the ships electricals was covered by us.

What about the torpedo room itself?

25:30 We had two sets of torpedo tubes one on each side, a torpedo tube consists of four torpedoes and then we had a spare torpedo in the workshop between the two. What we called the whitehead workshop and we use to periodically remove one torpedo from the tube and work on it. It was a bit like servicing

26:00 your car, but it's a torpedo. Quite a complex bit of mechanism but it was strictly laid down different routines you had to do on it. For example every six months you had to do an A routine and every twelve months you'd do an O routine, which was a complete overhaul. We always had torpedo to work on in the workshop.

A torpedo is much more complex than your average bomb?

Yes.

26:30 **Can you quickly describe what you were dealing with there?**

Basically the torpedoes we had in Hobart were the Mark Nine Two Star and it is twenty one inches in diameter and around about twenty eight foot long. You had the main components of it, at the front of it was the explosive part, the war head. Then immediately

27:00 behind that was an air vessel which was charged up to two thousand seven hundred pounds per square inch air. Then the next compartment contained gyroscope and various other bits and pieces, and fuel tanks. The mechanism for making the rudders go up and down and go this way and after that we had a

27:30 little engine room where the little four cylinder radial engine was and after that was the tail, which had the propel shaft going up the centre of it. One screw went that way and the other one went the other way, and then we had the vertical and horizontal rudders. It was all operated by air and it drove the gyros and pumped the fuel into the motor.

28:00 They ran on the motors themselves, it could of run on air but they didn't have a very great range. It also ran on a semi diesel principle where air, kerosene or [(UNCLEAR)] was forced into the cylinder and ignited and that was what they called 'hot run'.

I know most of the time you would have been servicing these but what was the procedure for firing them?

We never ever got a chance to

28:30 fire them at anyone, but periodically we use to fire them for test purposes and for training. Instead of having a warhead on we fitted what was called at 'canine blowing head', which consisted of a head which is the same as a warhead, the same shape but it was filled with water to the same weight. Inside it it also had an air vessel and in the top of it it had

29:00 two pockets, one pocket had flares and in the other pocket it had a depth and roll recorder. For example we could do a test run on a ship and set it to whatever depth you wanted to do, how far you wanted it to run. Then when it finished its run the torpedo would sink and then when it sunk to a certain depth a pressure valve used to open, open the air valve and

29:30 the air would blow the water out and so we'd get positive buoyancy then and it would bob up on the surface. The calcium flare would then show smoke so we use to row across and then hook on to it and retrieve it and clean it down, pull it apart and the torpedo officer would analyse the depth and roll recorder.

Fascinating job for you at that time?

Yes it was.

30:00 **How did you enjoy it in comparison to what you had been doing and Y turret?**

I loved it and it was great.

In those practice firings can you run through the procedure for when firing the torpedoes?

If it was decided to fire a torpedo say for example you used the target shoot and you sort of simulated

30:30 enemy bearings, green nine o, ninety degrees to starboard. Fire one torpedo, now the torpedo sat in the tube and on the top of the tube was a rather large vessel that looked like a large cylinder but in one end of it it had a core eyed cartridge and the torpedo could be fired from the bridge and when fired the core eyed cartridge went off.

31:00 The core eyed cartridge it's a slow burning propellant and the gas then filled up this chamber and when it reached a certain pressure a valve would open and this gas would then propel the torpedo out of the tube. On the top of the tube was a little catch and on top of the torpedo was like a little latch

31:30 so when it went past that latch that started the whole process, it started the motors running on air, it started the gyro and it started all the other mechanisms. When the propel ran off so many revolutions then the ignition came in and hopefully by that time it was underwater so it would start burning,

32:00 then away she'd go and you hoped to goodness that she ran right.

With your new position on the ship you had access to areas that you hadn't been to before?

Yes.

What new parts did you discover at that time?

I hadn't been down in the TSs [Transmission Stations] and I hadn't spent much time in the engine room.

The TSs?

They are a transmission station and we had two of them.

- 32:30 We had little compartments right down below and there was one for the six-inch director and one for the four-inch director. Basically what it was was a mechanical computer and the bandsmen use to operate this because when they weren't playing music they had other duties. It consisted of a table like arrangement with hand wheels on it and all kinds of information was sent down.
- 33:00 For example say you had an enemy ship, and I'm talking about the six-inch one now. Then the fire control officer up top would estimate the enemy's speed and that would go on, the angle of inclination. Then there was lots of other information about your own ships speed, and our own ships direction, the temperature of the magazines, and the number of rounds that the fired had fired.
- 33:30 All this information went into this by means of these little hand wheels and it came out as information to the guns, it translated into training, angle training and also elevation of the guns.

Which was what you had been working with already in the turret?

Yes but I hadn't seen that side, and we had it in the turret. It's remarkably in genius because

- 34:00 there were a few things in the chain that I didn't know a great deal about. For example when the guns fired they were fired by means of a trigger up in the director and that was on a twenty four volt electrical circuit, but so that the guns wouldn't fire when the ship was rolling there was a little gyroscope in between.
- 34:30 The contacts wouldn't make for the guns until the ship was level. Which was another little thing that I didn't know much about. Because of the varying distances between the director and the turret, we are only talking a mille second or a micro second, the time taken from the current
- 35:00 from that point from the supply to the turret could have been out by a certain amount. So what they did they put non inductive resistances in the firing so that theoretically every gun fired at exactly the same time that the trigger was pulled, that was another thing that I learnt as a torpedo man.

Fascinating. You mentioned the engine room as well can you describe that for us?

- 35:30 On the Hobart we had two, the Hobart was a modified Leander and originally Leanders only had one funnel so they had their boiler rooms together and their engine rooms together, but a hit to the boiler room would render the ship inoperative. So on the modified ones they had two funnels
- 36:00 boiler room, engine room, boiler room, engine room. We had these high powered steamed turbines with super heated steam driving parsons geared turbines, there were four propellers, four screws and the forehead engine room drove the forehead engine room and the aft ones drove the aft ones. Then of course in amongst all that there would be
- 36:30 turbo generators and so forth.

How dirty were these places?

Not really, not like coal burners, oil was pretty clinically clean.

You also had a new mess room a new mess deck?

Yes.

Was that a significant difference to the one on the quarterdeck?

It was much the same except for the different people,

- 37:00 they were all torpedo men. When the radar was fitted we also had the radar operators down in our mess deck too.

After the work you were doing at Palm and Dunk Islands the Hobart was to see action again later on, is that right?

- 37:30 Not really, after about nine months doing these patrols around about early in July the Americans had still been fighting for the Solomons. They lost a tremendous amount of shipping so consequently
- 38:00 they decided to pull us out of the Coral Sea and we'd operate under Halsey I think it was as part of that group in the Solomons, operating from the Espiritu Santo.

What did those operations involve?

We only had one operation and we didn't do anything, we had the

- 38:30 Australia cruiser and three American destroyers and we were on patrol between the New Hebrides and the Solomons. On the evening of the 20th July when we were returning to the Spirit a Japanese submarine happened to see us during the daylight and then got himself into position
- 39:00 and fired his bow torpedo tube port, I think he aimed it at the Australia because the Australia was leading and we were doing twenty five knots and zig zagging. One torpedo hit Hobart aft on the port

side underneath Y turret.

Tape 8

00:30 **You were just telling us about the time that the Hobart was hit, can you tell me where you were when that happened?**

I was on my station on the starboard torpedo tubes with another torpedo man called Len Holly. We were both leaning up against the tube and I said,

01:00 “Len wouldn’t it be lovely to get back to Sydney and have a big schooner,” and boom the next thing I knew I saw this big flash and bang, the next thing I was picking myself up off the deck and threw me off my feet. I always had a little canvas haversack and in there was my anti-flash gear,

01:30 my life jacket and torch and tools. I can always remember as I was picking myself up off the deck I was putting my life jacket on over my head and blowing it up because I didn’t know when the next bang was going to come. Then there was deafly silence. We were in dusk but we were already accustomed to the lack of light. Instead of the ship doing twenty five knots

02:00 it came to a sudden halt and just sitting there in the water. We were dead in the water and I thought the next one was going to come at any time. The next noise I heard was a heck of a loud bang as the safety valves blow off. We were steaming along at twenty five knots and three screws had blown off and the turbines raced. Down in the engine room they had to shut off the

02:30 steam to the turbines which built up pressure in the boilers so that was when the safety valves were released with this hell of a bang, and that was a big frightening.

What was the extent of the damage?

The torpedo hit on the port side and ripped out the keel

03:00 and blew up the deck. In other words the deck was sort of like that and Y turret had been blown up out of its mountings. It had gone up in the air and then came down again and there was a very large length of chain around the barred bit of the turret, which was there for towing purposes. With the force of the explosion lifted the chain up

03:30 and it went down into the hole where the turret lived so the turret just sat on the chain at an awkward angle and just sat there. Luckily there was no other internal explosions, if it had of hit a bit further it would of hit the magazine that supplied X and Y turrets and also hit around the wardroom area and also hit a place where there would be a few people.

04:00 So the up shot of it was there were fourteen people killed and about nineteen injured and some very severely.

Y turret use to be your position?

Yes.

I’m wondering how you reacted when you found out?

04:30 What was even worse and I still think about this today if you recall I have said we had one gun crew closed up at the time and one gun crew would go to tea and then they’d come back and we use to change over at ten minutes to the hour. The guns crew that I was in was standing outside the turret waiting

05:00 for ten to seven for them to relieve the other crew that was in to go to their meal, then come back and close up and all of us together at eight o’clock. The routine was we closed up at ten two, but first of all the people inside the turret had to turn the lights off and open the rear door to allow one crew out and the other crew in.

05:30 The relieving crew the crew that I would of belonged too was standing on the quarterdeck just around the turret and consequently all five of them were killed, including Ordinary Seaman Phillips who took my place. There were also a couple of officers who were out on an evening stroll up and down the quarter

06:00 deck and they were killed too. The poor old ordinance that use to look after the two turrets he use to sling his hammock down the wardroom flat and he just happened to be they’re just slinging his hammock when the torpedo hit and he was killed too.

We hear many many stories about luck

06:30 **during the war?**

Yes don't we. Do you recall me mentioning when I was down in Cerberus doing that torpedo course and I liked torpedo well that particular part of the instruction as I said I got very good marks, ninety three per cent as a result of that course I was recommended that I

07:00 become an ST, I said it had a profound influence on my life and it did.

What can you do, how do you deal with your emotions when you find out that it could very well have been you?

At the time I was just thankful that it wasn't me,

07:30 I didn't know exactly at the time what had happened all we knew that there was an explosion aft. As soon as the realisation hit aft I didn't sort of think anything

08:00 more about it, because at that time and I did mention our other job was damage control. The damage control party that I belonged mustered up in that particular area near the torpedo tubes. Then we had to run emergency cable, the electrical cables from compartment to compartment to get pumps. I think they wanted to

08:30 pump fuel out of the aft tanks that weren't damaged, and try to level the ship because it was down by the stern. We were already prepared for an emergency like that because on each bulkhead, we call walls 'bulkheads'. For example if you look on the bulkhead we had two big butterfly nuts,

09:00 wing nuts and a roll of red and black cable from that bulk head connecting and they had hook connectors on it, so we just hooked the connectors on top and then ran it to the next bulk head and so on to where we wanted to be. From that point, in that compartment where we were, was flooded, I was up to my knees in salt water, fuel oil and sundry rubbish floating around. We had an emergency

09:30 supply board, a board with fuses on it and links and the pump motor itself had emergency terminals on it too so we just connected it up to the fuse board and connected it up to the pump and then we were able to start the pumps. In the meantime they got power to that particular point because around the main portion of the ship they have what they call a 'ring main'.

10:00 Each dynamo feeds into the ring main and up forehead and down aft they had diesel generators too. So you were able to isolate one section and feed the undamaged section and by the means of these emergency cables then we were able to supply the pump and get the pump going and transfer the fuel. That occupied quite an amount of time I would say, I can't remember exactly.

10:30 Then we got under way about eight knots I think, we didn't have any steering but we managed to manoeuvre the ship with the one and a half screws we had left and headed towards the Espiritu Santo. The next morning a facility of ships came out, tugs and emergency vehicles and towed us into the lagoon of Espiritu. We dropped anchor

11:00 there and later on an American repair ship came on board and started underwater cutting and welding and patched it up and fixed up the steering and reinforced the decks that were damaged, so the stern wouldn't fall off. About twenty days later the Warramunga and some Australian

11:30 destroyers came in and escorted us back to Sydney. Then it went into Garden Island or Cockatoo Dock for repairs. In the meantime the bodies that we recovered, some of them were blown over the side so we never recovered them. Some of them we found mutilated

12:00 so we buried them at sea. That was rather sad because I might have explained how we do burials at sea with the sail maker sewing the bodies up and with the two cannon shots at the feet. The only difference was we draped an Australian flag or union jack over the body before we

12:30 released them to the sea and the chaplain spoke a few words. What was sad to see some bodies were whole and others they could only find half of a person and there was only a little bit to bury, I wasn't involved in that. The hardest part for the ships company was to

13:00 go through the wreckage and try and retrieve as much of the bodies as they could, and bodies go off very quickly in the tropics so it was a pretty gruesome task. Not like computer games where the bodies get up and start shooting again, it doesn't happen that way.

When was that search for bodies taken place?

13:30 Immediately the next day, nothing much was done that night except to secure the ship. It would have been done the following day and during our period in Espiritu.

What was your task when you got back into port

14:00 **at Espiritu?**

We just maintained the rest of the ship, and mainly doing whatever was necessary where the Americans were working like rigging up emergency lighting and cargo lighting for the workman. Other than that we treated

- 14:30 as sort of a relaxation period. The Americans had a very good recreation island there. We were sort of in a lagoon ringed by a number of islands and they ran ferries, like a fast motor boat and you'd go from island to island. This particular entertainment island had
- 15:00 a simulated sort of thing, it had a Duffy's Tavern, an ice cream bar, and it also had an outdoor theatre where visiting American entertainers use to come and you just sit on logs, and then it had a nice little beach. They had built a concrete water receptacle so that after you had your swim
- 15:30 you could wash your feet and put your socks and shoes on. The Americans gave us tickets where you could go one bottle of passion label, a can of coke and a ice cream for your afternoon's entertainment. They'd say, for example, "Does anyone want to go to a big bands contest?" so you'd put your name down and at seven o'clock or whenever
- 16:00 half a dozen DUKWs those amphibious trucks would come alongside the gangway and they'd pile in and go to an adjacent island where there was an army base. They might have some of the big bangs of the time out of America putting on a concert. Then we all piled into a DUKW and go back on board. The repair ship that we were alongside provided us with fresh oranges and fruit straight out from
- 16:30 America. Chicken, which we had never had, all the latest movies in thirty five millimetre they use to screen, they really looked after us. Another island had a very large long concert type hut and it was the first time that I had ever seen a supermarket that the American sailors had. It was like a huge big
- 17:00 clothing store so they let us have some dollars and we could buy say American jeans, shirts, white t-shirts all that kind of linen stuff like that. They had this big long counter and you'd just pick some off the rack and go up and there was an American soldier sitting on the end at the cash register and you'd pay your money, it was very good. It was a very enjoyable
- 17:30 time on Espiritu.

You mentioned that the Hobart returned to Sydney?

Yes.

I image had a long refit period?

Yes.

What did you do briefly during that time?

We still worked on the ship

- 18:00 and in the meantime I had a change of job and I was a telephone watch keeper and we had a little telephone exchange, so that was my job.

When did you get news of your posting to a new ship?

- 18:30 May 1944. I can't remember the exact circumstances I think I on leave and I visited Kangaroo Flat Bendigo where I use to live and I was staying with one of my old friends, the boys I knocked around with,
- 19:00 who incidentally joined the army. When I went there there was always somebody home on leave from the army. The boys mother use to look after me like another son and so I was one of the boys. I was just wondering down about ten o'clock to have a couple of drinks and the girl from the post office rode past and said, "I've got a telegram for you," and I said, "Go away." It said to report back on board.
- 19:30 I got back on board and they said, "Pack your bag and hammock you're on draft to the Rockhampton." It wasn't just a matter of just leaving the ship and going to the Rockhampton. I had to go and do what they called 'draft in and draft out routine' to Balmoral depot. You had to load up your gear and go around and get everybody to sign you in and then sign you out again. Then they
- 20:00 piled us into a little Ford V8 utility, there were two fellows sitting in the front with the driver and about eight of us in the back. We came down from Balmoral Naval Depot on to Military Road I think it was and it just started to rain. All of a sudden going around a bend the old Ford did a bit of a
- 20:30 slip and slide and rolled over. Of course those of us in the back, poor old Bill O'Sullivan he got thrown out on the roadway and I hit my ear on the stench holding the canvas top. It was a bit of a mess and we had to get the people out of the front of the vehicle and a lady lived opposite took us in
- 21:00 and rang Balmoral. Poor old Bill we had to carry him in because he had bad internal injuries and she laid him on the couch and Bill was groaning away in pain. In the meantime a staff car arrived from Balmoral with an officer in it and he said, "Where is the driver?" and the man said, "Here I am sir." He said, "How are you dear?"
- 21:30 And he said, "That's good, we can get plenty of trucks but we can't get good RANs." In the meantime poor old Bill laying on the couch groaning in pain. We just had to bungle him out and throw him in the back of this staff car and took him back to Balmoral and he had broken ribs, ruptured spleen and internal injuries and he was in hospital for about three months at Balmoral.

22:00 They didn't worry about checking any of us out, I had concussion. He said, "There's another truck coming along just threw your bags in and off to Central Station to catch the train to Melbourne and then Adelaide."

How did you react to the Rockhampton, it was a different class?

Yes and it was a small ship. They were just completing a refit

22:30 and it looked so tiny so there were five of us that left the Hobart to go to the Rockhampton, Bill O'Sullivan the eluding seaman and he was in hospital. Another one of our friends Bill Campbell he was married and had his wife living in Sydney at the time so he was given permission to take she back home to Melbourne separately. There were three of us so we got on the ship

23:00 and out come the first lieutenant and introduced himself to us and said, "I will show you around the ship," that took about three minutes and that was that. After it completed the refit we sailed around to Sydney but on the way we did an exercise, an anti-submarine exercise off Cape Hopaway.

23:30 There was a wreck there called The City of Roval, which had been sunk by a German mine so we had to do a depth charge attack on that. By this time I was feeling pretty crook, I was pretty sick actually. I hadn't been to sea for a while and a different ship so I was really crook. We threw about two or three patterns of depth charges on it and I was on one of the

24:00 throwers and we dropped two from the stern off rollers, and then threw two and then dropped two more off into a pattern. After we did about two or three patterns of chargers I was feeling pretty crook. Then trying to get the hoist up the depth charge and it was carrying and wrangle it into the angle while the ships was rolling around. We survived that and got

24:30 around the Sydney and proceeded north to Milne Bay. We were then operating under the naval officers up there, doing all kinds of weird things that corvettes did like escorting ships around and carrying troops and stuff like that.

25:00 **Before we go on to talk about the Rockhampton I might just back track a little bit. One thing I forgot to ask about the Hobart, when you were torpedoed and hit you had a change of captain by then?**

That's right.

I'm just wondering and perhaps you may be able to answer this with years of hindsight

25:30 **and thinking about it. What was the word on the ship about how much the captain had to do with the ship being torpedoed, was there any reflection on his part?**

No there couldn't have been, he just happened to be in the wrong place at the right time. There was nothing the captain could of done to avoid it, we were doing everything that we could to avoid a torpedo attack

26:00 cruising along at fairly high speed and zigzagging. It was unfortunate for us that the submarine happened to be there at that precise moment. The destroyers wouldn't have been able to detect it, because the sonar didn't work at that speed and they weren't able to find the sub afterwards in any case. One did stay around and try and find it,

26:30 we fired some star shells to try and illuminated it on the surface but we didn't sight it and they didn't detect it. There was nothing much the captain could of done about that. Consequently no one every thought to place any blame on his shoulders for what had happened, I think it was just a case of our luck running out.

27:00 **You mentioned earlier in the day under Harry's captaincy it would have been a very happy ship, I'm wondering if there was a change in mood when you changed captains?**

There was a change in mood because the ship's company as a whole was sad to see

27:30 Harry go. I think he deserved a break he had been on the ship since the war had started and he was under a heck of a lot of pressure. I think he had a short posting, I think he was CO [Commanding Officer] over at Balmoral. He never ever sort of left the ship because when any of the Hobart sailors were drafted through Balmoral

28:00 he always sort of looked after them, he sort never lost touch with his old crew. There was the difference between him and Harry, and the only difference of course I suppose was a period over time and through adversity that forged our opinion of Captain Howden, Harry's was an unknown quantity

28:30 but he was just as competent as any other captain as far as that goes. Nobody to my knowledge had any discouraging remarks about the way he handled the ship, there were grumbles about the way he conducted the disciplinary side of it as I mentioned before but that was only mainly from the people that it mostly affected.

- 29:00 **How did you feel about leaving the Hobart that had been your home for a long period of time?**
- Yes three and a half years. Sad, I cried, I didn't want to go but I had to go. My initiation to the corvette wasn't a very good one being involved in that
- 29:30 motor accident that wasn't a very good start.
- I can understand it would have been hard to leave those mates?**
- Yes, although it was good in one way that I did have
- 30:00 the other four that came with us, so at least I did know somebody, but apart from that I didn't know anyone else on the ship. When we got to Adelaide for that refit they virtually changed the crew around, they virtually emptied out the navy depot at HMAS Torrens and we had a lot of younger sailors on board. So virtually it was
- 30:30 almost a new crew that started up after that refit so there was a chance to get to know them from then on.
- I was wondering if you had acquired any kind of nickname along the way?**
- I was Holly, that was my name,
- 31:00 that's the only one that I know about there may have been others.
- There is one question that I would like to ask you about the Hobart. I've heard various stories about incidences of homosexuality on board**
- 31:30 **ships, I'm wondering if you encountered any incidences?**
- Yes there were a couple of people, I know there was one in my early period on the ship. If you can remember I was only given ten o'clock leave and my old 'sea daddy', Jake, said, "Watch out for..." - I won't mention his name -
- 32:00 "the PO [Petty Officer] cook." He was known to fancy young ordinary seamen, he was a bit predatorial. He wanted to take me ashore and buy me a fishing rod and when I told Jake he went up and had a piece of him but he used to hang around the gangway at night time hoping to catch some of us after whacked or something coming on board at ten o'clock but no I successfully evaded him.
- 32:30 There were others that reputed to be homosexual. I was very surprised too that one of the PO gunner's mates was that way inclined. When we were in Sydney we wanted me to come and stay with him for the weekend but I said, "No thanks,"
- 33:00 but yes there were. It's only natural in any group of males there would be a percentage that would be homosexual in any group, except it didn't turn me on. Apart from that no I wasn't attacked and I didn't attack anyone.
- 33:30 **I also heard stories of guys being known to be homosexual but not being dobbed in they were just doing their job and they were left alone?**
- Yes they were. We had one rather amusing character and he was an officer's cook but to my knowledge he really acted very guy
- 34:00 and put on the accent. He was a very flamboyant character and to my knowledge while he acted and sounded guy I don't know that he ever had any sexual relationships with any of the guys. But some people didn't like him and use to say something nasty like, "You old poof [homosexual],"
- 34:30 but he got his own back. For example if we were ashore in Sydney not to me but say someone would upset him on the ship and he saw them walking down the street with his wife or girlfriend he'd say, "Hello darling, aren't I going to have you tonight?" And that really caused a bit of a ruckus.
- 35:00 He would have been the only man that was actually to all appearances homosexual. The other couple people I knew you wouldn't of picked them and in fact I was shocked when that petty officer was like that because he was married and had a family in Sydney, so that was a bit of a culture shock.
- 35:30 But you learnt to accept all these things you don't lose any sleep over it, so that's life. On that theme as far as I know nobody on the Rockhampton was homosexual to my knowledge
- 36:00 and I was on it for two years and I never saw or heard of anyone acting in a homosexual way. We did have a stores assistant who rather primitive but he might have been latten but as far as I know, he was very artistic. One period
- 36:30 when we were in Madang and just for something to do we decided to have a ships concert and the whole ships company was involved in this concert. There were people playing musical instruments, Jock Gleason and his trumpet and a couple of the boys could sing, my mate Bill Campbell was great on
- 37:00 Flanagan and Allan impersonations. I got recruited into the ballet with this stores assistant. In stores

was all this rags old, you've probably heard of 'rags old'. It's discarded clothing that they send on board in bundles for cleaning purposes. He dug out all this rags old and trained the ballet and it was in the ballet. They had us all decked out in these

- 37:30 dresses and we did a dance. It was a big deal we built this stage and I don't know how we fitted everyone and invited everybody from the shore and on board and we ran it for two nights. The cooks put on supper afterwards it was a great turn.
- 38:00 We left Adelaide in the May and we didn't return back until the following July so we were up there a fair amount of time. As the war progressed further up we moved further up with it, we were always a few weeks behind. The landings would take place say at Biak, Morotai and so forth and we were sort of runners up we did all the dirty work
- 38:30 like tying up the water lighters and escorting the tankers and sitting outside harbours and doing anti-submarine patrol, the most boring jobs in the world. To my way of thinking there was the occasional air raid but nothing to disturb us.

Where were you at the war's end?

As I said in

- 39:00 June or July we left up there and we sailed back to Adelaide where we were before and had another refit. While we were there the bomb had been dropped and the war had finished so there was great rejoicing then.
- 39:30 The war wasn't over for us because as soon as we finished our refit we had to sail back up again and on the way up we were invited to the city of Rockhampton, our namesake city. We sailed up the Fitzroy River and we had that afternoon and next morning. We got there around four o'clock so there was a civic reception the usual dinners
- 40:00 and the whole town turned out virtually to see their ship. The next morning they picked us up for breakfast in buses and then took us up to Mount Morgan to the mine. The kids were given a school holiday and they lined the streets, waving flags and we inspected the open cut mine. Then came back to the ship and sailed up the river and went on up to the islands again.

Tape 9

00:07 Right where you would have been standing.

But one of the things, which stand out in my mind, was the sheer monotony of what we were doing on the corvette. I mean we'd sit outside Morotai, you know when they did the landing, we'd sit outside for fourteen days and just ping, you know because...

- 00:30 Morotai's a small island alongside a larger island called Halmahera and Japanese were using submarines to you know supply the garrisons there. And so that was only a matter of 40 miles away. So we virtually just sat outside Morotai. Just operate our asdic and that's about all we did. And the
- 01:00 only way to relieve the boredom there you know all the floating stuff that went past like oil drums and boxes and crates they let us get the guns out, the rifles and whatever just to have pot shots at it. So we weren't allowed to do much else. Weren't allowed to leave the ship. So we just had to sit there. And there was another time, it was during the invasion of the Philippines when we were outside
- 01:30 the landing harbour in Dutch New Guinea. And we just sailed up and down, up and down and up and down on the anti-submarine watch. Because apparently a couple of Japanese submarines had you know sailed past and fired a few torpedoes into the harbour. The harbour was absolutely chock-a-block with hundreds and hundreds of ships for the invasion of the Philippines. It was incredible you know. Convoys would go out, one day a hundred ships would go out and you couldn't even see where they'd come from.
- 02:00 I know the captain at the time didn't like Americans so they were having I think Thanksgiving night. The Americans were apparently partying ashore and all the lights are on. So this captain decided to interrupt their party at about 11 o'clock and tell them we had a submarine echo. And so we attacked this submarine
- 02:30 with depth charges and all the lights went out and we'd upset their party. This guy didn't like the Americans. The captain I mean. I won't mention his name. He's dead now but he was a Captain Quigg type you know, one of those. He was a permanent service lieutenant commander who'd sort of been shifted sideways and downwards. And he
- 03:00 finally finished up captain of the corvette. And there was the most horrendous time for anyone to be on there because he was mad. He had visions of something or other. Even the supply ship, the Mercer, he thought he driving a destroyer or something. You know we'd go alongside to supply the ship and he hits the ship's side with

- 03:30 his anchor and rips a plate out of the Mercer. So we finished up they wouldn't let us within 200 yards of her so we had to get our little motorboat out and climb up the big gangway of the Mercer, load our stores in, and back and forth and back and forth. Instead of just lowering them over the side. No he was a hopeless case. And he was crash hot on punishment. He was metering out punishment
- 04:00 just at the drop of a hat. You know the meanest thing and he actually stood up and said, "I've just sent So-and-so off for 89 days." That's just on 3 months to Garden Island. And he said, "I'll be happy to do the same to anyone..." In the end our punishment routines were the highest
- 04:30 of any ship operating in the area. So I think in their wisdom the navy board decided it's about time he had a dose of malaria. He went off the ship so we weren't sad to see him go. In fact outside Morotai Harbour there were reports of a submarine going into Halmahera, in this little bay and so he decided to up anchor and go chase it.
- 05:00 Well we weren't supposed to be there. And we were in there at night, supposedly looking for this submarine, when out of the blue comes this huge American aircraft just about to drop bombs or depth-charges on us when they flashed the recognition signal. Because the aircraft thought we were the sub. So anyway the next morning we were still there and so he decided
- 05:30 oh well, we'll bombard the place. So we had a little 4-inch gun up forehead and so we fired a few rounds ashore and got out of the place. And he was severely reprimanded by the American people in command. Luckily, as I said before, he was transferred off and we got another captain, which is great. And across the front of the bridge on the corvette he had this
- 06:00 Latin motto painted saying in essence in English, "I will not be harassed by fools." And probably he was the biggest fool of them all. And on a small ship it's more noticeable if you've got a bad captain than on a large ship because you have no control over, you know you don't see the captain. But on a corvette they can make your life hell. And I really didn't come to terms with
- 06:30 being on a corvette, you know putting up with that. Plus the fact that there was three torpedo men. There was the leading torpedo man George, he used to look after the ship while we were at sea and doing these anti-submarine things. And the other torpedo men Alec Cuthbert and myself used to work four on, four off on the depth charges down aft. So we were always terribly tired. You know we'd do four hours on,
- 07:00 four hours off. By the time you'd had something to eat and a shower and got say two hours sleep, you were back on watch again. So after 14 days at sea you were really, you know really had it. It was very hard.

And the primary role of the Rockhampton was at this stage, minesweeping?

Not at this stage, no.

- 07:30 Mainly anti-submarine and escort, and carting troops around. We'd take soldiers on board and cart them from one spot to another spot. It was a common way of carting troops around in those days, small detachments of Australians. They didn't like it a bit really. They felt very claustrophobic.

Your father and your older brother had joined the

- 08:00 **armed forces during the war. What had become of them?**

Well my father joined the army. Went into the [(UNCLEAR)] command military band. Decided that, that wasn't for him and joined one of the armament regiments. Was due to go to the Middle East but when Japan intervened stayed in Australia and then his CO said, "Trooper Holyoake, I think

- 08:30 you're a bit too old for this caper, so we'll give you an easier job." So they sent him off I think to either Kapooka or Singleton. So he became the army depot postman and bugler. So he sat the rest of the war out in Kapooka I think. But in the meantime, in 1941,

- 09:00 he'd remarried.

And your elder brother?

The last time I saw John was when I left Kerang. Because Dad and I went to Kangaroo Flat and subsequently I joined the navy. I hadn't seen him at all. And apparently he was called up when Japan came into the war. And he was

- 09:30 in the 39th battalion. And he was attached to ANGAU, which is the Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit. And I think he was a signaller in that but I didn't know anything about this until very much later on. I know apparently he was in Buna when the Japanese
- 10:00 landed in the Buna-Gona area to go across the Owen Stanleys. And from what I can gather he was captured with some American airmen who had been shot down and some priests and nuns from the mission. And they were attacked by Natives and given over to the
- 10:30 Japanese. As far as I can glean from information that I've received the men were beheaded. And this

happened approximately on the 8th of August 1942.

How much contact did you have with your father and his new wife throughout the war?

No contact with my father.

11:00 When I was doing my initial training at Cerberus I did visit him at Royal Park on one occasion, when I had Weekend Leave. But for the remainder of the war until the war finished and he came out of the army I didn't have any contact at all. I had contact with my stepmother because she was living in a little flat in St Kilda Road.

11:30 She was a high school teacher but then she was working for the Air Department in Victoria Barracks doing some secret coding work. Which she wasn't allowed to talk about so I don't know much about it.

When the war ended....

12:00 **what were you looking forward to at that time?**

Well, when the war finished I still had another 8 years to serve. So I was just looking to carry on doing what I was doing.

Were you happy with the life that had found you in that respect?

Oh yes. The only thing I was very, very disappointed with on the corvette was

12:30 our divisional officer was a gunnery officer who was just an ordinary reserve, he wasn't in permanent service. And he wasn't as good at record keeping as I would have desired. The navy, for example, when I did the seaman torpedo man's course on the Hobart the next step was to go to Cerberus to do a leading torpedo man's course. That's the next step up the

13:00 chain. But to do this your divisional officer has to put in to the navy board your recommend. In other words you have to be recommended every quarter, as an on-going thing. Now when I went to the corvette I told the gunnery officer (that was in '44, the war hadn't finished) you know that I'd put in to become an LTO and make sure my recommend would go in as normal.

13:30 Now it wasn't until well after the war finished and we'd formed up with the mine sweeping flotilla and we were in Melbourne and I happened to be in Port Phillip Club and there were some of my contemporaries doing the course I was supposed to do. And I knew, well there's something not right here. So when I went back on board and I said, "Have you been

14:00 putting in my recommend?" and he said, "Oh no you'll be getting out of the navy won't you?" And I said, "No this is my career. I've got another eight years to go." "Oh." That virtually ruined my career from then on. Just a simple bit of paperwork that was never done. But anyway, to get back to the corvette again. After we left Rockhampton we went back up to Morotai and there was several

14:30 navy ships, corvettes, the swan the sloop. We went into Ambon but the Japanese wouldn't let us in at first so then we went to Mindanao in the Celebes. And we brought out, oh about 100 Dutch

15:00 internees who were in a prison, had been in a prison of war. We had this whole group of women and children who were very sick with beriberi and little kids that hadn't sort of grown for 4 or 5 years. We had some on stretchers and so we had to look after them and get them back to Morotai. Had a very large hospital in Morotai where they were looking after all these ex-prisoners of war. We didn't go to

15:30 Ambon to bring the prisoners of war out but some of the corvette did. So they had to be taken to Morotai and stayed about 6 weeks there until they were healthy enough to actually take the trip home. But we did go there later on and take the surrender from the Japanese.

What was that occasion like?

Rather odd I thought. You know, you just go to the war and nobody

16:00 says anything but when you sign the Armistice it has to be done formally: a table and a guard around and you have the Japanese naval commander having to ceremoniously hand over his sword and sign the treaty and all the rest of it. All this ceremony goes on and you think: well why? And I was always part of that because we

16:30 didn't know what we were going to strike so we always had an armed party. We had soldiers on board as well as armed sailors. We had 9 rifles and 9 Tommy guns [Thompson submachine guns] and 9 pistols as our small arms quota on the ship. So we did that. And then on another occasion we took a detachment of soldiers and an Air force officer and we circled Halmahera and we

17:00 installed the Sultan of Tinati on the island. And it was a great, big ceremonial day and this little sultan, you know went ashore and put him back on the throne and quite a lot of fuss and ceremony went on there. And then we went around to the very place, back to where I said we shelled and we took the surrender from that garrison there. There were 40,000

17:30 troops on Halmahera and apparently they'd been detached to there from China. So they were all

relatively well fed and didn't look too bad. But an amusing incident took place. We anchored off the island and the Japanese had to send out a landing barge to pick us up. And we had an army officer, a captain

18:00 and some soldiers and a detachment of sailors, me included. So we piled into this Japanese barge and the Japanese coxswain took off, but we didn't speak Japanese and he didn't speak English. So anyway he headed off in this direction and the officer said, "No, that direction." and pointed towards the shore. The Japanese man shook his head, "No, no, no, no."

18:30 And the officer thought; oh well, where's he taking us? So he pulled out his gun and pointed it at the Japanese coxswain and said, "That way." And he definitely turned the boat around and headed straight in, but what we didn't know, he was taking us around the sweep channel. What we did was go over a minefield.

19:00 **Again a lucky escape after the war had ended.**

Oh it was a fairly shallow boat so you know. I tell you it was the roughest ride I've ever had. It was an old wooden craft with an old Daihatsu diesel or something and talk about vibration. It was pretty rough.

What was your reaction to news of the atomic bomb?

19:30 Well it was quite an amazement, wasn't it, that such a thing could happen, particularly the one that dropped on Hiroshima and then another one on Nagasaki. It was a shock to think it could all finish so quick.

I know you took the surrenders, but were there any celebrations on the Rockhampton to mark the end of the war?

20:00 Well we were in Adelaide and yeah we took part in the old street celebration. Everybody was drinking up and dancing around the streets and that girls were kissing the horse and all that sort of thing. It was rather a wondrous time. And it was a great relief for those who sort of their time was just about up. Me, oh, another eight years.

20:30 **How much did navy life change once the war was over?**

Well it changed to a great extent. We could have lights on at night on the ships. And it was more relaxed. But during this period when we went up to New Guinea to take the surrenders and

21:00 all that sort of thing we still remained on a war footing so there was no relaxing as they didn't know whether the Japanese would accept the surrender or not. Now when we came back, we came back to Sydney and then half a dozen corvettes formed up into the 20th Mine Sweeping Flotilla. And there was another group of corvettes went to the 21st. we swept around the

21:30 coast. Started off at Broken Bay around Wilsons Promontory and off Tasmania, Storm Bay and the Gulf of South Australia. What we were actually doing was checking, sweeping all those swept channels so that they could put out these notices to mariners that it was safe. So that took

22:00 approximately a fair amount of time. But the intervening time the point system came up. You know they had a number of points. You've probably heard about that one. And so gradually all the old hands went off and we used to get batches of you know the two-year [(UNCLEAR)] service blokes on board. So it finished up pretty, well it was pretty hard on me because I was

22:30 only an able seaman torpedo man but I used to have to be PO the watch. And the captain used to say, because when you're sweeping you follow the sweep of the corvette in front of you with a little flag on their float. So it's like ploughing a paddock. You've got a row of corvettes and they each have a sweep out and you've got to stay within the flag.

23:00 So that you sweep this section and the next corvette and so forth. And then another corvette drops Dan buoys along so we know the area that's been swept. But of course it's very hard to keep station correctly with these young kids. And the skipper used to say, "Get Holyoake on the wheel." So Holyoake used to spend a lot of time on the wheel when we were mine sweeping. So it was pretty hard for me. Didn't get any extra money for it either, which is worse.

23:30 So finally it got to the stage where everybody except two of us who were permanent service. The ship tied up at Watson's Bay and just prior to everybody going off we sort of mothballed the ship, cleaned everything up, covered it all with waterproofing and then everybody went off and just left this other guy and myself. And we thought,

24:00 "Oh this is great, we're free. Nobody else is giving us any orders. Nobody is telling us what to do." And then the realisation hit us; we didn't have any power light and all we found was an old primus stove and a can of Webol and we used to go up to the Watson's Bay butcher shop and buy sausages and cook them. Then after about 2 days we got sick of this and said, "We haven't got any money. We need to get paid." So we gave ourselves up to Balmoral. But it was

24:30 such a chaos they didn't do anything about it. And so they sent me down to Williams Town to work on

those workboats that were being sold off. 400 pounds a pop. And me and a mate, a mechanic, worked on them for about a fortnight and then they sent me down to Geelong on shift and reserve. They had 6 corvettes and a couple of frigates down there and we were looking after them. And then finally, from there

- 25:00 I got a draft to Cerberus to my [(UNCLEAR)]. Now once again I went to Melbourne. Down for Weekend Leave in the Pot Phillip pub having a drink with me old mates. And they said, "Where have you been?" and I said, "Why?" And he said, "You're supposed to be in our class." And I go back on board and I see the skipper.
- 25:30 I said, "Excuse me Sir. I think I've got a draft to Cerberus for LTO." And he says, "Yes I know Holyoake, but I didn't want to let you go." So that put me back another certain time. So anyway he finally let me go. So that was in I think about July '46. And it happened to be right in the middle of a raging
- 26:00 rubella epidemic. And I was wearing this navy jumper, pretty rough wool and I've got a sensitive skin so it gave me a bit of a rash around my neck. And as soon as I got to Cerberus the regulating PO looked at me and said, "You've got rubella. Off to the sick bay." And I didn't, but once I got in there I don't know whether I had it or not. So I was there for a fortnight. Missed my class again.
- 26:30 So I was stuck in the isolation ward, the rubella ward, which is a whole heap of sailors. So they decided; oh yeah we want some rubella serum for the expectant mothers. So they bundle us into a bus and took us to the Royal Melbourne Hospital and dragged a pint of blood out of us all to make this serum with. Didn't even ask permission they just did it. So anyway eventually
- 27:00 we got started on the course for LTO and in the meantime they decided to hive off the torpedo branch and form an electrical branch so I had the option of going torpedo anti-submarine or electricals. So I opted to go electricals. So I stayed on and did further courses and that finished in 1947. And then I got drafted to commissioning crew of HMAS
- 27:30 Sydney the aircraft carrier. So I was sent to HMAS Lonsdale Port Melbourne to await the arrival of the Kanimbla the ship to go to England on.

You went to pick up the Sydney, which was the Terrible beforehand?

It was the HMS Terrible.

You picked it up.

Well it took a long while but prior to that we went to Devonport.

- 28:00 And because we were going to an aircraft carrier they put us on board an accommodation ship called the HMS Glory, which had been paid off and was in a hell of a mess, dirty. They said it would be good experience working on a carrier. But in the meantime they also sent various people off to do courses. For example I did a Damage Control and Firefighting Course and then I went up to Chatham and
- 28:30 I did a Cinema Operator's Course because we were going to get movie projectors on the ship. So it was pretty good in a way because it was a long, long time before the ship was actually commissioned.

You were to be in that ship for a few years after its commission. How many?

Oh I didn't stay on it long. I think

- 29:00 all together, well from the time we left Australia to commission the Sydney and by the time we got back to Australia 12 months elapsed. So I was only on it for a year that time. And then when the Sydney came back we did do a cruise up to Manus Island, you know flying aircraft and whatever. And then we came back to Western Port Bay and they drafted me off to Cerberus.
- 29:30 And I was there as depot maintenance party electrical maintenance. So I was there for the best part of two years. And in 1951, back on board the Sydney to go to Korea.

Could you describe the Sydney for us and your role upon it in

30:00 1951?

Well it was a small aircraft carrier about 18,000 tonnes. And I was in the electrical branch. Once again the jobs were rotated. We had nothing to do with the aircraft we were just company crew. So it was much the same as the Hobart. By this time

- 30:30 the electricals were getting a little bit more sophisticated and there were more things on it. Like hangar motors and lift motors and goodness knows what. A lot more electrical equipment.

It was an even bigger ship than the Hobart though. What new challenges were there for you in an aircraft carrier?

Yes. I wouldn't say there were challenges. It was

- 31:00 just a matter of you know routine. Doing your job. And under the circumstances it became pretty

difficult. Particularly when we were operating off the coast of Queensland, when we were doing our patrol. An hour before flying started, which would be at dawn first light, everything had to be tested. So we would be up on the flight deck testing the communications between the captain and the port control

31:30 position, the deck landing officer's position and all the other communications between the deck and the flying officer's control position up on the bridge. And then also there was stand-by on the crane. That was another job.

What was the crane used for?

Oh it was needed to lift an aircraft.

32:00 **What were the conditions like that you were working in, in that Korean time?**

Well conditions weren't too bad. It was a good ship in a way there was plenty of room to move. But when we were operating over the 38th Parallel it became very, very cold. And

32:30 working conditions there were really atrocious. You know the seawater was freezing on the ship's side and we had snowstorms and it was virtually impossible to work outside for more than a couple of minutes without having to go back into the warmth again. I know I was working on the gun side of one of the Bofors guns and I took me about an hour just to remove a cover plate and change a globe.

33:00 I could only get one screw out and my fingers would freeze up and I had to you know take me gloves off and warm me hands and do the next screw sort of thing. It was all very, very trying. And to keep the guns crew busy they used to make them wash down the salt off the mounting. Poor old guns crew would go to the bathroom get a bucket of hot water and a piece of rag to wash the

33:30 [(UNCLEAR)]. Rub down the metal work and the actually cloth would freeze to the steel it was so cold.

How did the navy prepare the crew of the Sydney for these conditions? What sort of equipment did you have or clothing for such extreme conditions?

The navy didn't sort of

34:00 supply us with too much except our normal kit. I bought a Canadian army jacket off somebody in Japan, which is very handy. And we were issued with long handle underpants. You know

34:30 and also long sleeved underwear. And by the time you put on that and I had a pair of cotton pyjamas that I put on over that and then me pants and then about 3 jumpers and a jacket I was like a woolly bear then. So it was pretty cold.

What was the Sydney's

35:00 **role during that campaign?**

Well it was to provide air to ground support for the troops. We were flying Sea Furies and Fireflies; propeller driven aircraft. And they were excellent at ground to air warfare. And so they'd fly off these sorties at night time. And after they'd debrief they used to

35:30 recite the day's efforts over the loudspeakers. You know they'd say, "Oh we've destroyed 4 bridges, 2 ox carts and 14 huts." And things like that. But over night the Koreans or the Chinese used to rebuild the bridges. And every now and again one of these ox carts would go with a bit of a bang but

36:00 we really didn't achieve much but expended a lot of effort.

What were your opinions on this new war? It wasn't as widely known about or supported as the last war you'd been involved in.

No. It wasn't. because every now and again they'd have a truce and stop but it

36:30 seemed to me to be a pointless exercise. I mean we lost a number of aircraft shot down and we lost I think two or three young pilots. Expended a lot of ammunition. Rockets and so forth, bombs. But I think we achieved very little.

By this stage in your naval career you could almost be considered an old hand.

37:00 I was yes.

Did you take an attitude towards the younger recruits you worked with similar to ones that had been taken to you early in your career?

Not necessarily because the people I was working with, like the electrical branch, would have all gone through that recruit business and gone into

37:30 the electrical branch or whatever. And they were virtually, maybe not as old as me or as experienced as me but we were all sort of virtually on a par. They wasn't that feeling of you know inferiority towards somebody else. I can't say that with the seamen. We didn't have much to do with the rest of the crew. We virtually worked and lived amongst your own group. I mean there were people on the

- 38:00 Sydney who I met I didn't have a clue who was on there. And I'm still finding people to this very day that were on there and I didn't have a clue. When you think there's upwards of about 800 crew for the aircraft and about the same for the ship. So there was upwards of 1,500 to 2,000 men on there and you didn't have anything
- 38:30 to do with the flight people you know the aircraft people. Because they worked different hours. I mean they went to work when we were going to bed. You could hear them up in the hangar replacing engines and doing this and doing that to the aircraft to get them ready for flying the next morning.

How hard was it just to find your way around this mammoth ship?

Well as far as aircraft carriers go it wasn't all that big. But no I didn't have much trouble. They were a bit hard at first but

- 39:00 no, it was all right. Because basically it's flat on the top, you know the flight deck and the neck deck down is the hangar deck. So that's a big wide-open space too. And below that are the accommodation decks and so on and so forth. And we had a cafeteria type mess thing where we had these metal trays with little compartments so you'd queue up past the galley and they'd serve up various portions of your meal onto the tray.
- 39:30 And then they had a big 44-gallon drum of hot water and you'd just dip your tray in that and wash off the surplus and then they had a large steam cleaner to clean them. You had your own knife and fork and spoon. But that was a little different to what we had on the corvette or the cruiser.

Had your accommodation improved along with your rank?

Well it had to a

- 40:00 certain extent because there was more room to move. If you felt like it you could have a trot around the flight deck. Although during Korea the flight deck was packed with aircraft as well as the hangar so we had twice the normal compliment of aircraft, which we'd normally carried in peacetime. No but it was a comfortable ship. We had good messes and so we didn't have to eat in our mess we had the cafeteria.
- 40:30 **How long was the Sydney's involvement on that occasion that you were with her in Korea? How long were you up there on that occasion in '51?**
- Oh I don't know. You got me there on that one. I can't remember the exact dates.

Tape 10

00:30 Can you tell us about typhoon Ruth?

We had finished one of our patrols and we were in Sasa Bay in Japan and I remember going ashore that afternoon and

- 01:00 we had this terrific rain storm. We came back on board during the afternoon because we were called back and the weather was starting to get particularly bad. It was torrential rains and to the likes of which I hadn't seen before. We got on board and the captain decided to go to sea instead of staying anchored at Sasa Bay, so we sailed out. It must have been around about later
- 01:30 on that evening when we sort of hit the full force of it and we sailed into the wind with the engines going flat out and making about one knot steerage way. The wind and the waves were absolutely tremendous, the wind just howled and nobody was allowed up on the flight deck. The damage it caused was incredible and the waves were smashing
- 02:00 up and hitting the boats and crashing them against the ship's side. Two or three aircraft were washed off the flight deck even though they were chained down. Water was getting into some of the ventilation fence high up on the island and getting down into electrical compartments and starting electrical fires.
- 02:30 It blew away the radio antennas, it was really a frightening twenty four hours.

As an electrician on board at the time how active were you in trying to shut things down?

We couldn't do much because once the water got in all we could do was put out the fire and try and maintain things as they were.

- 03:00 Until we got back to Kure in the British Commonwealth Occupational Forces area. When we got into Kure Japanese engineers came on board and set up in the offices below our mess deck, were the engineers and electrical officers they work away on some of this gear. They'd take ashore a big panel
- 03:30 of burnt and mangled switch gear and two days later they'd come back completely refurbished, copied and built exactly the same. After about a week in Kure at a dockyard they fixed things that would work properly before and they really did a marvellous job. We had trouble with some of the one hundred and

twenty volt three thirty three cycle machines

04:00 and they fixed them. They even fixed all the leaking taps that the plumbers couldn't fix. If they hadn't done it it would of taken six months or more to get the stores out from England and replace everything that's providing they had it. It was a magnificent job that the Japs [Japanese] did.

How strange was that for you having been at war against them only five years earlier?

04:30 It was strange, it was one of the feelings that I just couldn't get over. I couldn't reconcile the brutality of the Japs in the war and the Japanese at home. We were based in Japan and we use to ultimate between Sasa Bay and Kure on the inland sea. I couldn't get over how polite the Japanese people were, how kind and they were very honest

05:00 and they never caused any problems as far as we were concerned. Everything was very cheap too because I think it was eight hundred and five yen to the Australian pound in those days, and three hundred and sixty yen to the American dollar. So consequently everything was cheap.

What other images do you still hold with you

05:30 **saw of Japan during the Korean War?**

I could see just how industrious the nation was because we'd be away from Kure say for a month and when you got back there were new buildings. It had been pretty heavily bombed and there'd be new shops, new this, new houses.

06:00 One time when we were at Kure and we were let off a bit early and we went to see where the atomic bomb had fallen at Hiroshima and that was pretty sad to see all the devastation. They had trams running again by that time but the amount of people you saw on the streets with disfigured and burnt features was really sad, and to see the

06:30 result of that atomic bomb.

How did that make you reflect on the war that you had been involved in?

You got mixed feelings about that because I suppose it end of the war quicker, whether it would of done or not or whether Japan would of fought to the bitter end and lost more casualties you will never know because it didn't happen. I just felt sad

07:00 because the civilian people suffered the most. Not all the Japanese in Hiroshima or wherever would of known a great deal about what the army or the navy was doing. I think they were pretty much kept in the dark, they didn't really know much about the war. They were just ordinary people getting about

07:30 their daily lives.

Can you describe what the typhoon was like and what it sounded like, during the worse moments of that on board the Sydney?

I heard the noise of the wind and the waves, it was just fierce, and it was just like a huge wailing sound.

08:00 The ship was moving around quite a bit as you would imagine with rough sea. I think being below decks probably wasn't as bad as if we had of been on the flight deck but you wouldn't of lasted on the flight deck you would have been just swept away, and nobody was allowed up there anyway and we had no reason to be.

08:30 They didn't even attempt to try and salvage anything or repair anything at the time they just let it be, and let it blow itself out.

What did you see of the damage on the flight deck when it was over?

Didn't see a great deal of damage accept the boats and we lost a couple of boats that got washed ashore. One aircraft was dangling over one of the Bofors

09:00 gun mountings but apart from that you could see other damage.

You returned to Australia shortly after that?

We called into Hong Kong and we had an American helicopter on board and we handed over a

09:30 lot of information to the ship that was going to relieve us which was HMAS Glory the carrier we had lived on in England. We stayed in Hong Kong Harbour for quite a few days I think while they handed it over. I don't know what they really handed over apart from some aircraft, the helicopter

10:00 and probably a lot of information. There was one thing that did impress me was sailing into Hong Kong Harbour was a French troopship loaded with young French Foreign Legion soldiers on their way to Vietnam. At that time we didn't know very much about

10:30 Vietnam but later on when our involvement became more open then I kept on harking back to these

young French soldiers. I know in that last standing when the French decided to make a stand they were all killed and I felt just so sorry for the young soldiers. That sort of then

11:00 made me very much an anti-war person as far as Vietnam goes.

That was one of the questions I wanted to ask you towards the end, you had two years left to serve in the navy, you left in 1953?

That's right.

How weary were you becoming in those last two years?

Very.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

11:30 First of all it was a very frustrating time for me because my promotion had been disrupted, I had ambitions. As it was I was qualified for petty officer and by my contemporaries had gone to be chiefs so I

12:00 was very very cross about that situation. I wasn't a happy boy at all and I drank a lot and I was just quite content to see out the last year or so of my time. When the Sydney came back I went to the naval air station at

12:30 Nowra and from there they sent me down to Jervis Bay and we were operating air sea rescue boats when they were flying from Nowra so we had one of these sixty three foot search and rescue boats. I was the base electrician and I was looking after the boats on the base and we had a little base right down on the wharf.

13:00 At that particular time the navy hadn't gone back to Jervis Bay the Mitcham College was there but during the depression it was transferred to HMAS Cerberus and all the buildings were leased out on a nine year bases to people. There were two hotels and about five guest houses out of all the buildings and it was ACT [Australian Capital Territory], so the New South Wales liquor laws didn't apply.

13:30 Soon as Nowra rang and said, "Flying completed," you'd put the boat away and up to the pub, it was a pretty sort of laid back time that I had there.

How much was the drinking a problem for you at the time?

It was never a problem, it was just good

14:00 and there was plenty of it. Sometimes we'd get a barrel of beer from the pub and go down to the beach and sit there all night until it was gone and go back to work the next morning.

Were you married at this stage?

No.

Would you like to tell us when you got married?

I came out in 1953.

14:30 Have I mentioned about the CRTS [Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme] course?

No but you can now.

After the war for the returning servicemen the Commonwealth Government initiated the this Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme where by you could go to university, college or whatever and take up a trade

15:00 or vocation. As I was in the electrical branch I wanted to be an electrician. That gave me the opportunity under this scheme and that's one of the reasons why I never signed on again because I got a letter from the Department of Reconstruction and Training saying 'any further reengagement would cancel my training.'

15:30 I was only able at that particular stage to sign on for a further five years and then the possibility of another five years, theoretically at aged forty that was it, then I had to look for life beyond that, so I took up this things. I started this scheme and it was very good and they put me with an electrical contractor in Melbourne. The contractor paid me

16:00 second year apprentice money and the commonwealth government made up the rest and they brought tools, books and school fees. I had to attend night school two nights a week, half past five until half past seven or half past five until half past nine a couple of times a week. Which was a bit awkward when you are working it could be anywhere around Melbourne because there is always a scramble to get back home. I did my two years and I got my A Grade licence

16:30 and then the subsidy finished. But that gave me the start in life that I wanted.

How hard was it after having spent so long and such a period in your life in the navy?

It was.

What challengers were there then?

Reverting to civilian life, fitting back in, not being able to do the same things, the same

17:00 very close relationships with your shipmates, and settling down to routine. I was in a sort of a quandary because I really wanted to settle down so I think I married the first girl I asked, which was a disaster. Although we had six children I wasn't particularly happy married. I was probably very difficult. I was suffering from

17:30 wartime problems I suppose and the fact that I had to try and live in a married situation, go to school, go to work so it caused a pretty hard sort of existence, plus the fact that I didn't have the same money that I would be able to spend. I can always recall the different times when beer was

18:00 two shillings a bottle, I could only afford one bottle a week. I had to cut down on all of those sorts of things.

In what ways were you difficult do you think?

Generally speaking I think I would be hard to live with. In any relationship it takes two to have problems

18:30 so it's not all on one person, perhaps the girl I married should not have married me. But she loved babies so we kept on having babies. After the babies grew up she didn't want to really know about it, so that left me in a pretty difficult position. I pondered whether I'd get out of that situation at one stage and I know I was having a drink in a pub and one of my old shipmates

19:00 said, "I've got a good job for you." I said, "What is it?" He said, "An electrician on Cape York at one of the lighthouse ships. We want an electrician bad." I thought about it and thought, "Gee, that would be great." Then I thought again and I would only dig myself into another hole, I said, "No, but thank you I can't take it. I do have some responsibility."

19:30 But it was an attractive thought.

You have mentioned a few times today that you thought that you had problems that you could attribute to the war, would you like to tell us a bit more about what those problems were?

To be perfectly candid I really don't know. I suppose it manifested itself,

20:00 I think I better just mention when I was working as an electrician, I was with this contractor for a number of years and then a job came up at Mentone as an electrician in this plastic factory at Nylex at Mentone. I was there until about 1963

20:30 but one of the fellows I worked with the shift fitter he said, "I'm going to apply to the Education Department as a trade teacher." There was a rapid expansion with the baby boomers and the rapid expansion of building technical schools all over Victoria and they needed tradesmen to be part of the scheme. He said, "What about coming in as an electrical

21:00 trade teacher?" and I said, "Ok." We applied in 1963 but I got knocked back so I decided to go back to school. Actually I had decided the year before to go back to school and get an electrical technicians certificate and then in 1963.

21:30 I had left high school early I better do some HSC [Higher School Certificate] subjects so I did English expression, Australian history and social studies at that particular time. The next year I applied at the end of 1963 and I had to go before a board consisting of the

22:00 head principle of the technical schools. One of the principals was rather cursed with me because I hadn't completed an apprenticeship, because everybody had to go through the apprenticeship thing. By this time I was getting to the stage where I said to myself, "This doesn't sound fair." I said

22:30 to them, "I couldn't do an apprenticeship because I was in the navy, and because I was away fighting that means that I'm not going to get a job." And I said, "I've done the same thing as an apprenticeship, I've done the course." And I showed him all the results, certificates and what have you that I got from the schools that I had passed. One of the other people on the committee said,

23:00 "Don't worry Mr Holyoake, that's all right," so this guy got overruled. The next thing I got a letter to say, "Report to Footscray Technical College on 1st February 1964," and that started my career in teaching. Then we did two days at the technical teachers college and three days

23:30 teaching. Then when I finished the course at the technical teachers college I trained in trade instructors certificate and they posted me to Frankston tech. But during that period at Frankston or during the period at Footscray also on part of our lectures we had to go to Collingwood Technical School. It was very frightening

24:00 because for recess and lunchtime they had an identical siren that we had on the Hobart and every time

the siren went I use to freeze. This horrible feeling use to go through my body and just for a brief minute I use to think 'when is the next bomb going to drop', but it didn't. Then I realised in the next second that I was at the

24:30 Collingwood Technical College and not on board the ship. That feeling stuck with me all the way because I use to often go to the various things doing pilot studies on multiple choice questions for apprentices and I was on the committee that was doing it. We use to go to Collingwood a bit and every time these sirens use to go off I didn't like it.

25:00 **A lot of people have had dreams about their wartime experiences, what about you in that respect?**

I often have. Not so bad now but I use to have a lot of nightmares. Something terrible was happening but when I woke up I didn't know what it was.

25:30 Sometimes I'd be on the ship and it would be tearing down this little narrow water way and there it would crash and then I'd wake up, or something like that.

26:00 **Who did if anyone did you talk to about the war and it's effect on you during these years?**

About the only time that it actually happened I did go to some marriage guidance people and they talked to me there but I was very reluctant to open up.

26:30 You would have never in those days caught me talking like I am today, I just clammed up. Apparently one of the people said to me, "With navy people, they tend to withhold everything." You can understand why because when you are living with a group of people in such confined spaces

27:00 you can't go off your trolley and ranting and raving at somebody else because you don't like the way that they sneezed or something like that so you had to keep a lot inside. It's difficult but you learn to do it to keep you feelings under control. That's why the opportunity to get ashore and have a few drinks and try and release the

27:30 tension and for most sailors that seemed to be the way, that's why alcohol probably played a big part.

When you look back at the wars you participated in, your service in the navy, what are the strongest images that have stuck with you?

The strongest images would be

28:00 the Hobart it always stuck in my mind and it was always my favourite ship even though I had been on other ships. I never had the same attachment and the friendships are still endured today. It seemed to be that the Hobart was my second home and my second family.

How did you feel in the years after you left the navy,

28:30 **how do you feel that your service was recognised by civilians and by the population in general?**

I didn't think too much about would anybody recognise it, it was never an issue. Around about that time there were a lot of people who had been in far worst situations than me, from all the services.

29:00 There was nothing odd about what I had been in or had done, in fact I was one of the lucky ones.

What do you miss about the navy?

I don't miss anything in a sense. I have been to sea since because

29:30 about ten or eleven years ago one of my daughters is married to a sailor on the Perth, and he's a PO weapons electrical. In the navy you have what they call 'father son cruises' its virtually a publicity thing they invite fathers of serving members to go on a cruise when it's possible.

30:00 I was lucky I was able to go onto the Perth on the Monday and spend a week on it. It was doing exercises up and down the coast and it was going to Melbourne to represent the navy on Anzac Day. I really had a great time, I didn't see anything of my son-in-law because he was missile tower the whole time, and so he kept on apologising, "Sorry I can't,"

30:30 but they just work twenty four hours a day. They were off to Newcastle having simulated war exercises with the aircraft from Nowra, Newcastle and they were going at it at hammer and thongs for days. I was living in the petty officers' mess and I couldn't help remarking to all sundry that would listen how different that class

31:00 of DDG [Destroyer] was to the old Hobart, I couldn't just get over it, it was just so different. The PO cook would come in and say, "If you go to lunch at eleven forty five I've got this on, then we had got this on and that on," you could virtually pick your menu. They were very health conscious

31:30 and in fact there were no fatty foods that we got dished up with whatever it was all carefully planned

for nutrition and so forth. They had the old ice cream machine because it was an American ship in the cafeteria. Always a big dish of fresh fruit and in the POs' mess they had a tea and coffee machine going all the time so you could have a cup of coffee. Down in the

32:00 POs' rec [recreation] room they had a fridge and you could have a drink when you are off duty.

You mentioned your daughter how much have you talked to your children and grand children about your service?

Not a lot because they don't live here, they know. One of the girl lives down

32:30 near the Mornington Peninsula and one of the girls lives in Perth, another one in Melbourne, but they are pretty keen to know.

You mentioned you weren't so keen to talk about it and you use to hold things in. Why have you changed that to this point where you can talk about it now?

33:00 First of all I find it easier because I've gradually come to the situation where I'm asked to talk about it. For example at the War Memorial where I have been doing the wreath laying with the kids and you have this little talk sessions after with the kids.

33:30 They ask you all kinds of questions, some of them are very intelligent questions; some of them, "Did you know my grandfather? He was in the war." And, "How many Germans did you shoot?" The boys always ask this question and so forth. It's good because it makes me feel more at ease with myself. I don't know how I became involved in that but

34:00 since I've been in Queanbeyan for the last eight years I have been involved.

When you talk about the past which we have done all day today and you think back perhaps about that sixteen year old boy who entered the navy all those years ago. Do you recognise him in yourself?

I recognise some parts,

34:30 I'm still fairly idealistic. I like to be as truthful as I can and as honest as I can in dealings with other people. I hate lying politicians and I hate what politicians do to servicemen,

35:00 particularly now. This is one of the things that really upsets me the fact that service people are used for political purposes. The troops are going away and the ships are going away and you see the Prime Minister there. What the public doesn't know is that behind the scenes they are withering away at your entitlements, making it harder to get this.

35:30 I had a hell of a job myself getting a disability allowance I had to go through quite a traumatic experience, being interview with a physiatrists and doctors and goodness knows what. I was actually told from someone from the naval association because up until that time I never considered

36:00 that I needed help, I'm quite capable of earning a living and I don't want a pension or anything like that. I didn't want to go through the trauma.

When you look back on your period in the navy and particularly your time on the Hobart with

36:30 **all the benefit of hindsight how do you feel about it now?**

Happy that I was able to do it, happy about all the friendships I've made and still have, and happy that I was able to serve on such a good ship. I've got no regrets about anything that happened during the war, I've got no regrets about some of the things I've done, some of the things I could have done better

37:00 since the war. I look forward I don't look back. My father had a calendar I think and I always remember this it had a saying on it 'the mill will never turn with the water that has past', that's my motto in life. I look forward, I have no control over what's going to happen tomorrow, I can't do anything to change the past

37:30 so you life for today.

That's a good motto. With that in mind we are in a very different Australia and a very different world right now then we were in some of the periods we have been talking here to day, how do you feel about the future?

I'm not quite sure how I feel about the future but I feel sad about the present about what's going on in the world.

38:00 The problems that are happening today haven't happened overnight. I think in my time I've seen the effect colonialism on other countries and how the colonial powers have been pretty ruthless in their deals with their natives. You can see it in a lot of these things coming

38:30 home to roost now, if we didn't keep people segregated then they wouldn't want to rise up and try and get what they think is their just desserts, although the means a rightful, there are two or three things

happening right now. I think it's a bit like 'as you sow, so shall you reap',

- 39:00 I think a lot of the present day problems are caused by what people have done in the past. Hopefully we will have some enlightened people at the top who can do something to preserve the environment, fix up the
- 39:30 hospital system, fix up the educational system and making life better for the young people. It's tragic that there's so many people working in casual part time work, if a job is classified as a job with one hour a week, you can't go to the supermarket and say,
- 40:00 "I only want to pay a fifth for that piece of meat." I don't work that way. I feel sad for the future and I'm not quite sure whether I'm happy about it or not.

Do you have a message for the future, people who might be watching this in fifty or one hundred years time?

Yes I do

- 40:30 have a message to the young people to just think over the suffering and devastation that has cause by war and the people who are involved in it. There has got to be a better way of solving disputes than going to war. Don't trust your politicians
- 41:00 and I would really like to see the leaders of all the countries who want to be involved in conflict to do what they use to do in other words get out in the front and lead, and I don't think you'd find that you would have a war. That reminds me of a review of a book that was rewritten by a soldier and on the closing paragraph the review said, "There are two kinds of people in the world,
- 41:30 those that like war and those that have to fight them."

On that note I think it's a very good point to stop. Thank you very much for taking part in this today?

It has been a pleasure and thank you for the opportunity to tell my story to those people who are going to listen to it in the future.

INTERVIEW ENDS