Australians at War Film Archive

Thomas Wilson (Tom/Tug) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 25th November 2003

http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1126

Tape 1

00:46 I was born in Townsville, but to get there my mother had to go in by train, from Richmond, from a station at Richmond called Tarbarek Station[?].

01:00 So we went into Townsville, I was born there then we came back to Tarbarek Station. Quite a big trip for just a little job. At the time we were working on stations [large properties] in north Queensland, run by my father's uncle. He was in charge of half a dozen stations up there, Tarbarek was one. Carpentaria Downs was one.

01:31 There was about six of them all together. He was in charge of the lot, for an English meat company. Started school in Charters Towers at the age of five. I can still remember the nun on the first day; she was a real old witch. I've never forgotten her. We went from Charters

02:00 Towers to Kempsey. My father had been up in Queensland for a few years, and he has to get out of New South Wales because of his asthma. So we went back to Kempsey and we were only there a couple of days and he had asthma, of course. But we stayed there for a few years. And farmed at Clybucca, just outside of Kempsey, about sixteen mile out.

02:30 I went to school at Clybucca School, and that was before the 1929 flood. And it was a big flood. The only bit of ground was where we were. So we had about ten herds of cows, thousands of people. They were all there for meals, they were all there for everything else but they were never there for the milking.

03:00 We had a lot of cows to milk at that time. But I was only six or seven at the time, so I didn't do much. Anyway, we transferred from that farm to a bigger one, down there. Then my father left and came to Queensland, looking for a farm of his own. So he ended up at Biloela, just over the range from Gladstone.

03:32 We bought a farm there. We were there for quite a number of years, doing correspondence first.

04:06 We stayed there until 1939; we sold out and moved to Yepoon. And that's where I started in the picture [movie] theatres. I had lots of fun there. They brought a milk run. We used to get up at two o'clock in the morning, milk our own cows, take it around the town,

04:33 deliver the milk, then go home. I used to do that as well. Then at eight o'clock I would go to work, and work all day right up until eleven o'clock at night. And then go home. One night I actually went to sleep riding home and I ended up about half a mile past the house, up a hill. I was there when

05:00 I was eighteen and I got my call up for the army. I had been trying to get in the navy for donkey's years [a long time], but my father wouldn't sign the papers, of course. So I got my call up for the army and I went into the showgrounds at Brisbane. We were sleeping in the stables. We were there for about four days. Then they drafted me to Beaudesert. To the 1st Australian

05:30 Heavy Artillery Unit. And we were on 155 guns there, that's six inch. Six point five I think. We were there for quite a long time. I did a [jungle training] course at Canungra, and came back to Beaudesert. We were preparing to go to the islands. And every second day,

06:00 we would march up to Lytton, in Brisbane, the next day you would march back. We did this for weeks, getting us used to do it. And we were doing jungle training as well. At that time I got word that I was accepted in the navy. So I got my discharge from the army and went into the navy.

06:32 I went to Melbourne and I went through the bullring again. The bullring is where you do your initial training. From there I went to Sydney. And the wharfies' [wharf labourers] strike was on. For some reason, I had to go on the [HMAS] Wilcannia.

07:00 The Wilcannia was a naval ship that used to ply from Sydney to Brisbane, carting goods. So I went for a trip on her. And coming back to Sydney, I was crook [ill] one morning, but it was my duty on to cook the

breakfast. So up at I get at four o'clock, I cook the breakfast, everyone comes down at half past six and seven o'clock and nobody would eat their breakfast.

07:30 They'd come to the window then they'd walk away. They didn't get any breakfast. So I had to go up on the bridge and report to the skipper, on the way to Sydney. I had the greatest case of mumps you ever saw. No wonder no-one would eat their breakfast. So I ended up for a fortnight in the South Shore Hospital.

08:03 And ended up there for a fortnight. a really strange thing happened there. Somebody was speaking to one of the nurses and calling her 'Sister Kemp'. I said, "Kemp? What's your first name?" She said, "Edith." I said, "Do you come from Clybucca?" She said, "Yes." And I went to school with her.

08:30 She lived on one farm and we lived on the next farm. So we had quite a good time in Sydney, that time. Then we got our transfer to Darwin. So we hopped on the train and went through Townsville. We camped in Townsville at night. We went out to Mount Isa the next day on the train, camped there that night, in the middle of a big dust storm.

09:01 Everything was red the next morning. We get up the next morning and a big call goes out. "Everybody who can drive a car has got a car." So we had to take all these blooming vehicles from there to Larrimah, for the army to pick up from Larrimah. Because apparently they were short. Obviously there wasn't too many vehicles over there at the time. Anyway,

09:30 we got out of the trucks there and we got onto the train. A little narrow gauge train. We used to call it 'The Spirit of Protest'. Because every time we came to a hill, the call came out, "Everybody out and push!" So everybody got out and pushed the train up the hill. We had, I suppose, about twelve months in Darwin.

10:00 First at Myilly Point. That was the main depot. Right alongside the hospital was the naval. We were in a house just across the street. But all of the houses there at the time we were well ventilated. They were all filled with holes from shrapnel and stuff like that, from the bombing. We were there a few days at Myilly Point and we got our draft to the Boom [?] Depot.

10:33 I was there a couple of days and the skipper's called me in and he said, "You're a film projector?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, we've got a projector now and there's no-one to run it, so you're it." So they put me in the electrical repair party and I operated the films at night. They'd been trying for years to get

11:00 machines up, to put them in the Star Theatre, which had been bombed out, during the early raids. Every time they got one on a ship, that ship was sunk. So they had about three goes to get them up there, then they finally got them up there and I operated that for a while. Then I had to go out for a couple of days on the Kangaroo, out on the harbour. It

11:30 was a boom ship. It used to go out and pick up the boom nets and check them and things like that. But I only had a couple of days on it, then I went out to the Kurra Kurra. That was a gate ship. I was there for a while. I was there as a cook. I cooked at home, before I joined the navy. I get on the Wilcannia and I cook for about fifty men,

12:01 I get up there and I'm cooking for about thirty men. They want to send me to Melbourne to do a cook's course. I said, "No way. I didn't come in here to cook." So anyway, we did our time there. Oh, I missed out. The first night we were at the boom depot, we had an air raid. They came over,

12:30 quite low, and we knew it was coming. We were on top of the hill here, and the oil drums were down there, so we were close. We had no idea where the slit trenches were, but we soon found them. We got in… Quite a funny sensation, an air raid. Coming over you can hear the drone of the engines; all of a sudden you hear a big click. That's the bomb leaving the plane.

13:02 So long as you don't hear a whistle you're safe. If you hear a whistle, it's coming for you. Anyway, we got through that. We had another one, later on. Christmas Day they were coming in. Apparently, for some reason, the raid was called off, because about half an hour later we got the all clear.

13:31 Then we got our draft to the Ipswich, I came in from the Kurra Kurra, the other two blokes were in Darwin. It was a strange thing, though; our camp in Darwin was the courthouse. We were sleeping on the veranda of the courthouse. I was in this bed here and Jimmy Gilchrist, the tennis player, was in that one alongside of me.

14:03 We were looking at the tennis court across the road and saying how lovely it would be to play tennis. He said, "Do you want to play tennis?" We said, "Yeah." He said, "Good. I'll get some rackets and stuff." So he sent away to Dunlop and got a big heap of rackets, a big heap of balls, and we played tennis. He used to get on one end, there'd be four of us on the other and he used to beat us. Of course he was only a Davis Cup player, so it was expected.

14:38 There were three of us to go. There was myself, Lofty Simmons and George Clarke. And we go out to the…and there's no seats. So in they go and they drag three officers off the plane and put us on. Said, "This is strange." We only

15:00 had light shirts and light shorts on, of course. We were in Darwin, it's nice and warm up there. So we

hop on the DC3 [transport plane] and we come to Brisbane and we're all freezing. Absolutely freezing. We just woke up, it's the middle of winter and we've got no clothes with us at all, only our shorts, and what we're standing up in, and our hammock, which was in the back. So anyway, we landed at Brisbane. The next day we

15:30 hopped on the train for Melbourne. We were supposed to be going to Adelaide to pick up the Ipswich. We get to Melbourne and we get word that the Ipswich is not in yet, from the Mediterranean. So we had to go out onto the Napier. We get out there,

16:02 the skipper didn't endear himself to us. Because our first day out there we got leave at four o'clock. We were racing for the train, we walked onto the platform and turned left, then we hear this bellow behind us. It was the skipper. We had to go back and report to the officer of the watch because we didn't salute him as we came onto the platform. He was about a hundred yards up the platform anyway. So we didn't have to. But

16:30 that's the kind of bloke he was. I won't mention names. I could because I've never forgot him. Anyway, we were only there for a fortnight. We did trials and all that type of thing on the Napier, and that was the only time that I was sick in all the time I was in the navy. Then we got our call to Adelaide to join the Ipswich.

17:00 And she had just come in. She was just starting the refit so we got a couple of weeks' leave. We came back, then we got stuck into splicing and all that type of thing to get her ready for sea. After we completed that, we did the trials on her. Then we went to Fremantle, then back to Ceylon [Sri Lanka}. Ceylon was our base at the time.

17:30 We were operating off Ceylon, to the east and west. We were doing convoys. We were doing sub [submarine] patrols and all that type of thing. One night we got a call out to chase a sub, and I think there was about six corvettes went out. We got a response so we dropped depth charges. We saw oil and we saw stuff on the surface but

18:01 they used to shoot them out of the torpedo tubes if they were close, to make us think that we had got them. Apparently we didn't because it was never recognised. We had a quite a time there. I don't know exactly how long, now, offhand. We left there and went back to Perth.

18:31 We went right around Australia. We had a little while in Sydney, getting our mine sweeping gear ready. Because we hadn't done any mine sweeping to that stage and it looked like in the Pacific War we were going to do a lot of it. We got all that ready, and we did a few tests. Then we went up to Leyte.

19:00 We were at Leyte for a while, then we went to Manus Island. That was the main naval base in the Pacific at that time. We were operating there. The Yanks had built a big picture theatre there, and they had no operator. So muggins [I] joined in again. It paid off because I got a projector from the American Navy and I

19:30 carted that with me everywhere. Every ship I came across, I used to change films. It was quite good. The boys used to get a picture every now and again. Anyway, we had a lot of service in the Pacific. We were at sea most of the time, refuelling off carriers and oil tankers and things like that.

20:00 And just before the end of the war we were patrolling up and down the east coast of Japan, trying to stop the Japanese navy from doing anything while they were bombing the place. We were about six weeks doing that, I suppose. And two o'clock one morning we got the word that the war was over. And we were to head for Japan.

20:31 So at eight o'clock the next morning, we were outside the heads of Japan Harbour, and we were going in. The whole Australian fleet was there. They stuck two little corvettes out in front and we wondered why this was. We were going in and we looked to the sides. There were big hills on both sides. Impregnated with guns. So we found out why they put the corvettes in front.

21:01 But we get inside and the British fleet's in there and the American fleet's in there, so it was perfectly safe, but they were very cautious. There was a terrific amount of ships in that harbour. We dropped anchor about half a mile, I suppose, from the [USS] Missouri. So we had quite a good view of everything that was going on during

21:30 the signing of the peace treaty. I have no idea how long we were there. Time didn't matter in those days. I mean, you were there, you had to do something today, and you did it today. Time didn't seem to matter. Anyway, we were in Yokosuka one day, and we were going to flog a midget sub and bring it back.

22:01 But just as we were going to flog it, one of the destroyers came across. That settled that, we couldn't flog it. But then they put us on the mail run. We were the first ship to tie up at a Japanese wharf. We will admit that. Even the navy will admit that. But that was because we had to pick up the mail.

22:30 Anyway, after the peace was signed, we got orders to go to Hong Kong. We were going over in a convoy then all of a sudden, fresh orders, we were to return to Australia for a refit. So we took off, went down through Manus, spent a couple of days at Manus, then went back down to Sydney. Spent a couple of days at Sydney. I went on leave

23:00 from there and I left the ship. I got a draft off. It was the end of 1945, and I went on leave and I had to report back to Brisbane afterwards. I did my demobilisation. So I got out in March, of '46.

23:32 I got straight on the train and I went to Western Australia. I'd been writing to a girl in Western Australia, actually. That's why I went over. I got a job at Geraldton, on a sheep and wheat property. It was quite good. I spent a fair bit of time there.

24:01 Then I came home, to Barcaldine, actually. I was mucking around for a while, then a mate of mine had a shop there. He got sick, so I took over the shop for him for a while. There was a picture theatre closing down and I was tempted to buy it and

24:30 go into it myself. But at that time I got the call from the… department, to go to Rockhampton for a course. They told me I could do anything I wanted, so long as it was carpentry. So carpentry I did. From there,

25:00 I went to Gladstone. I was supposed to go for a job at Blackall. I went out there and he didn't want anyone when I got there. I went back to Rockhampton and they sent me to Gladstone. I worked there for a while and we didn't go on too well, this bloke and I. So I left him and I went with another bloke. His brother was a Member of Parliament, actually. He was doing all the work

25:31 at Swift's Meatworks, which is where the aluminium plant is now. And we did all the building there for years. I got sick of that. I thought, "There must be something better than carpentry," so I put in for a job with the railways. In the stationmaster's grade. I got

26:00 called up and I did the test and got accepted. I trained at Rosedale, then I went to Miriam Vale as the night officer. I went to Gayndah as an assistant station master. And from Gayndah I went to Woolloongabba, on the relief. My home station was

26:30 Woolloongabba, but I was on the Toowoomba relief. So I did quite a long time relieving all the stations around the area. First class, second class, third class. And I was a fifth class station master, and I couldn't get a fifth class station of my own, so I told them to shove it. I then went to work for Singers. I was with them for a while, but I didn't like them.

27:01 I liked the job, but I didn't like the way they went about their job. So I left there and I came back to Bundaberg. I went to work at Fairymead. I did about twelve months there, but I couldn't get on with the boss, again, so I said, "Right, give it away." So then I went on the main roads as a cost clerk

27:30 at Miriam Vale, then at Gin Gin. Then I came back to town. I went to Milliquin . I finished up at Milliquin. Twenty one years I did at Milliquin. Ended up in charge of the

28:00 repairs on their trucks. So that's about it. I retired from there. Now I'm just working around the house. I'm quite wrapped up in two naval associations. The RSL [Returned and Services League], Legacy, so I've got plenty to do. Particularly at this time of the year when I've got to go out and see all my widows and give them prezzies [presents].

28:44 **Tell me about the station that your parents were on, when you were born?**

Tarbarek. I don't remember a lot. I left there when I was two, I think. But I do remember that they had an old

29:00 steam tractor there. Big old thing, big wheels on them. I saw that thing working, that was many years ago. We had the main house; we had accommodation for all the men. We even had accommodation for the men. Even married men's quarters, which we stayed in. And alongside that was the tennis court.

29:30 I can mostly remember because we've got a photo down of the sisters standing beside the tennis court, and a dog chain hanging from the tennis court fence and it looks as though it was tied up there. I can't tell you much about it, because I just remember anything about it much.

And when did you move from there?

30:03 1925 we left there. We went into Carpentaria Downs, then, I think it was. My mother and us went into Charters Towers to start school.

30:31 **So your father had to stay?**

He stayed working on the station. He only came in weekends. But we went in to go to school. There were no school out on the stations.

And you mentioned your first day at school was a bit of a shock? With the nun?

Oh, yes.

What did she do?

I don't know. And I don't know why

31:00 I hated her guts, but I did. She was just a stand-over merchant [a bully], that's all. A lot of them were you know. They reckon away from work they were nice people. I know some of them were nice people, because I've met them. But that particular one I couldn't take at all. I don't know why. I was five years old. I suppose I was a little bit uppity, too.

And what are your memories of Charters Towers?

31:31 Not a lot. It was only a small town. All the gold diggers were gone, and that type of thing. It just settled down after the gold rush. They have since started the gold up again, but it is completely riddled, underneath that town, with pits and channels.

32:00 Wherever the gold was, they chased it. And it saturated. That town is going to fall in one day.

And aside from you disliking the nun, did you enjoy school?

I can't remember, really. I can't remember much about the school at all. That was only my first day when I fell out with the nun, so

32:30 I don't know what happened after that. I don't think we could have been there long because the next thing we knew we were in Macksville in New South Wales. We were staying with our father's brother there on the bank of the river, and he had a boat. And there was a fig tree outside that I fell out of and broke my nose. We had a lot of fun there.

And what was your father doing in Macksville?

33:01 He just stayed there for a couple of days on his way to Kempsey, to his parents' place.

And what sort of work was he doing on the stations?

Stock work. All sorts. He was a very handy man with stock. A very good rider. He used to train a lot of racehorses and he used ride them in races.

Would he ever take you out with him? What do you remember about that?

33:30 In later years I used to ride training for him, and I rode in a couple of races. See, being so young at that stage, I don't remember well… But later on, when I came back from the war, he was training horses and I used to ride for him.

34:05 I rode a couple of races, but I got too heavy. He was only a little bloke.

And what was the situation in Kempsey? It was your grandparents' farm?

My grandparents were there, and there was an unmarried aunt living in the house. We stayed

34:30 there for a while. I don't remember how long. But I do remember my uncle had a T Model Ford, and my brother and I tried to take it for a spin one day. That wasn't too well received.

How old were you?

Six or seven.

What happened?

Well, nothing really. We didn't go very far. We got caught.

35:11 That would be about 1927, '28. The only buses in those days were cars. They had been cut in half and physically extended.

35:33 And wooden seats put in across that way. And there was a Chinese garden across the road. We went from there out onto the farm at Clybucca.

And what was the Chinese garden like?

He used to grow everything over there. We used to over and talk to them

36:00 and watch him watering his plants. He used to carry everything in the buckets, and water his plants from the bucket.

What sort of things would you talk to him about?

I don't know. Probably the garden. He was friendly. They all were. All the Chinese were friendly. I never met a bad one.

36:31 I do believe there was a few bad ones around, but I never met them.

And was there many of the effects of the Depression starting to…

We never noticed the Depression. The Depression was big and everyone was feeling it. But we never noticed it so much because we were on the land. We were milking cows. We had our own milk, our own

cream, our own butter.

37:00 We used to kill a calf occasionally, or a cow or something. We had our own meat. The only thing that we had to buy was bread. You couldn't buy ice-creams in those days. They only brought them out at Christmas time. You couldn't buy bacon any other time of the year, bar Christmas time. Watermelons, rock melons, you could buy them at Christmas time. You couldn't buy them any other time of the year.

37:30 **Do you remember seeing any effects of the Depression by people coming, looking for work, or coming to the property?**

It was quite interesting. They used to have their own signals. They would come to a place and get abused and they would go away and they would leave a stone in a certain place on the gate. And everyone that came along and seen this stone, or whatever it was that was put there, and nobody would go in.

38:01 But if they had a good reception, they got a little bit of work chopping wood or something and got a feed, got a camp or something, they would leave another type of signal. I don't know what the signals were, but I know they did had their signals.

Did many come to your property?

Quite a few, yeah.

What kind of reception did they get there?

All right. They used to chop wood and get a feed and go again. We used to get a lot of people around

38:30 then in wagons, selling stuff. That's where we first start Rawleighs. Rawleighs used to travel around in a wagon, and he used to stay with us every time he came to the district.

Who was he?

Rawleighs. They sell all type of medical stuff, ointments and that type of stuff. They're still selling it.

39:00 We first struck them on a cart. We used to buy it off the cart. And Maloufs, they were a drapers and they used to travel around with drapery and that type of thing. They were the only people you'd buy off in those days. Because they used to come to you. If you wanted anything else, groceries or something, you sent to Rockhampton, or one of the bigger towns, and they sent it back by train. You used to

39:30 buy your tea in four gallon tins. Biscuits in four gallon tins. Jam in gallon tins.

Was it exciting when the train arrived?

Oh yes it would be.

Do you remember going out to the train station, to…

We didn't go in for that very much. I mean my father would drive in

40:00 and get the stuff. We'd be at school probably. We travelled by train from Kempsey to Rockhampton then out to Biloela.

40:30 We went out the farm we just bought. We drove in. There was trees all around. We get into the house, it's a little cubby house, with a little shed there. A few sticks up with a piece of tin where the bales were. All the rest was scrub. So we had to start cutting scrub. We cut it by hand.

We'll just change tapes.

Tape 2

00:40 The floods. That was in 1929, quite a big flood. As I said before we got all the cattle from the neighbourhood up on our hill.

01:02 We had people sleeping everywhere, four and five to a bed. They were sleeping on the floor, they were sleeping everywhere. We were feeding them, and we were milking their cows. Because they were missing. I don't know where they went, because it was way out in the bush. You couldn't get anywhere, and still they went missing.

01:30 It was in that flood that a bull got washed into a fork of a tree. And I do believe that his head and shoulders and some of his bones are still up in that tree. It was a big flood.

Why would the head and shoulders still be there?

It just hasn't fallen down I think. Just the bones.

02:01 **How did your family manage to feed everyone?**

I don't know. I was only six or seven at the time, so I don't know how that happened. They managed to do it, of course. They could always kill a calf, or a cow, or something like that. And there are always vegetables there. We grew our own vegetables all the time. As I said before, we had our own milk and we had our own cream and we had our own butter.

02:31 So you didn't have to worry about too much. And when you grew your own vegetables you only had to worry about a piece of bread, that was all. And then they used to make scones, if they didn't have bread.

Describe what it looked like, the flood the around your place?

Well, it was a continuous sea of water. No matter which way you looked from the top of the hill, where we were, you could see

03:00 water. It was fantastic; I didn't think it was… The trouble is between Clybucca and the sea is all low land. And I don't know why the whole area wasn't covered. It must have been, I'd say.

03:36 **And how did everyone recover from the flood?**

All right. Once the rain stopped it didn't take long to go down. Of course, all that area was very low, and the top of the river is only inches underneath the top of the bank. So, it didn't take much to flood.

04:00 Most of the rivers in northern New South Wales are the same. We didn't go to school. We couldn't go to school, there was no school. It was only half a mile away from the house. There was a row of big wattle trees down one side, I remember.

04:33 Two rooms, I think. I did find the school again, a few years ago when I went back there. And I pulled up at the Clybucca service station and I asked him where the school was. He said, "Just around that corner there." So I went and had a look. The school's gone, but you could see where it was.

Was your family

05:00 **appreciated?**

I think so. After that they would have had to have been. I don't know what happened to them during the day. When the milking came on, I don't know what happened to them. They couldn't go to the pub, there wasn't a pub.

So how did you feel about them disappearing during the milking?

They just weren't there.

05:31 There was hundreds of cows to milk and there was nobody there to milk them. A most peculiar thing.

And so how did your father come to want you all to move back up to Queensland?

Well, he had always got asthma in New South Wales. He got asthma in Queensland, too, in parts. But not as often as in New South Wales.

06:05 The climate didn't suit him apparently. The west suited him; he never got asthma in the west. Got asthma at Biloela. I had a special licence when I was twelve to drive him around in the car at Biloela.

Could you get that at that age?

Yes. The sergeant could do anything in those days. He'd just give you a piece of paper and you could drive a car.

06:31 Mostly I used to drive on the farm. I didn't go on the road too much. And even if you did there was nobody on the roads. There was only dirt roads in those days.

Were you a good driver at twelve?

I think I still am. Other people mightn't think so, but I do. I learnt in a cotton paddock.

07:02 **Were you big enough?**

Yeah. I could just reach it. I managed to keep the car going. I used to drive the car; I used to drive the tractor when I was still going to school. My mother

07:30 must have had a good head, because we never went out in the sun unless we had long sleeves and long trousers on. Never. And yet now I'm going to the doctor every year and getting thirty-five skin cancers cut off. Peculiar.

What was the farm like? What were you growing?

We started off

08:00 all we were doing was milking cows. We had a small patch of plain down the bottom of the hill the house

was on, but we used to put a bit of lucerne in their for the cows. So they could get a feed during the winter. Then we started cutting trees down. Brigalows. Big ones. He'd cut them down with the axe.

08:30 We ended up, we got about fifty acres cleared and we cleared that of stumps and everything, and we ploughed that and put wheat in there. The first year we sent it away and got a bill for the bags. We didn't get enough out of the wheat to pay for the bags. So that wasn't too profitable. We tried cotton. That was all right.

09:02 Yeah, cotton came first. We had the cotton first. Because it could be sown with the walking stick planter, in those days. You didn't have to have a mechanical planter to sow the cotton. So we'd burn the scrub and plant the cotton in amongst where the scrub was burnt. Took us a while to clear the paddock. Then we planted cotton there. Then

09:30 we chased wheat, thinking it would be better, but it wasn't. We had one of the first tractors in the district. We did have the first wheat harvester. So we used to do a lot of contracting around the place. We used to plough for people and we used to take their wheat off and all these type of thing.

10:05 **Was it a hard life?**

Hard work. Particularly the fencing. I used to have to be able to fence on my own when I was twelve. I was flat out lifting the small posts, let alone the big ones. But I had to get them in the hole. But we managed it.

10:30 We fenced the whole place. Then in 1937 or '38, we bought a sawmill. Then we put it in and we started cutting timber. We just started building a new dairy when we sold the place. All we had there was four sticks up, two sticks across the top and some tin on them.

11:03 We used to milk by hand. So when we got the new bails up we were going to put new machines in, but that never got done while we were there. I did get back to see it about six or seven years ago. We went back to the sixtieth reunion of the school. I said, "I'm going back to the

11:30 farm. Is anyone coming?" So everyone came. We went back and we drove in and we pulled up outside the house. I got out and I was standing there to have a look round. The bloke came out from the house and I told him, "I was here in 1933." He said, "Oh, well you're welcome." He took us inside, gave us a cup of tea and then

12:00 gave us the free run of the property so we could go and have a look around. The only thing that was there when we were there was the shed. Part of the shed was still there. The base where the windmill was, that was still there. Everything else was gone. And he was working at the mine, and he was growing wheat at the same time.

12:30 So he had two axes in the fire. But we had a good time. They welcomed us back.

What about life on the farm as a young kid or a teenager. You were working quite hard in that early part of your life. What was that like? Working so hard?

Well, it was the natural thing.

13:00 Everybody worked at that time. As soon as you could do something you did it. I chopped wood from the time we went there, and I was about nine when we went there. We chopped wood and we had to go down and milk, and feed calves, feed pigs. We had to milk ten cows before we went to school and another ten when we came home. So,

13:30 it was a big day for us. You never got into the house until well after dark, then you swallowed your tea and you had homework to do. Usually twenty sums. You used to take a card. Every night you got a card. Twenty sums at home. That was your homework for the night. But we were used to it.

14:00 You didn't mind it. Unfortunately the kids of today don't know what it's like. I suppose they will learn. They haven't had to do it; we'll put it that way.

Tell us about your schooling? Where did you go and how did you get there?

As I said before, our first

14:30 schooling out in Biloela was correspondence. It used to come in, then we'd sit down and do it, then we'd send it away and then another lot would come in. Every week a new lot came and we'd send a lot away every week. Then in 1933, my father was on the committee,

15:00 and all the other farmers around the place were on the committee to get a school. And we held our first meeting just opposite where the school was eventually built, in the scrub. On the side of the road. It was quite interesting, the work up to it. Then they got the school built. My father remained on the committee. And we were the first day pupils.

15:33 In the last reunion, which was the sixtieth reunion, we went back, there was eight of us, the first day pupils left, and the first schoolteacher was there. It was good. A quite interesting reunion.

How did you manage to do correspondence in those days? Who helped you?

It was difficult. But after

16:00 we finished milking, and cleaned up all the stuff there, we could go home, have our breakfast, then we'd sit down and do correspondence. After that we could go and play if we wanted to.

What about if you couldn't work out a problem? Without a teacher instructing you, how did it work?

Well, my mother used to do it. She'd be able to do it. And if she couldn't, my father could.

16:31 He was taught in Kempsey and he had quite a good education. Good handwriting and he was very good at maths. We got over it. It used to take a lot of time away from playing. We never had much time for that.

What about the socialising with other kids?

That was quite good, actually. Surprisingly.

17:04 Well, Sunday was the day. We would probably go to Sunday School on Sunday morning. We'd walk two miles to a Sunday School and come home, then we'd hop in the car and go and visit some friends, and we'd stay with them for the day. Or they would come to our place. Surprise parties was the thing in those days.

17:36 Well, say you had a twenty-first birthday coming up. Everybody would roll up to your house. And nobody knew anything about it, that you were coming. And everybody would be there, putting on a bit of a party. It was quite good. No grog, of course, but still it was quite a good party.

18:00 Old Mystery Overland, is what we used to drive. We drove it for years without a battery in it. You didn't need a battery. Once you turned it over, it would run on its own. You didn't need it. You didn't have any lights. If you went anywhere at night you had a hurricane lamp on the front and a hurricane lamp on the back.

18:37 **You said no alcohol. Didn't people drink?**

At the pubs they did, and oh, at a dance some of them would bring a bit of grog out. There wasn't much. Not so much as there is today, because it's more freely available today.

19:04 But people did drink. And then there wasn't as many people around in those days as there is now, either. There's been a big population explosion since then. But it's funny thinking back over the years, the cars on the roads, how

19:30 they've built up over the years. The top speed in those days was twenty-five miles an hour. That's all you could do, because the roads were so rough. Then you built up to thirty-five, then to sixty, now it's a hundred. The roads keep improving, the cars keep improving. But in those days if something happened to you car, you could fix it.

20:00 You can't today. We were out once and we got a puncture. For some reason we never had a spare, it might have been flat. We took the tyre off, filled it with grass and put it back on. It got us home.

Tell us about life as an adolescent in this area, as a teenager.

20:31 **What were your feelings as a teenager out here?**

Well, I was still going to school until I was seventeen. You travel around so much, you miss so much schooling. I was still going to school at seventeen and I was due to sit for my scholarship that year. My birthday came around and I was too old to go to school, so I left.

21:00 I went to work at the butter factory, for ten bob a week. That's equal to a dollar today. It wasn't too bad. I used to ride the bike five mile into town, work all day, right the bike five mile home in the afternoon. Repeat it the next day. For a dollar a week.

21:33 We had our fun. We used to go to dances at the school, or they would have a surprise party somewhere. Played cricket, played a lot of cricket and played a lot of tennis. Cricket is my star game. My father used to play and the bloke that worked for us was a good cricketer and he taught me a lot.

22:01 I ended up the captain of the school sports team. I did all right. Sport, school sports. Big day. All the cars would come around and take you from the school into town, to the sports oval, and we used to have sports against the Biloela school.

22:30 And Goovigen used to come in. All the little places around, the little schools used to come in and we'd have school sports. I couldn't run. I couldn't win in a race in a fit. But I could jump. I did long jump, I did hop step and jump, I did high jump. I did pole vaulting. But I couldn't run.

23:07 We used to travel to different schools to play cricket. We used to play cricket on Sundays during the

summer. I used to play with the men, then.

23:39 **Just one quick question about the correspondence, too. How did this work with the feedback and hearing about…**

They'd come in from the correspondence school in Brisbane, every week they'd send them. We'd get them,

24:00 we'd open them, we'd do our correspondence. And that same week we would send them back, at the end of the week. And the new lot would arrive. It was quite a good system. I think it's more or less what they still do out west, except for the School of the Air. I mean, that's a new innovation that came in around thirty years ago, but I think they're still doing correspondence out there.

24:30 **And would you get feedback?**

Yeah. You'd get your answers back, comments and all that type of thing.

When did you go to Yepoon?

1939. It would be early 1939.

Take us through that. How old were you and why did you go there?

1939, I was seventeen.

25:02 We sold the farm at Biloela That's why we went there. We got down there and we brought a farm down there. That farm, as I said, had a milk run attached to it. And at that stage, I started at the picture theatre.

How did you get into that job?

Just lucky, I suppose.

25:32 I was very friendly with the people who owned the Regent Theatre at Yepoon. That was Finley. He owned a grocery shop there, too, and his sons used to run the picture theatre, and his second son was my mate. I used to deliver to their place. His older son ran the picture theatre, and the girls were in the office or in the shop. The whole family

26:00 ran the pictures, more or less. I used to hang around there. I was in the box with them, and watching them. The little picture theatre on the corner wanted an operator. Or someone to learn to learn to operate it, so I stepped in. I did it there for quite a while, then they transferred to Hughenden.

26:30 We had forty-six thousand Yanks at Yepoon during the war. They had dances, there was a big hall and there had dances every Saturday night with a band from Rockhampton. But they wanted somebody to work the picture theatre during the week so I stepped in.

27:04 There was emergency that came up Montville so I had to go over there to run a farm for a while, while a bloke went on holiday. It was the brother of the baker at Yepoon. I was over there a fortnight and they came back. Most of the time I milked all of their cows by hand, because the machines had cracked up the first day I was there.

27:30 Anyway, we got over that. They just got back, and Len Harris from the Roxy Theatre at Yepoon came over and offered me a job at the Roxy. That was when the Light Horse was starting up again, and the army was really getting into taking blokes in and training them.

28:01 So they had taken the operator from the Roxy, so I stepped in there and I operated it for a while, until he came back from camp. Then he took over again and I was out of a job. So the other grocer at Yepoon, he was an Italian bloke. He had a farm out at Byfield. He offered me a job,

28:31 so I went out there. Driving little tractors out there amongst the orchard. Keeping it clean and things like that. Then we'd go down and throw the nets in the river, all night, and the next morning go down and pull it out. You could do it in those days, you can't now. We used to get some good fish there. A lot of cod and brim. Kingfish.

29:01 We got a lot of good fish in Byfield Creek. Anyway, I was there for a while, then the bloke at the theatre got called up again, into the permanent army this time. So I had to go back to the Roxy. Old Len had to drive out with the mail and told me to come in. I went in the next week and started at the theatre.

29:30 I kept it going. I kept the music going on the beats that Al had going down there, right up until I got called up myself.

Tell us about first learning how to do this job as a projectionist.

It's easy, actually. The hardest part of it is threading the machine. Once you get that, well, you're set. The first thing I had to do was learn to wind the film.

30:01 That was the first thing because that's the most important thing. I also had to go out on my bike, all

around town, putting blooming posters up. Gluing posters. They used to have them on fences everywhere then. Pamphlets for the pictures. You had to do that first thing in the morning, then come back and clean out the theatre and then

30:30 I'd have to go up and wind the film, ready for that night, or maybe an afternoon show. Quite a lot of work done. Well they just put me on one machine and told me what to do and I did it. And repeated it and repeated it until

31:00 I was proficient. Then they left me alone. He walked outside and I ran the pictures and that was that. Another humorous thing I forgot to tell the bloke writing the book about the picture theatre at Yepoon, in the winter time we had heaters in the theatre. Four big forty-four gallon drums, burning away brightly. It was perfectly legal in those days.

31:34 I used to light them pretty well before anyone got there, then they were burning pretty well, then you'd stack them with wood and let them burn down. By the time picture was finished, the fire was nearly out. But it did the trick.

32:07 **Describe what the theatres looked like?**

They were built like a hall, with the screen on one end. It was usually just hung on a frame, just inside the back wall. You had your box upstairs with your machines in it.

32:32 The seats in those days were fold-up type with canvas in them. Real relaxing seat they were, but they were fairly hard to get out of, particularly when you had them pretty close. When it came to cleaning, it was very convenient because you just tip the chair up like that, clean that area, then tip it back again.

33:02 And most of them had an aisle up the centre, and up both sides. They had seats on the outside, then the aisle, then seats, then an aisle in the middle. The Roxy was a little bit different to that. Although it had the same layout, it was on a slope. Not like today's theatre. Just a ground floor, on a slope, and

33:30 then it had a step up of three foot, then another slope up from there to the box. It was all ground floor. There was no wooden floor or concrete floor in a Roxy. The first Regent didn't have a concrete floor either, but the second one did. Myola had a wooden floor. But the seat layout was the same. The fold-up seats were the same.

34:01 The Myola, when we cleaned that out, we used to just fold the seats up against the wall. And it was a gigantic hall, a terrific hall for a dance.

How popular were the theatres?

Terrifically popular. We whinged like fun when they put the price up to two bob [2 shillings]. It went like fun. It was two bob to go to the theatre.

34:34 It was terribly popular. The theatre was always full. Even the matinees in the afternoon, the theatre was full. Then when the war came, of course, we had matinees every afternoon. We had a show at night. And the odd times, for Gone With The Wind particularly, we had a morning show.

35:02 So we had three shows a day for a time. But it was a very interesting job and I liked it. But I couldn't get back into it when I came back because the bloke from the army, he was in before, he got the job and I didn't. So I had to look for something else. I wanted to do a motor mechanics course when I came back. And they told me

35:30 I could do anything I liked so long as it was carpentry. So needless to say I did carpentry.

Tell us what kind of people would go? Would it be families or would it be couples?

Families used to go. In those days, they were all families. Now you couldn't take a family to the pictures. It's too dear. I don't know why it's so dear, I honestly don't.

36:01 Because they used to make a good thing out of it when it was only two bob a head. That was for adults, and it was a bob for kids. If they could do it then, why can't they do it now?

And what were the popular movies that you remember?

Oh, the big ones I can remember were Gone With The Wind. There was…

36:34 National Velvet was very popular at that stage. I can't remember them. I saw too many movies. Wuthering Heights. Dozens of them.

37:06 **Did they have a snack bar?**

Yes, there was one at the Regent. It was outside; you had to go outside to that. It didn't have windows, it had shutters. They used to lift up like that and you used to hook them up. People would come and get served underneath these shutters, and when you were finished, you shut them down and you were finished.

37:35 Matter of fact the whole theatre had shutters.

What were the popular kinds of snacks?

All types of lollies [candy], drinks, peanuts. Not chips.

38:00 You couldn't get chips in those days. You couldn't get any other food, because just down the road a bit was a café. You couldn't infringe on them. Just ordinary snacks that you would like to eat in a picture theatre. Peanuts and things like that.

38:34 I had ice-creams in the winter time, because there was no freezing.

Do you remember when there were lots of Americans based at Yepoon? Would they go to the cinema?

Yeah. They went to the pictures and they went to the dances.

39:01 I'm trying to think of some of the dances that they brought in when they came over. I might think of them later.

And what was it like when you used to have all these Americans?

It was all right. They used to fill the house up, that was the main thing.

39:38 I don't know what you could say about them. I got on all right with them, but a lot of people took them down. I mean, we could go into to a shop to buy a loaf of bread for one price. An American went and brought the same loaf of bread, he paid a different price. Because he had more money than we did, of course. But that was

40:00 the way it worked in those days, of course. I didn't think it was fair, but they got away with it.

Tape 3

00:38 **So you were in Yepoon when war was declared. Can you tell me what your memories of this are?**

Actually, there was very little happened at the time, because everybody just seemed to accept it was coming. We knew it was coming for a long time before the war was declared.

01:01 Everybody seemed to accept it. Nobody was against it, and nobody was for it. Personally I don't see that war has ever served any purpose in history.

And do you remember when you heard the declaration of war?

Not really, no. The first time I heard it was when [Prime Minister] Menzies announced one morning on radio that were at war. Britain was at war with Germany and so Australia was, too.

01:32 **How did you feel about that fact that because Britain was at war, Australian was at war?**

It was accepted because with the First World War, it happened exactly the same way. It was more or less just accepted. Australia was, then, more British minded than they are now. Britain was the ruling country,

02:00 in those days. They were respected for it. They were at that time. Now it's a different situation altogether. We're in the Commonwealth of Nations but we're not part of it, type of thing. We should be able to make our own mind now whether we're in these things or not.

02:33 But it doesn't seem to be doing us any good, does it? What do they see in wars? The only thing that I've seen come out of war is good machinery.

In what way?

They were all tested in wars, and we get them to use after the war.

03:00 But that's the only good thing that comes out of war as far as I'm concerned.

Your father, what was his involvement in World War One?

He wasn't in World War One. He was too young, I think. Either that or he was on the land and he couldn't go. He wasn't in World War One.

So when you heard the declaration of war, how did you think it would affect you personally?

03:34 I didn't think it would affect me because it was so far away, like the other one. But as I said before, I

had been trying to join the navy since I was sixteen.

Why was that?

I don't know, I just wanted to join. I thought that might be good. I was after it.

04:00 But he wouldn't sign the papers so I gave it away.

Why wouldn't he sign your papers?

He didn't want me to go, I suppose. Anyway, I tried to join the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] a few times and he wouldn't sign my papers there. It took the call up when I was eighteen to get him to sign my papers.

Was there anything about the ocean or the way ships worked that attracted you?

I don't think so.

04:31 Well I mean, I was a country boy. I knew nothing about the ships; I knew nothing about the sea. I just wanted to join the navy. No understanding why I wanted to join the navy, but I did. Strange thing that.

And was there a general change you noticed in Yepoon when war was declared? Or in the time afterwards?

Not immediately.

05:01 The first change I noticed was that men in the lifesaving ranks were getting thin. They were going to the war. The girls stepped in and they took over. That was the first change that I saw. That happened quite quick at Yepoon.

05:30 **How about in the cinema, in the theatres? Was there a change in the types of films you were getting to show?**

Not in the early parts. Later in the war the big war films came in, but in the early part, no. We were getting musicals and all that type of thing. The peculiar thing about the pictures in those days

06:01 was when you went to the movies, you got slides first, then you got a newsreel, then you got a comedy, then you got a film. Then you got a newsreel in the middle, after the intermission, then another comedy, then another film. All for twenty cents. Now they've got one film for six or eight dollars.

06:32 It's ridiculous.

Did people sing, or did you play the National Anthem?

Yeah, we played it every night.

When would that fit into the program?

First up.

And what would people do?

They just stood up. It was difficult standing up in those canvas seats, too.

07:05 **With the newsreels being shown, how updated were you on what was going on in the war?**

Oh, I supposed you'd be a month or two behind, that's all. It was quite modern. It was a funny thing. What got me about the war.

07:31 there were families of German and Italian descent in this country. They'd done absolutely nothing wrong, yet they winded up behind a fence. It just didn't make sense.

Did you experience that at all? Was there anyone that you knew?

Yeah, the first bloke that I knew was the bloke who owned the picture theatre at Biloela.

08:04 Hans Appel. He owned the picture theatre and he ended up behind bars because he owned a picture theatre. He might have some radio equipment there to contact the Germans. I don't know what radio equipment he could have there to contact Germans, but anyway he's one. There were lots of Germans around here did the same thing. They all got put behind bars, just

08:30 because they were German. And most of them were born here, anyway.

Did you see anyone in the local area being treated differently?

No. The Italians, of course, were lovingly called wogs in those days. They never got upset over it, and nobody made any derogatory remarks about it.

09:01 It must have gone down all right. They realised what was going on I think. They had to be called something so it might as well be that.

And so how did you get your call up?

I became eighteen years old. When you became eighteen years old, at that time, you got a call up to join the army, and you had to go.

09:30 I got mine and Lester Finley from the Regent Theatre got his at the same time. We both went down to Brisbane, into the Exhibition Grounds.

How did you get to Brisbane?

By train.

What was that train trip like?

All right. A normal train trip in that era. No fast trains then, they were slow trains. Smokey and coaly, coal flied through the air into your hair or into your eyes.

10:04 **What was your father's reaction when you got call up?**

I don't know, actually. I was away from home at the time. He was back out at Barcaldine then, and I was at Yepoon. He did decide after I got into the army that seeing as I wanted to join the navy he would sign the papers, so

10:30 he went ahead and did it.

And when you were called up for the army, were you still thinking about the navy?

Not really. I had forgotten about it, then. There was no good thinking about it; he wasn't going to sign my papers.

What year was this?

1941. I was eighteen.

Had the Japanese come into the war at this stage?

Yeah.

11:00 They'd come into the war by then. All the Yanks were here, see? And they never came here until after the Japanese war started.

And so what were your impressions of Brisbane as you came in on the train?

It was only a little town then. Not like it is today.

11:33 We came in on the train and we went straight into the Exhibition Grounds. We were allotted the stables to sleep in. We used to walk through the Valley [Fortitude Valley] into Brisbane, occasionally.

What was the Valley like?

Very old.

12:00 There were very old buildings all along the Valley then. We used to walk from the Showgrounds, straight down, come onto the end of Queen Street, that way. That was all old buildings along there.

And so what sort of things would you do in the city, in Brisbane, when you walked in?

12:32 We just went for a look around. Go to the pictures, or go skating. Used to be skating over on the south side then.

Ice skating or roller skating?

Ordinary skating. I don't know whether there was any ice-skating in Brisbane then. There was in Sydney. I don't remember any in Brisbane. We used to go over the

13:01 Queen Street bridge, go round to the right there and there was a skating rink there. It was a dangerous part of town in those days, too. That area, that was where all the muggings took place.

What sort of things were over there?

There was two pubs, a railway station, a whole lot of businesses.

13:31 And there was a concert hall over there and the skating rink.

Did you ever go to or hear about Cloudland?

Cloudlands, yes. Hans Appel ended up owning Cloudlands after the war. I used to dance a lot, in those days, when I went to Cloudlands. It was good.

What was it like?

Good. It was a good hall.

14:00 A good floor. And I knew good floors because I used to do them in [UNCLEAR] Yepoon.

And what was the general set-up of the dance?

Mostly old time. A little bit of modern. Foxtrots, jazz, waltzes, quicksteps.

14:31 But mostly old time.

And what kind of people, apart from people in the forces, would go to the dances?

There was a lot of civilians. Men and women, naturally, we need them both. I found people who danced were all very good people. Because they were active. I suppose, that's why.

15:01 **And were there any sort of troubles at dances? With people drinking?**

Very little. I mean, they used to drink. I never noticed it down there so much. In the country they used to take it to the halls. I never saw it at Cloudlands, but then I didn't drink in those days, too, and that was another thing.

Why didn't you drink?

I don't know. I didn't drink until after the war. I used to take

15:30 blooming drunken soldiers back to the ship, but I never drank myself. I'd be walking along the street with blooming drunken sailors dragging crayfish behind them. It was funny.

And did you meet any interesting girls at these dances?

Not in Brisbane.

16:00 I met some nice girls at Beaudesert when I used to go to the dances down there. We were much longer at Beaudesert so I met people down there. We didn't at Brisbane because we were only there a short while. And being bush people we didn't know Brisbane anyway. So it was very hard to get around.

Were there many Americans in Brisbane at that time?

Yes.

16:30 As a matter of fact, it was shortly after that the Adalistic [?] Brawl took place. And I was in that. On the back of a navy truck.

Tell me what happened?

Actually, it was started by something stupid said in the bar. It was taken out of context, then a brawl started and it started and it spread and it spread and it spread.

17:01 **Do you know what was said in the bar?**

No, I wasn't there. But we were called in and shoved in the back of a truck with machine guns. We never used them, but we had them.

Can you describe what you were seeing?

Just a jumble of people fighting amongst themselves. That's all it was. There was thousands of them. Both Australians and Yanks.

17:30 It was stupid. Absolutely stupid. But it happened a lot. It happened at Beaudesert. It happened in Rockhampton. It happened a lot.

How did you disperse the crowd?

They got sick of it in the end and they went home. The MPs [Military Police] did all the work. That's the Military Police, they did all the work. We just supported them. But it wasn't fun.

18:03 We were sitting down, calmly, getting ready for bed and all of a sudden we were in a truck.

Were you seeing many things around Brisbane, aside from that? Say at a dance, for instance, where the Americans were resented?

18:32 I never saw anything untoward happen at a dance in Brisbane. I did see it at Beaudesert.

What happened in Beaudesert?

They put on a dance and invited the Americans and the Australians weren't supposed to go. So that wasn't too well taken. So they went anyway, and caused a blue.

Why weren't the Australians allowed to go?

They didn't want. They just wanted the Yanks, I suppose.

19:00 Anyway, it didn't go down too well, and a bit of a brawl started. But I don't think we had any dances after that, while I was there.

How about with the women? Did you see much of that? You hear the rumours how all the women fell for the Americans…

Oh yeah. That was always going around. But I mean, all the women

19:30 always talked to us. They were all right. As far as that was concerned, I will admit that Yanks had a lot more money than we did.

And when you were at the Exhibition Ground, you didn't know what type of army you were going to be in, at that stage.

I had no idea. I had no idea of where we were going from there.

So how did they sort you out?

We were on parade in the morning and

20:01 and they called out our names and said, "You're going to Beaudesert." We get down there and nobody knows anything about us. Got the stationmaster to ring the army camp to tell them to come and get us. There was about thirty of us on the platform with nowhere to go.

What were you kitted out with at this stage?

Nothing. Never had a thing.

So you were still in civvy [civilian] clothes.

20:31 Yeah, we had our uniforms. We picked that up at Brisbane. But that was all we had. We get down there and they didn't want us, they said. They took us out and they kept us there. We did everything they wanted… As I said before,

21:00 we were training to go the islands when I was taken out and sent back. Sent back to the navy.

So what was Beaudesert like as a camp?

A nice little town. Good dances, until the Yanks came down. They did different dances to what we did. We did ordinary old-time and modern.

21:31 But they did boomps-a-daisies and all those things, you know.

What's that?

Hands, knees and boomps-a-daisy. That was one of the things they brought out. You clap your hands like that, slap your knees like that then you hit your bums together.

Did it catch on?

No, not terribly well. It used to be done a little bit, but not often.

22:02 I can't remember the others they brought out. There was a few but I can't remember them. I think maybe I didn't go to the dances where they were on, possibly.

And what were your first impressions of the army, in terms of being in Beaudesert at the camp?

It was quite good actually.

22:30 The army camp was on Tabragalba Station there. It was nicely set up. All the offices were in the house. We were in tents, of course. We did all our field training, then we went onto guns. All types of guns. We had to pull a gun down and put it back together blindfolded and this type of thing. Then we went onto

23:00 Bofors, that's a bigger gun. Then onto the 155 millimetre guns.

When you say you went onto them, what were they teaching you about them?

How to fire them, how to pull them apart, how to fix them up if anything happened to them. All this type of thing. Things you had to know and you had to be able to do in the dark.

How did you learn to do that in the dark?

You used just a blindfold on.

23:33 Pull the gun to pieces, put a blindfold on and put it together again. It worked. It meant you could it in the dark if you had to.

And how well did you enjoy this artillery training?

It was quite good, then we had three months, I think, at Canungra, doing the jungle training.

24:00 **Can you tell me about Canungra?**

Not a lot. All I know about it is that it was very dangerous.

In what way?

You used to get bullets shot over your head as you were going through. If you were going overland. A lot of pits, bullets flying over your head, so you had to crawl through and this type of thing, to make certain you kept down.

24:30 They made it as similar to actual combat as they could, without killing anybody.

Can you take me through what a typical day at Canungra would have been like?

Difficult, we did so much. You see it was mostly bivouacking. You'd start out in the morning, you'd march somewhere and then you'd have to go through…

25:02 It might be over walls or something like that. Then it might be crawling through barbed wire. There was quite a lot of stuff that we had to know, but by the same token, we never ever used it. Not after I left there.

Before you left there, what were your feelings about being sent to the islands and possibly fighting the Japanese there?

25:30 Oh, it didn't worry us. That was what we were there for so I suppose we took in our stride.

Did you miss being a projectionist?

Well, that's the funny thing. I could have remained a projectionist and stayed in Australia. Because the first week I was in the army they offered me three stripes to go and work in the picture theatre, and I knocked them back.

Why did you knock them back?

I wasn't in there to show pictures.

26:03 **What were you there for?**

To go to war, I suppose. That's what they wanted me for. Anyway, I knocked them back.

Where did they want you to work?

That would have been on trucks. They had the picture theatre on trucks, and they used to travel around all the camps and do a show here and do a show there. That's what I could have done all the war, and I knocked it back. I'm mad.

26:36 **Did you make any mates during that training or friends?**

Not in the army, because I didn't have time, really. I was moving around a lot. I did the training,

27:00 then I went into the officers' mess for a while, then I went driving trucks for a while. I was getting about a bit and I didn't mix a lot because I didn't drink. Everyone else drank, so I was more or less a loner in those days, I suppose you would say.

You were telling us before that they had given you cigarettes?

Well, when they gave us the cigarettes,

27:31 they told us they were good for us. Good for our nerves. I don't know why they would have done a thing like that, but they did do it.

Were you a smoker beforehand?

No.

After they gave you the cigarettes….

After they gave me the cigarettes and they told me it was good for me, I tried it. And I smoked then for a lot of years. About twenty years ago I gave it away.

28:01 Probably would never had smoked if they hadn't gave me those cigarettes.

Did many people smoke?

Oh yeah, everyone smoked. I don't know anyone who didn't. At least I can't remember anyone who didn't.

Even in the navy?

In the navy everybody smokes.

28:31 And most of them drank, again. I used to go to dances and be sober and they used to come in drunk.

Was it beneficial meeting women being sober?

I don't think so. I always got on well with women. But I don't think it was because I was sober.

29:02 Because I used to know blokes who drank a lot and they got on well with the women, too. So I don't think it was a drawback, one way or the other.

And at the dances you went to in Beaudesert, did you have any girlfriends, did you meet any nice women?

I danced with them all. I was there for about eight or nine months. But you only got into town one night a week, and

29:30 you would meet them at the dance. You wouldn't see them again until the next dance. The next dance was the only time you saw them.

Did you ever feel any pressure to have a drink because everyone else was drinking?

Oh yes, they used to ask me.

30:00 I think, the first drink I had was in Sydney, and it took me half an hour to get the beer. I couldn't see any sense in that. You used to go in, you'd get your glass, and you had to hang onto that glass or you would lose it. Someone would take it. In some pubs they used to cut off bottles and that was the glass.

30:35 You'd get a glass, then you'd struggle to the counter, it would take you half an hour to get a jug of beer and by the time you got back it was flat anyway. So I couldn't see any sense in it. Sydney was a funny place. The boys used to go to some funny places down there but

31:00 I didn't like them. They were too rough for me. The Snakepit and places like that in Sydney.

What was that like?

It wasn't good. It was very rough. There were brawls there all the time. There was a dance, in the Snakepit and you would go there and there would be brawls all the time. I went once and that was enough for me.

Why were there so many brawls there?

31:30 I don't know, they just got full [drunk] and wanted to fight, I think, some of them. Peculiar.

So tell me about getting the word that you were going to be in the navy?

I got that by letter. That they had accepted me for the navy,

32:01 then we had to arrange for my discharge from the army. I had to go out to Redbank for that.

Was this okay, from the army's point of view? Were they happy to let you go?

They weren't happy. But they let me go, anyway, because the navy was a senior service. It had preference, in everything.

32:30 Even if you travelled by train, and you come to a station to tea or lunch or anything, the army and air force stood back and the navy marched in first. Even if they were on the far end of the train, they marched in first and they got seated. The other poor Qs had to struggle to eat where they could.

Why is that?

Senior service.

33:00 It's just an English tradition.

Do the other forces resent the navy for this?

I don't think so. It was just a thing that happened and nobody worried about it. They knew what was happening. They knew that they were waiting for the navy to go in first. They didn't get upset. I don't know why they didn't get upset, but they didn't.

33:31 The most interesting one I went to was Casino. We were travelling through by train and we stayed there for lunch. We had to march away from the station to go under a big tin roof, so we weren't open to the air to have our lunch. Quite interesting, tiny little station and this big area outside where we ate our lunch.

34:03 **Who provided the lunch?**

I don’t know who did. I think it might have been the Red Cross or something like that. But they had them in numerous places. Rockhampton was another place. Townsville was another place.

34:32 The troop trains never stopped anywhere else but where they had to eat.

What was the procedure you had to go through at Redbank to get transferred from the army to the navy?

Well, they took me from Beaudesert out to Redbank in the morning. I had to line up and have my medical.

35:00 That afternoon I was out. Just a lot of signing papers and things like that, and handing my uniforms, getting rid of everything.

And so where did you go from there?

I went from there to the navy depot in Brisbane and collected my uniform from the navy.

35:32 **Was it a better uniform?**

I liked it.

What was it like?

Bell bottom trousers and a coat of navy blue type of thing. An ordinary square rig uniform with the big bell bottom trousers and the tight jacket, with the collar, the dicky.

And what kind of a hat did you wear?

36:00 A tiny little cap.

Do you know why they had a hat like that?

Oh, it was adopted from the English Navy. Now they’re in wide-brimmed hats.

Was it hard to keep them on your head?

Not really. They had a chinstrap.

36:34 They used to blow pretty well in the wind. They’d get on the rim and keep on rolling. Like an Akubra. They will roll on the rim.

So you went to the navy depot and got your uniform and then….

Then I was transferred to Melbourne for my preliminary course,

37:00 prior to getting dispatched to other depots or ships.

And what was the trip to Melbourne like?

Quite good. We had to go on the train from Sydney to Albury, hop off there, hop on the Melbourne train and go down.

Would you talk to other troops on the train?

You could do. You could walk the train. Not many of us did, but you could.

37:31 **What would you do to entertain yourself?**

Looked out. I only have to look at country. I could look at country wherever I go. I love watching scenery. A lot of people don’t of course, but I do. A lot of people played cards. A lot slept. We used to climb up on the hat rack and sleep.

38:01 There wasn’t enough beds. We had to find beds somewhere and that was it. I was small enough to fit up there so that did me. That changing trains always amused me, between Sydney and Melbourne. You’d only have a few hours on one train, then you had to change trains.

Why is that?

A change of gauge.

38:33 Now they go direct from Sydney to Melbourne. As a matter of fact I think they go direct from Brisbane to Melbourne. But not in those days. You used to change trains in Brisbane, change trains in Albury. When you went to South Australia you changed again. Western Australia, you changed again.

39:02 One day we will get the same gauge I suppose. I don’t know when it will be.

And how long did it take from Brisbane to Melbourne?

That’s a good question. I don’t know. It’d be a hell of a lot slower than it is today, I know that. It was team engines all the way.

39:34 I went to Sydney, changed trains in Sydney. That would have been twenty-four hours at least, from Brisbane to Sydney. We left Sydney, I suppose about midday, or maybe ten o'clock, changed trains at the border around about dark.

40:03 Went on from there. I don't know how long it took.

We'll just change tapes there.

Tape 4

00:38 **Just tell us about arriving in Melbourne and going to Flinders?**

We went from Flinders Street in Melbourne, to Flinders Naval Depot in the train. We got off down there, we marched into Flinders.

01:03 Of course we got the normal chiacking [teasing] when you went into a camp. "You'll be sorry." and all that type of thing. We were put into some demountable buildings down the back. And that was to be our home in Melbourne.

01:32 It must have been late in the afternoon, I'd say. We had to walk around then and familiarise ourselves with the place. Find out where everything went on. So you could go there the next day. The first thing we did then was collect our equipment, because up until then we had no equipment.

02:03 We had to collect all our equipment. We had to mark all our equipment. That took us a few days. Then we started training. Field work first, then advancing onto the gunnery and shooting and rowing and

02:32 radar. Radar was just coming in then. We had to be tested for that to see if we would be any good at it. And signalling and all that type of thing. Gas drills. They used to put us into a chamber and let the gas go and hope our gas masks would work. Then we'd lift up our gas masks

03:00 to get a smell of the gas, and all this type of thing. Just so that we knew what it was if it ever came over. And from then on, we did a lot of marching; we did a lot of running. We used to run every afternoon, four or five mile right around the scrub area over the top of swamp. They had a boardwalk there.

03:32 **What differences were you noticing between the army and the navy?**

At that stage very little. Because the bullring is where you go out, you learn to march; you learn to handle guns, all this type of thing. Well, that's exactly the same as it is in the army. But as you advance a little bit further, there's other things you take on. Like radar, Asdic [anti-submarine detection]. And then you've got

04:00 machinery to look after. Some people had motors to look after. They had to learn about that type of thing, they had to learn about them.

What about the atmosphere of the navy? Was it different to the army?

More strict I think. In the army you could get away with a lot so long as you

04:30 were reasonably polite. But in the navy you had to be very polite. They followed very strictly along the English lines. The NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers], you couldn't say anything to an NCO. In the army if you didn't agree with him, you could tell him.

05:00 You mightn't get away with it, but you could tell him. Most of the training area was quite similar. Things that were different were the uniforms, of course. We had to learn to look after them. When they were folded up you had eight creases across your blooming trousers for a start.

05:30 You had to learn to do them. Because when you went on parade, they had to be right, otherwise you were in trouble. As I said, everything had to be marked. You had to learn to swing your hammock before you went to bed. Climb into it, that was interesting. Because they were strung up there, about six foot in the air. You had to swing into them, and then

06:00 swing out of them in the morning. Then roll them up and stack them away.

How did you find sleeping in them?

Good. Particularly after you learn it. Because when you first get it, they used to close over the top of you, more or less, but you learnt to put both a stick at the bottom and the top, that kept it open. You could breathe a lot better. Comfortable. They were quite good on a ship, in the rough sea, you didn't feel it

06:31 as much as you did if you were out of them. Strangely you always put your feet to the front of the ship, I

don’t know why. I don’t think anyone ever told us to do that, but we always did it.

Why do you think?

I don’t know. I think mainly because you had your feet first.

07:02 **And what kind of unique things were you learning about seamanship in Flinders? What were you learning about being a sailor?**

Well, there was not a lot you could learn there, except the rowing and stuff like that, because

07:30 most of the work on a ship is very, very different to the work in a depot. So in peace time they go on training ships, so they can learn the fundamentals of seamanship in actual practice. But all you could do was learn the practical side of it ashore then wait onto you went on a ship… The theory of ashore, then you go on the shore to learn the rest.

08:03 During the war you didn’t put in much time at Flinders. Because they had to pump them out pretty well and keep the numbers rolling. When we finished at Finders we went to Sydney, and we weren’t in Sydney long before we were on the ship.

08:31 **Tell us about being put on a ship. When did you first hear?**

I was at Balmoral. Sent from Flinders to Balmoral. They wanted some people on the Wilcannia. They told me to pack my gear so I packed it. They threw me onto a truck,

09:01 down to the wharf, bundled me onto the Wilcannia and she took off. I didn’t find out until after she took off that I was to help in the kitchen, so that’s what I did. That’s got nothing to do with seamanship, I’m afraid. I was only on it for a week so it didn’t matter what I did, I suppose.

09:34 I only went from there to Brisbane, dropped some gear in Brisbane, loaded some more, we took it back to Sydney. Then they shipped me to hospital, so… I got off that one quick. Anyway, I was due to go to Darwin anyway. When I went to Sydney first I was to go to a barge.

10:01 A troop barge, for troop carrying. They must have changed their mind and sent me to the Wilcannia instead.

Was the Wilcannia?

It was a very old wooden ship. She creaked a lot; she talked a lot during the night. Particularly in a rough sea, she was bad.

10:35 I can’t tell you anything about outside, because I wasn’t outside. I was in the galley most of the time. Of course I slept on the mess deck. But most of my work on there was cooking, or assisting the chef.

How would you come to be the cook?

They were just short of a cook.

What had happened to the previous cook?

11:02 I don’t know. He must have been drafted or he got sick or something and I took his place. Same thing happened in Darwin. I got on the Karra Karra, and as soon as I got on there, I was the cook. I don’t know why they picked on me. I was the lucky one, I suppose.

Could you cook?

Yeah, I could cook. But I wasn’t used to cooking for blooming thirty men.

11:30 **What would you cook?**

Anything. Roasts, steaks, sausages, whatever was going. A lot of tin stuff was used in those days. The eggs came out of a tin, that was powder. Eggs were in powder form, potato was in powder form. In some cases you got the good stuff. Strangely enough the potatoes weren’t bad,

12:01 but the eggs weren’t much good. All you could do with the egg was scrambled egg. You couldn’t do anything else because they were just powder. All you had to do was add water and salt and pepper and that was it. We got through. They wanted to send me to Melbourne to learn to cook but I wouldn’t go.

Why not?

I didn’t want to cook.

12:33 I could have made a lot of money if I had learnt to cook, but I didn’t want to cook.

How did you get out of them wanting you to do that?

They asked me if I would go and I said, “No.” I said this wasn’t what I joined up for.

Did you have any leave before you left for Darwin?

No. We had some after we came back.

13:02 We never had any before we left.

Tell us about the trip then to Darwin on the train?

We left Sydney on the train, went to Brisbane, transferred from the train to the navy depot overnight. On the train the next day, for

13:30 Townsville… It used to take you a lot longer to go by train then than it does now. We got to Stuart in the morning, had breakfast then we got on the train for the west. Went out to Mount Isa. Transferred from the train to trucks

14:02 from Mount Isa to Larrimah in the Northern Territory, and then on the train to Darwin.

Did anything happen on this journey, of note?

Oh, the only thing exciting was when you came to a hill on the train you had to hop out and push, other than that there was nothing real exciting.

14:30 Except that we had a carriage at the back of the train, and all the troops were in open wagons. It was silly, but that's the only train they had over there. They were sitting in the sun.

How did they cope with this?

Like cattle trucks. But that's all they had.

Was there a danger from Japanese bombers on these trains?

15:00 No, not really. The bombers came mostly at night, and they wouldn't see a train at night. They came after fuel depots and things like that mostly, or aerodromes. That's why they shifted the aerodrome just out of Darwin, down to Adelaide River.

15:32 So they were further away. At that time the army was down at Alice Springs, and that was the headquarters. And anyone who was above there was regarded as being at Alice Springs, which made it very hard for getting pensions and things after the war.

16:02 **So just describe what you would have to do in pushing the train up the hill.**

Well, you'd come to a hill and the train would be struggling to get over the hill, so somebody would yell, "Outside!" and everybody raced outside and got their hands on the train and pushed. It was only a little train, like one of our cane trains here, only a two foot gauge. But

16:30 it carried the men. It was enough at the time, I suppose. There wasn't a terrible lot up in the north at that stage.

So tell us your naval base or where you were situated was like in Darwin?

Miley Point was, as I said before, right alongside the hospital. There was a big area

17:00 between the hospital and the naval depot itself, and that was used for pictures and concerts and things like that. What we did at Miley Point? Mostly abseiling, while we there. We were only there for a couple of days. They took the chance to teach us to abseil. There was a cliff right alongside. So we used to go

17:30 up and down this cliff. After a couple of days there, they transferred us to the Boom [?] Depot. And that was when we circled our first raid. It was, I suppose about eight, half past eight, nine o'clock at night, when the alarm went.

18:00 Pitch dark outside, and we had to try and find these slit trenches. We had no idea where they were, but we found them and got in them. Planes came over, quite a number of them. You could hear the bombs dropping. You could see where they were aiming for. They were aiming for the fuel tanks.

18:31 They didn't hit them, strangely, at that time. Some of them kept on going out to get the airport. It went on for about half an hour, I suppose. Then the all clear signal went and we all went back inside. To try and sleep.

19:00 **How did you feel during this raid?**

You weren't comfortable. Because you could hear the droning of a lot of planes going overhead, and you were waiting for them to drop their bombs, then you would hear the bombs let go and then you would wait and you wait and you wait, until they hit the ground.

19:31 So, it wasn't very pleasant, but nobody seemed to worry about it. It was just something going on, I suppose. But we had seen the results of previous raids. Because if you walked around the town you'd see the post office was gone, and that was just

20:00 at the back of our depot. You could see that the government house had been hit. The two banks, they'd

been hit. The Star Theatre had been hit. The Don Hotel had been hit. There was debris everywhere. Most of the houses were fibro, and they had holes in them from the shrapnel.

20:35 **What kind of atmosphere was around the time during this time?**

It was all right. There wasn't anyone around. All there was was navy, mostly. There was about eight or ten gun sites along the waterfront. That's all the army that was there. The rest of the town was navy.

21:03 **There were no civilians?**

We were quite lucky. We had a Salvation Army right next door. We could go there any time and get a cup of tea. Game of cards, play billiards, something like that. It was handy, right next door actually. No sign of it now.

21:30 It's gone. The tennis court is gone from across the road.

Was there many civilians, or any civilians?

No civilians at all. They were all gone. It was a navy town, absolutely a navy town, except for a few army along the waterfront, on guns.

Did it feel like a war zone?

22:06 In a roundabout sort of a way, I suppose it did. Because you were expecting raids at any time. Even though they didn't come, you were expecting them. You saw nobody but uniforms. There was nobody there but uniforms.

22:32 And you never saw the army.

Was there a tension?

No, it was very laid back. Everybody got on with what they had to do and that was it.

And what kind of work were you doing here?

There was a variety of jobs going. I was in the electrical repair party

23:00 in the depot, as well as operating the picture theatre. They did try me one day down at the workshops making motors, but I failed in that one so they sent me back to the workshop, so I could fix up jugs and electric lights and all that type of thing. I never used a lathe in my life,

23:31 I'd never seen one in my life, and they tried to put me on one. Well, it didn't work. Not in the time I was allowed to do, anyway. If I had time to pick it up I would have been right. They were doing a lot of work on the foreshore, trying to tidy that up a bit. There were ships on their side in the harbour.

24:00 It was a mess. But that remained a mess until the end of the war. A lot of Catalina flying boats there. The odd Constellations [airliners] came in. They were all there. We had a floating dock there

24:30 to do any repairs on the small ships and things like that.

Were you working on ships?

Not at that stage. I went to a ship later on. I went to Kangaroo first. As I said before, it was one of the boom ships. It went out and picked up the nets and examined the nets and put them back in again. And I did a couple of days on there.

25:00 Then later I was transferred out the Karra Karra, which was a gate ship.

What does that mean?

Well, there were two ships on the gate of a boom. See the boom was a net that stretched from one side of the harbour to the other. Right around like that, and in the middle there is two ships. One is the stationary end of the gate, the other is the moveable

25:30 end of the gate. They signal to one another, and one starts to winch up and draw the net up and it swings in. And the wire comes out from the opening ship, it drops the bottom of the floor, and the ships can go in. Then when they want to close it, they signal again, then start up the winch on the other. That pulls the gate shut and that's it.

26:01 Quite interesting for a while, but it gets a bit boring after a while because you get so used to doing it…

What role were you in on the Karra Karra?

I worked on that for a while then I went on as cook.

What were you doing on the Karra Karra?

I worked on the gates for a while, on the winches, then I went on as the cook because the last cook was killed in the last air raid.

26:30 So they were short of a cook. So I won the raffle. I don't know how I won it, but I got it. I managed it, we did the job…

How was the cook killed in the air raid?

I think a machine gun. That's what I think, I'm not too sure. I didn't know until well after the war that that was the reason I went out there,

27:00 to relieve him. But because I had cooked on the Wilcannia.

So after the Karra Karra, where were you posted next?

I was taken ashore and directly to the aerodrome, to be sent south. And that was when they took the three officers off. Three army officers off, three of us navy

27:30 ratings on. So we went down. Froze coming into Brisbane because we had no clothes. Only very light shorts and a shirt. We picked up our gear from a Brisbane Depot, then it was onto the train for Melbourne.

28:01 We were supposed to be going to Adelaide, actually. But they pulled us off at Melbourne, to send us on the Napier. The Napier, of course, had just come back from the Middle East and was doing a refit prior to going to the Pacific Ocean. The Ipswich was supposed to come in at Adelaide, but she hadn't got there,

28:30 so we had to do two weeks on the Napier. Trials and that sort of thing until the Ipswich came in. Then we were transferred to Adelaide to take her over.

What do trials involve?

Well, you've got sea trials, which is the actual running of the ship at sea. Then you've got gunnery trials, where you are trying out the armaments. Then you've got radar trials

29:00 and there's Asdic trials. There's trials for every part of the ship. It was all quite interesting, really, the first voyages after a refit, because you are doing everything. Everything that the ship can do, you're doing it. The only time I was sick was on the Napier,

29:31 and that was during the trials. I think that was because it was so rough. We were going over one and under three, the waves. I hadn't been to sea before, except for the Wilcannia, which was slow. This was a very fast ship. It did thirty knots.

30:04 **What kind of ship was it?**

A destroyer. Had a good run. In fact it was given to the Australian Navy to man, by the English. All those, the Napier, the Nestor, the Norman, all those. They were given to Australia to man, because they had them doing nothing and we

30:32 practically no navy. Except that we were building corvettes at that stage.

And what was the atmosphere like on board the Napier?

Like a destroyer. It's very brisk. Everything is very serious on a destroyer.

31:02 You can't do a thing… Incorrectly, we'll put it that way. Because if you do it incorrectly, that's wrong, and you will get hauled over the coals for it. Whereas on a smaller ship you can get away with it.

Why is that?

I think because on the smaller ship you tend to mix more together, and the discipline is less strict.

31:31 Because… on a corvette… They were only a small ship, and we had a hundred men on a corvette. Well, you had to get on with them, or you were really on the outer. And even the officers were the same. They had to get on with the men.

32:00 So needless to say the discipline was a little less strict than it is on the bigger ship.

Can you tell us a story of discipline on the Napier?

The first day on there we were given leave. We were going into Melbourne. So we raced up to the

32:30 railway station, walked onto the platform, we turned left, we were walking down and we got a bellow from the back. We turned around and had a look and the skipper was a hundred yards up the… We didn't know it was the skipper, of course. We had only just joined the ship. He was a hundred yards up the platform and because we didn't salute him, we had to go back to the ship.

33:00 Put ourselves on report for the next morning. So we didn't have any leave.

And what kind of effect does this action have on you?

Well, it's something you don't forget because it's so damn stupid. You don't mind discipline to a point, but something like that is so damn stupid.

33:32 It's not only stupid, it's unfair.

Why would he do that?

Oh, just to remind you that he's the skipper of the ship, I think. He was that type of man.

Well, what type of man is that?

That was a very navy type of man. A very English navy type of man.

34:01 He was an Australian, strange as it may seem. But he had been trained in England, like most officers at that time had been trained in England. They were very strict. On big ships they got away with it.

34:30 **So was the Napier a happy ship?**

I think so. I think they got on well. It was much the same crew as it came in on, were on it at the time, except for the three of us.

So tell us about finishing up these two weeks and where you went from here?

Well, our time finished. We didn't know it had finished. We just got orders

35:01 to pack our gear and go back to the depot. Which we did. And when we got there they told us we were going on the train, so they threw us into a truck and sent it into the train. So we were off to Adelaide to pick up the Ipswich, who had had just anchored. She had come into Adelaide, and was preparing for a refit.

35:30 We got there and they immediately sent us on leave. We missed out on all the pulling stuff down. We only had to help them put it back, when we came back off leave, so that wasn't too bad. It was a long way to come.

36:30 **What was your first impression when you saw the Ipswich?**

Well, actually it was a very…ship. The people on it were out of sight. So when we came back off leave, we just walked on and there was nobody about. We had to ask the man on the gangway where the mess deck was, because we didn't know. We'd never been on a ship before.

37:01 Well, not a seagoing ship. They told us where it was, so we went in there and dumped our gear, changed our clothes, into working clothes and we came out and they told us where to go to work. Me? I had to go splicing. Splicing steel ropes would hold the mast up and things like that. Or for the railings around the outside.

37:30 There were lots of steel ropes on a ship, and they're all different splices. Quite interesting, but it takes a bit of working.

What were your first impressions of the atmosphere aboard the ship?

Well, we were on it something like three weeks before anybody came back. They had longer leave than we got because they had just come from the Mediterranean where they were in

38:01 sea battles and things like that. They had taken part in Tobruk, and Greece and Crete. All those places. They sunk a sub just off Greece. They challenged one of the big Italian flaming cruises. They had a lot of fun in the Mediterranean.

38:32 When they came back, some of them found they weren't necessary there, so they had to pack their gear and go. Then things started to settle down.

Was it in any way intimidating being new to a ship with lots of experienced…

It is, yeah, because there are a lot of people that know what goes on, and there are three or four of you that don't anything about

39:00 what goes on, on a ship. A bit upsetting for a while, but it doesn't take you long to learn. I was lucky. I got a lot of the wheel, so whenever I was at sea I was on the wheel for my shift. When action stations came I was, in the first place, on the depth charges, then they transferred me from

39:30 the depth charges to the Oerlikons[rapid fire anti-aircraft guns]. But once she came back from the Middle East, she had an Oerlikon on the front deck. Well, they took that off and put a four inch on. And they took the pom-poms off the aft deck, and put a Bofors up there. They took all of the machine guns off and put Oerlikons on.

40:02 Because before that they had Lewis guns and Vickers guns up there, instead of the bigger guns. So while they were doing that, of course, during the refit, they put Asdic and radar in. That was all put in for the first time while they were in Adelaide.

We're just at the end of the tape.

Tape 5

00:36 **We were just talking about the Ipswich. Can you tell me what she was like physically to be on?**

She was a good ship. Everybody got on well. I only saw one blow up [argument] the whole time I was on there. It was just a good ship.

01:07 **And the area where your hammock was, what was like that?**

It was in the for'ard section of the ship. In the middle of the ship, so it was fairly

01:30 wide, but in the middle of it was also the radio officer, the stokers were on one side, we were on the other side, all our lockers were in the middle. The paint was right in front of them. All the hammocks used to swing fore and aft, of course. No good swinging the other way, you would never sleep the other way.

02:10 **And how many hammocks would have been in your area?**

Well, there was a hundred people on the ship, so there was a lot of hammocks. But then the officers had their own cabins.

02:31 There would be six cut out there. There would be a couple of officer stewards that would be sleeping in the officers' area, so there would be ninety people in the for'ard hatch. Quite a lot. But then they're sleeping at different times, too. There are some on duty at eight o'clock, and they got off at midnight. Then there's another crew on at midnight that goes till four o'clock.

03:00 They go off, then another crew comes on from four o'clock to eight o'clock, type of thing. So they're sleeping at different times, so it's not so bad.

What would you do with your hammock when you weren't sleeping in it?

It was rolled up and stood on end in the for'ard part of the mess.

How comfortable is it to sleep in a hammock?

It's good, once you get used to it.

How long does it take to get used to it?

Not long.

03:30 Not long. Once we got the spreaders in them we were all right. You've got to have a spreader in them to keep it apart. Otherwise it will close in over the top of you. So once we learnt that, it was quite good. A spreader is only a piece of stick that long, with a V cut in each end. It just fits in the top piece of rope and keeps it apart. It's quite good.

04:04 If you roll, you swing, and if you pitch, you go that way.

Would you ever get woken up by rough seas?

No. They never worried you in a hammock. But it wasn't very pleasant outside in rough seas. You would have water coming over the front and if you didn't have the windows closed on

04:30 the bridge, you would get wet. It was all right. In the Indian Ocean we got a lot of flying fish that used to fly on deck. Got a lot of them.

What would you do with them?

Threw them back.

And how did the corvette behave in rough seas?

They weren't good as long as they were ploughing into the seas.

05:02 They weren't too bad going across it. But if the sea was coming behind them, they used to walk around a little bit. Very hard to control.

How hard is to walk around on a ship when it's in rough seas?

You tie ropes from one section to the next, then you hang onto the rope to get to where you're going. Otherwise you can go over easy.

05:30 **Did anyone ever go over?**

They have done. There was ten that went off Norman in the Great Australian Bight in one go. That was a freak wave, of course, but still it was there. There were quite a few others that have gone over, but I think that was the biggest number that has gone over in one hit.

06:01 **How rough would the seas have to get before you tied ropes?**

Oh pretty rough. You see, for the most part you could handle it. In a fairly rough sea, you could handle it all right. It had to be a rough sea before you would put ropes out.

And what were your day to day duties?

When I was on

06:31 duty on the bridge, when I was on the wheel, I did the steering.

What was that like?

Good. It wasn't bad, after I got used to it. A little bit different to steering a car, but quite good. It's a lot bigger, and it takes a little bit longer to turn a ship than anything else.

07:00 **Can you explain how you would get the instructions when you were steering?**

For the most part you are given a course to follow. And that's a number on the compass. And you just watch the compass and you steer to that number. If you go off, then you go off course. That's given to you by the officers, of course. The duty officer gives you the steering to go. And

07:30 it's checked every now and then by the skipper, or the first lieutenant, he comes on the bridge. Just to make sure that you're doing it right. If you're not steering straight, you would get pulled into gear over it. You've got to watch what you're doing.

And what's the feeling like controlling the ship?

It's quite good. But we weren't allowed to… ordinary seamen, weren't allowed to control

08:00 her in action. It always went to a petty officer, when we went into action. He used to take over in action while we used to go to our action stations.

What was your action station?

At the start it was on the depth charges, then it went onto the guns.

And what was your job on the depth charges?

To set them. To roll them into the sea.

08:30 **How do you set them?**

You take the cap off and set them to the depth you want them set, then you put the cap back on, then you roll them off the rear of the ship. That is how we used to do it. After our refit, before we went to the Pacific, we got throwers in. But we still had the rails for the depth charges to go over the back.

09:00 **And when your action station was the guns, what was your job there?**

I was in the Oerlikon. The rear end Oerlikon I was on. A point five weapon. A fairly big gun. It replaced the .303 Vickers that were on it beforehand.

09:31 **What did it look like? In terms of where did you have to stand or sit to use it?**

It was set on a stand, and it stayed on the stand all the time. When you weren't using it, it was lashed straight up and down. You undid it and fitted it onto your shoulder and away you went.

Did you ever have to use it?

Yeah.

When?

We used it mostly on mines. When we were sweeping mines,

10:00 we'd sweep one to the surface and we'd bring the guns out and shoot it and explode it. A couple of times we lined up to tackle aircraft, but they were only viewing what we were doing. And they were pretty well away; we couldn't hit them anyway, so we never fired a shot.

And when it wasn't action stations and you weren't on the bridge, what were you doing

10:30 **for the rest of the time?**

Well, when you were at sea, that is your job. Once every four hours you're on duty, then you're off duty for four hours. When you're on duty, you go to your duty post. When you're off duty, you do what you like.

And what other duty posts did you have apart from the bridge?

11:00 **In port, I was in the electrical repair party. That was about it. Anything was wrong, switching from one generator to another generator, I did that. Most of what you did was fix up things that had broken down.**

What sort of things would break down most commonly?

11:31 Jugs, that type of thing. When we went to Darwin we didn't have a jug, so we had to make one. That was interesting.

How did you make one?

We made up an element and put it in a jug, and it worked.

And after you left Adelaide, where did you head for initially?

We went back to Ceylon then.

12:03 **Had the ship already been to Ceylon?**

It had been there, yeah, but it had only just come back from the Middle East. Where it had taken part in raids on Tobruk and Crete and all those places. They sunk a big sub in the Mediterranean. That one was put down to them.

12:31 Anyway, we went from Adelaide to Perth, where we stayed overnight in Perth. Then we took off the next day for Ceylon.

Did you have any leave in Perth?

We had night leave, yeah. Go off about four o'clock and come back sometimes during the night.

Is this when you met your girlfriend in Perth?

13:00 **Who you visited later?**

Yes.

How did you meet her?

She was a pen pal of mine, for a long time before I got to Perth.

How did she become your pen pal?

I think I was given her address by somebody, some Red Cross or something and I wrote and she answered and we set up a meeting when we went to Perth and that was quite good.

13:30 **What was she like?**

Very nice. She lives in Albury now, I believe. That's where she was the last time I heard of her. No, Albany, down the south.

And what was it like meeting her after writing to her for so long?

It was very good.

14:00 She was a nice girl and I went out and met her family and all that type of thing. They used to grow flowers and sell them at the markets in Perth. So every time you'd see her going to work, she would cart off a big bunch of flowers. Drop them in at the markets, and away she'd go to work. But I never found that out until after the war, actually.

14:31 We never had a great deal of time in Perth. After the war, I found out where she lived and she took me out and we had a look over the place, big garden, lovely place. I can't even tell you where it was now. Never mind, we were on

15:00 our way to India, weren't we?

Leaving Perth…

We did notice the difference in the two seas, from the Bight to the Indian Ocean. The Indian Ocean is very calm, beautiful. Everything was nice and smooth and we had a good trip over.

15:30 **Was there much of a fear of attack by submarines?**

Not really, no. We knew they were there. If we struck them, we'd chase them. In those days we hadn't struck one. We got to Ceylon…

What was the experience like of being out on the open seas for the first time?

It was very pleasant, we enjoyed it actually. We'd sit out

16:00 on deck, when we weren't on duty, and see everything that was going on, and see the flying fishes come on deck. That's the only place we struck them, the Indian Ocean. The sea was as smooth as a lake. Not a wave anywhere, just cruising along. You could see the fluorescence in the water and everything,

16:30 it was quite good. Plenty of dolphins chasing the ship. They always chase the ship. I don't know whether they touch it or not, but they get very close to the bow of the ship.

What colour was the water most of the time? Was it clear?

Oh, quite clear. It looks blue when you're looking sideways at it, but when you're looking down into it, it's clear.

Is there something strange or unreal about

17:01 **being on a small ship alone in the ocean?**

No. I didn't notice so, anyway. I enjoyed it. It was quite a good experience.

What was the weather like?

At that stage it was beautiful. Nice and warm, clear, sunny every day.

17:33 Very starry at night. It was very nice.

Did you have to sleep down where your hammocks were, or in warm weather….

Not if you were lucky and you could find a place on deck. But most people couldn't. Only a few could sleep on deck. There wasn't that much room. A couple used to sleep under each wing of the bridge. That was only four.

18:01 Not too many wanted to sleep out on the deck, because you'd get wet if it rained. Or if the seas come up, you'd get wet anyway.

And during that trip, what sort of things would you do for entertainment?

Play cards. We had another bloke who used to sit up on the bow of the ship and strum a guitar and sing for hours on end. He was good.

18:33 **What would he sing?**

Cowboy songs. Western songs. Like Slim Dusty and all them. Don't you know them? Oh, you are missing something.

19:01 **Did people enjoy him doing this?**

Sometimes they used to get mad and sing along with him. Most of us were off the land, and so most of us knew most of the songs he was singing anyway. Nobody had any other instruments, that was the only instrument on the ship.

And what sort of card games would you play?

Some played euchre, some played

19:30 bridge, some played con-can…..Some of them did play backgammon….

20:05 But bridge and con-can were the most….

Would people put money on them?

Very rarely. They played with matches, mostly, if they wanted to bet. Nobody had any money. We only got five bob a day.

20:36 **And were there any particular people you made friends with?**

The two blokes that went with me from Darwin, they went into the same draft into Flinders with me, they went to Darwin with me, they went on the Ipswich with me, so all the time we were in the navy they were more or less with me. I was very close to them. Still am close to one of them.

21:01 The other bloke's dead.

What were they like?

Very nice chaps.

Where did they come from?

Well, after the war they lived at the Gold Coast. But before the war they came from Sydney, I think. I know one came from Sydney, I think the other bloke might have. We just happened to be in the same draft wherever we went so

21:30 we palled up and… But they never played tennis with me.

Was that because you were too good?

No. I was very mediocre.

22:00 **Were there any little funny ceremonies that would take place on the ship? Say if it was your first time crossing the equator or something like that?**

Yes, they always celebrated that, and washed you down with soap and dumped you in the water.

Tell me about when they did it to you?

I nearly forget now. They got a big dish of soft soap and they put that

22:30 all over you, clothes and all. Then they pick you up and throw you into the pool. They had a pool rigged up on the rear deck.

How did they make a pool?

With tarps and things like that. They did three or four of us at the same time. We were the only ones that hadn't been across, the new ones that had joined the ship. All the rest of them had been on it before. They'd been to the Mediterranean

23:00 on it. So they had been over the equator, so they didn't have any ceremony, but we did.

Did they dress up at all?

A little bit. I believe some of them get rough when they do it. But our mob didn't. We were lucky, I suppose.

Would they tell you any stories of what they had been through in the Mediterranean and the Middle East?

Well, we knew pretty well what they had done. They had told us.

23:32 We knew they were in Greece, and we knew they were in Crete, we knew they had been to Tobruk and all those places. They had done very well for themselves. But we got back there unfortunately.

What sort of advice would they give you seeing as they had been in action before?

They never, really. Because…

24:01 I'd take it for granted that they thought we might have been in action, too, but they didn't say so. Nobody told you anything. You just had to find out for yourself, what was going on.

Were there any good-natured nicknames for different groups of people on the ship?

Everybody had nicknames. All the Clarkes were 'Nobbies', all the Wilsons were 'Tugs'.

Why is that?

That is just where they are in the English navy.

24:32 The English navy started it all. Most names had a nickname attached to it. I can't remember any more. Simmonses were 'Lofties'.

25:04 I forget most of them. You'd think you'd remember that all your life, wouldn't you?

How about if you were stoker? Would they have nicknames?

They would have nicknames attached to their name. But not attached to their rank, usually.

25:32 Stokers and seamen didn't seem to mix too well. I don't know why. Possibly because they worked away from us, and they slept away from us. They slept on the other side of the ship. Even though there was a walkway through, you never seem to meet. They might be playing poker or something over there. And you might be playing poker on your side, but

26:00 you just didn't seem to mix. Even though you had to walk past them to go to the bathroom, or wherever you wanted to go. Because it was on their side of the ship.

You weren't cooking on this ship?

No.

How was the food?

It was good. We had fully qualified cooks on it. They turned on pretty good tucker [food].

26:31 The only thing about the food that I didn't like, we had far too much what we called 'goldfish'. That was herrings and tomato sauce. We had it for weeks and weeks and weeks. It got so bad that we used to

open tins and dump it over the side and try and catch fish. We weren't very successful usually, but

27:00 we got some. I really did get sick of that stuff. Herrings and tomato sauce. I don't mind it now.

And were you allowed to have a bottle of beer a day?

We never got it. I believe some of the ships did, but we never ever got it. I think we got a bottle of beer once the whole time. And that was when we were in Tokyo.

27:32 I think that was the only time we got a bottle of beer. We might have got one at Manus once; I'm not too sure about that.

And you mentioned there was only one brawl on the ship the entire time, what happened then?

I don't know what happened… Two blokes got their blooming knickers in a knot,[angry] I suppose. And got the boxing gloves out and tried themselves out on the fore deck.

28:00 But they were all right afterwards; they got on all right afterwards.

Did it take a while for you to become tolerant living in such close quarters with other people?

It took a while, but you got used to it.

Did anyone have any particular habits that annoyed you?

No. Not me.

Not even snoring?

Oh, some of them snored,

28:31 but you didn't take any notice of that. At least, I didn't. Some blokes grit their teeth or things like that, but that didn't worry me. Because I used to sleep in those days, I don't now. I could go to sleep then and sleep right through. I can't do it now. This morning I was up to quarter past one.

Why?

29:00 Reading. Can't sleep so you might as well be out here reading.

So where was the first place that you stopped?

On the way over? After we left Fremantle, the first place that we stopped at was Colombo. We pulled in there,

29:31 for a while. We stayed a few days there, if I remember rightly.

What was the harbour like in Colombo?

Not good. Most mornings you'd wake up and there'd be a body alongside the flaming ship.

Where would the bodies come from?

Somebody died and they got thrown in the river, I suppose. But you could smell Colombo before you even got there. It was terrible.

30:03 I think it would still be like it today because there are millions of people in Colombo.

Did you have shore leave?

Yep.

What sort of sights did you see in the town?

We enjoyed ourselves, but you were pestered the whole time. People trying to sell you stuff and things like this. You weren't game to go anywhere on your own.

30:30 And you were told not to go anywhere on your own because they will attack you, if you are on your own. But if there were two or three of you, they wouldn't attack you.

Did you ever get out of the town at all and see any of the…

No. Oh, we went up the coast once and pulled into a place up there. I forget the name of it now. We spent the night there. We spent it on the ship and the officers spent it at the officers' club, so…

31:03 I suppose there was an army officers' club there, so they spent it there. But that was quite good. We did get orders to head to Madagascar once. We took off and got nearly there and we struck a convoy and got instructions to convoy it back.

31:30 So we had to fall in behind it, and protect it.

And at Colombo, what sort of things did you do in terms of entertainment? Were there bars or clubs?

Oh yes. But there was so much to see. We hadn't seen anything like that before. And even the shops on the street… The footpath was there and actually on the footpath

32:00 would be a shop. You could look through it, and they would be trying to sell very hard. But you took no notice of that, you just had a look. Then you could hop in a rickshaw and go for a ride somewhere, or go to one of the churches. Take your boots off and have a look inside. A few shops there.

32:30 A few big shops. But we didn't have a lot of time to look through them, but we did have a look. But we were more interested in the small shops, and the people on the streets themselves. The beggars. The beggars would sit on the street, and some of them would have their blooming one arm off or something, and they kept teasing the end of their stump to make it bleed, so you would feel

33:00 sorry for them. They were the richest men in Hong Kong, the flaming beggars.

And did you buy anything interesting there? Souvenirs?

Oh, we bought stuff there. I bought a bag full of cigarettes to bring home to my father. I never smoked. I bought a bag full of English cigarettes for him. Then I had trouble getting them off in Sydney.

33:30 But that's another story. Also in England we had a number of dummy mine sweeping runs, because we had never done mine sweeping before. So we went out and did them and came back and fell in with convoys and took them to

34:00 different places. Then one night we got a call out. They knew there was a sub outside so we had to go looking for it. So, half a dozen corvettes went out and were patrolling all around the place. We got a ping, and we chased it and we dropped depth charges on it, but I don't think we got it. It was never accredited to us anyway, so I take it we didn't get it.

34:30 Even though we found rubbish on the surface, and oil on the surface. But that was a ploy they came up with. They used to shoot it out of the torpedo tubes, to make you think you got them.

And what did you do on the dummy mine sweeping runs?

We just used the equipment. Got used to using the equipment. Because we had never even seen it before, see, so we had to

35:00 learn how to use it and all this type of thing.

What was your job during this?

Mostly on the wheel. When I was on duty, I would be on the wheel. I had been down on the winches and things like that, but not very often. Mostly I was on the wheel.

And you mentioned that there were lots of other

35:31 **corvettes there?**

There was also a lot of other ships from other countries, too.

What was the general relationship like with other ships?

Good.

How did you greet each other?

Well, we didn't know most of them. We knew the ship and that was all we knew. If we were in port and we were

36:02 on the lifeboat, it used to go to the different ships, or take officers to different ships to have a little talk and things.

What sort of things would you talk about?

Just what we were doing I suppose. I forget now, but I would say it was just what we were doing.

Say if you ran into another corvette, was there a…

The officers on the bridge used to communicate with them, but we didn't.

36:30 We couldn't really. We used to work with the Pirie a lot. It was another corvette. We worked with them a lot. The skipper and the skipper of the Pirie used to play… What's that game with the statues on it?

Chess?

Chess. They used to play chess.

37:01 And they used to put their move on a blackboard and hang it over the side of the bridge. The bloke on the other one would set that one up and make his move, and that went on all the time that they were at sea. It was quite interesting to watch.

Did you ever put money on who was going to win?

No. I don't think. They just did it to fill in time,

37:30 while they were on the bridge. We were very unlucky. We had a gunnery officer who got sick every time we went outside the heads of the port. He was seasick the whole time he was at sea. He used to have a bucket on the bridge. I used to feel sorry for him. I was on duty with him. I was on the wheel; he was on the bridge, duty officer. And he was sick as a dog.

38:03 This went on for years, all the time we were over there. He only joined the ship in Adelaide, just like we did. But as soon as we went outside the heads, he was sick. And he was like that right until we left the ship in Sydney in 1946. And he was still on the ship.

38:31 **Was he a good officer?**

Yeah. He was all right. He was good to get on with because he was always sick. He never abused anybody. Poor critter, I used to feel sorry for him.

Did many other people suffer from seasickness?

No. Very seldom. You might get a bloke come on today, he might be sick tomorrow, but he would be right the next day.

39:00 You got used to corvettes very quickly. But we only had about four months over there, I think, then we had to come back to Australia. We did a partial refit in Adelaide, then we went to Sydney and did some training in Sydney, in depth charges and gunnery, and things like that. Because we knew we were going north.

39:31 Then we got a convoy and we took it up to Leyte.

We'll just change tapes.

Tape 6

00:38 **What was involved in sub patrols?**

In sub patrols you were steaming at a fair pace, usually about [UNCLEAR] knots with a corvette. You've got your Asdic sending out signals, its sending out signals all the time.

01:01 If you start getting those signals back, then you know you've got something on the end. You can tell by the sound as to whether it's a sub or whether it's a rock or what it is. But you can usually, by adjusting your ears, whether it's a sub or not. By the size. When you are certain

01:30 that it is a sub, well, you build your speed up to full speed, you close in on it, and when you were over the top, you dropped two cans, we used to say, but they were depth charges. We used to do that, that was when we had the rollers on. We'd drop two cans.

02:00 Then you'd go out, you'd turn around. The Asdic bloke has still got the thing on his screen, so you come back on it, and he tells you where it is and what heading to steer, to pick it up. You go over it again and you drop more. You keep on doing this until you think you've sunk it or it's got away. Quite often you lose them,

02:30 but sometimes you get them. But if it comes up, you've got to use your guns. And they've got a bigger gun that what we've got. Because most of them have got over four inches on the front. They've only got the one gun, but it's a four inch gun, and it's bigger than what we're carrying. Ours is an anti-aircraft gun which goes up in the air and it only come down a certain way, so it's got to be pretty well away from the ship before they're much good.

03:03 So you've only got the Oerlikons and the Bofors to attack with. I've heard of ramming them with the ship, and things like this, too. I wasn't in on one of those.

And what kind of orders do you hear? You're in your position, actions station, depth charges, what would you hear?

You used to get back a peep, a peeping sound.

03:31 The signal's gone out, it's hit the thing and it's come back and it's been picked up by the earphones and it's just a peeping sound, that's all it is.

Take us through being at action stations with the depth charges. You're waiting for an order.

What kind of things would you be hearing?

We wouldn't be hearing anything. We would just be waiting. We're on the depth charges; we're down the back of the ship.

04:00 Right down the far end. And we got a signal from the bridge, when to drop the charges, and that's when you drop them.

How was that signal given?

They yell out the depth they want them set at, so you set them at that depth, and when they want them dropped, they just hold their hand up and you drop them. It's as simple as that. It's a simple strategy, but it seems to work.

04:30 **How do you set the depth?**

The Asdic machine gives it to you. He's been on it for a while. He knows at what depth it is and everything like that. He passes it onto the officer; the officer passes it onto us. We've got to take the cap off the depth charge, set the depth, and put the cap back on.

05:00 And then roll it off.

And how do you set that depth, actually on the depth charge?

Like a switch for a fan, the same as that but with numbers on it. You move that around until you've got the depth required and

05:30 close it off and she's right. It's just a switch.

And tell us about your methods for mine sweeping?

From the bollard in the front of the ship, it sends steel lines out, and you attach the

06:00 paravanes, what they call paravanes. They're like a floating object that takes the wires out to the side of the ship like that. They come from the bow and they go out like that. That's how they get the paravanes out there and that's what does the sweeping of the mines. The wire going along, it catches on the mine, and cuts off whatever is holding the mine down, or loosens it,

06:30 and lifts them up. When you do that, you can explode them with the wire or else you can shoot them. You've got to aim for the pins on them of course, the pins sticking out of a mine. You aim at the pin, you hit the pin and it explodes.

Is there any possible damage if it hits the wire or if it's too close to the ship?

It could do. It could explode close to the ship, or explode out further.

07:02 It just depends where the wire picks it up, because the wire goes underneath the water, and the paravane holds it out there. As it goes through, it might pick up the chain. It picks up the chain and it might bring it the surface and not touch the mine. But if it touches the mine it could set it off. There's still mines being washed up on the beaches now.

07:30 It's sixty years after the war, and they're still being washed up. But it was quite interesting, sweeping. The funny thing about it, we'd been sweeping during the war and got nothing for it. They went sweeping after the war and they got a medal for theirs.

08:00 Never mind. We didn't get anything for Tokyo either. They had a time limit. You had to be in the area. We were on active duty; we didn't have time to put in that time there, that's all. After the war they did just nothing but sweeping, so they got in their time quick. We might be sweeping today, and then not touch it again for a month.

08:32 So, we didn't have the chance to get the time up.

Was it a dangerous job?

Not actually on the ship, except that you're likely to hit a mine. Being so shallow, the corvettes were reasonably safe. Although they were known to hit them, they were reasonably safe. Most of them went over the top of them.

09:08 I believe they did a lot of sweeping in Hong Kong, but I didn't get there.

So you returned home from Ceylon to Sydney, when you were having some work done on the ship.

09:30 **What was it like to return home?**

It was all right. We didn't get any leave or anything, because we were going straight to the Pacific. We came home, we did a few necessary things that had to be done to the ship in Adelaide, then we went round to Sydney and waited for a convoy going north, to take it up. The submarines were very active on the east coast at that time.

10:00 They never sent a convoy out of Sydney without an escort.

What kind of duties would you do on escort?

Just your normal duties, as far as the working of the ship itself. As far as the ships in the convoy, well, we used to be on the outside of all them. There might be six ships. One in the lead, one at the stern,

10:30 two on either side. That's six ships. That's how we'd go. They'd all have their Asdic on; they'd all have their radar on. If they picked up anything….They might pick up something over from us, say, well they'd give us instructions to go and check it out. See what it was.

11:02 If they thought it was a submarine, they would give us the depth and all that type of thing. So that we could pick it up on our Asdic. We would tear after it and see if we could sink it. If we couldn't, we'd chase it away.

Did this happen on this trip north?

Oh yes, it happened quite a lot. It didn't happen to us every time, because we might be on the wrong part of the convoy, and

11:30 we had to stay with the convoy. Most of the ships had to stay with the convoy in case they got away and came to the convoy.

Was there a time when you were dropping depth charges on this journey?

We never did any in the Pacific. We did a couple of chases in the Pacific, but we never got around to assessing that they were definitely a submarine and that it

12:00 necessitated dropping depth charges. By that time we had throwers on the ship, too, so we would have dropped four depth charges if we had struck one. They would have put two on the two throwers and they would go out at one depth, and the two that dropped off the rear of the ship would be sent to another depth. So you had a greater chance of getting the submarine if there was one there. But we never struck one in the Pacific.

12:33 Our worst enemy in the Pacific was tornadoes. We went through a few of those. They were a bit rough. Very rough seas. They knocked your convoy around a little,

13:00 because they used to spread out and you could lose them. You couldn't see them so you could lose them. You could check them on radar, but you could only do one sweep every now and again. Because you had other things to watch for, too. You can drop a ship. You wouldn't think you would be able to, but you could.

13:32 **What would happen to a ship when you say, 'drop a ship'?**

Well, if it was lucky and there were no submarines around, you might pick him up in a couple of days. One corvette would have to go looking for him. He might pick him up in a couple of days and escort him back to the convoy, or if he was a slow ship, he would have to stay on his own, and just protect him.

14:00 That's all you could do.

Can you remember a particular cyclone?

We had one up north of New Guinea, on the way to Manus, once when we were escorting a convoy. A Liberty ship broke in half. We ended up towing the two halves of the Liberty ship into Manus.

14:30 That was the only exciting one that we had.

Were there survivors?

Yeah. They were all right. The two halves were just floating. They were a good ship that way. They were divided off into sections, and they just floated. They didn't sink. Strange, that.

Can you remember how you would get the men from the ship on board?

15:02 They stayed on board.

On the two halves?

While they were floating they were in no danger.

How does a ship break in half and stay up?

Well, you've got walls in between. You might lose all the goods out of this section, but you've got a wall there dividing it off from the rest of the ship, and a wall here on this half, dividing it off.

15:30 All the goods will go, but the ship will stay afloat. Quite brilliant.

And tell us about the finish up of towing this ship in. What happened?

We just towed it in, they threw their anchors out. We just left it there. The Americans unloaded it. I don't know what happened to the ship after that.

16:02 **And what was the Pacific like for you now that you were in it? What kind of things were you noticing about the Pacific?**

The Pacific was not as good as the Indian Ocean in that it was a little bit rougher. It wasn't as rough as the Atlantic, they tell me.

16:31 The Atlantic is a terribly rough ocean, but the Pacific mostly was pretty fair, except when the storms came up, then she got very rough. But Manus Island was our base for a long time. And it was from there that we did most of our convoy work.

17:00 Once we had to go down to New Guinea and pick up a floating dock and take that back. Things like that.

Tell me about some of those escorting jobs, those convoy jobs?

We had to head off from Manus to Port Moresby. I tied up there overnight, the next morning we hooked onto the tug, a floating dock,

17:33 and we towed it back to Manus. We never had any problems. We didn't have a cyclone, then, at that time. So we were lucky. We got that one out very easily.

How was the war progressing at this stage?

18:04 It was progressing pretty well. This would be 1944, roughly, I would say. I think about this stage, they'd be getting starting to get [General] MacArthur moving on the islands, going back, and taking over the territory that they lost.

18:30 It would be about that stage, I would say. Guadalcanal was over. The Battle of Townsville, that was over, and finished.

19:07 I'd say they were just about ready to start moving on the landings at that stage. They must have taken Guadalcanal by then.

I guess I'm asking in relation to your work. Was it changing, the dangers?

Well, it could have been. Because there could have been a lot of

19:30 planes around in that area, too There were still Japanese on Manus Island. You would be operating the pictures there, all this mob would be sitting in the front of the screen, here, and we could see Japanese in the scrub behind the screen. So they were watching the pictures, too. At least we take it they were Japanese in the scrub behind the screen.

20:00 **How do you get in a scenario were you are watching a picture and knowing there's Japanese there?**

You don't really know. You are only thinking that they are. You're not real certain that they are. You're not real certain that they are because… You can only just see the reflection from their faces, through the screen. The screen has got holes in it, of course, and you can see the lights going through that screen, and

20:30 it hits a face on the other side, well, you could see the face. You wouldn't know who it is.

Would anyone do anything about that?

No. Not to be worried about it. They picked Japanese up on some of those islands, six or eight years after the war. And they're still fighting the war. They didn't know it was over.

Did it seem quite bizarre?

21:00 It was bizarre, yeah. It was very bizarre. You can understand it. See, they were there, they were cut off. As far as they knew the war was still on. And that was years and years after the war was finished.

Did you crack jokes about this situation?

It never worried anybody. They were probably out of bullets by then anyway.

21:33 At least we hope they were. Nobody seemed to worry about it. You can't show anybody, because there's nobody there to show. You could tell them afterwards. They didn't seem to worry about it, so I didn't.

22:01 **What was Manus Island like?**

It was a big American naval base. Most of the ships there were American. There were Australian ships there. There were English ships there. There were Dutch ships there. There were Indian ships there. They were all combined at that stage. It was a big harbour, very shallow in parts.

22:30 But it was a big harbour. There was a reasonably good docking area for ships. There was a big base on shore. We used to send people ashore. I went once to do gunnery repairs. Did a course on shore.

23:00 And then came back, and that became my job after that. After you do a course, that becomes your job, so you do that for a portion of it.

What did you have to do in that job?

That was where I first struck the cold tea. We used to drink a lot of cold tea. I had never tasted it before then, but it went down well. They used to make a pot of tea and just

23:30 strain it off and freeze it. I think that's how they did it, because it was very cold and quite good. Their meals were good, but they used to eat funny things like ice-cream and tomato and things like that. I couldn't fancy it myself, but they used to eat it. They loved their ice-cream. They couldn't go anywhere without their ice-cream.

24:17 **How did you get along with the Americans?**

All right. I was working with them in Manus. With the picture theatre there. I would go ashore and operate that

24:30 for them for a while, and teach them to operate it so as they could do it when I went back to sea, so…

How did you get this job? How did this happen?

Because I was a theatre operator before. And they had a theatre there with no operator.

How did they find that out?

I think they sent a message to the ships, for anyone with a theatre operator. So the skipper pulled out my record., "Okay, you're going ashore." So I had to go ashore

25:00 every night and operate the picture for a while until I trained someone to take it on.

How did you enjoy this job?

It was good. I used to take the Liberty boat ashore. The officers used to go into the officers' club. I used to go and operate the picture theatre, then I went and picked them up and took them back to the ship. That went on for a while, until we decided we were going back to sea then I had to give it up.

25:33 **What's it like to have the job of driving the little boat? What were some of the benefits of it?**

No actual benefits. But you do get away from the ship and you see other ships, and you get to talk to other people, and things like that. I mean, other people are stuck on the ship,

26:00 getting bored, twiddling their thumbs and you've got a job of taking the boat somewhere… It breaks the monotony a little.

And tell us about the picture theatre. What did it look like?

It was a big hollow in the ground, with hills all around on three sides, and one side was flat, they built the screen down that end. And they put the box right up

26:30 on top. And everybody sat on the earth, on sloping landscape. So it was very simple and quite a good show actually. Quite a good picture theatre. With the most up to date projectors in the world, at the time. They were very good projectors. But nobody could use them. So they gave me a day to find out how to use them, then I had to put a show on that night.

27:08 **What kind of movies were you showing at the time?**

By that time, you had all sorts. You had war movies, the lot, by then. Because that was getting late in the war, and they were turning out war movies by the hundreds. But you also got good movies. Good musicals and things like that.

27:34 There was always plenty of shorts. Comedy shorts. Plenty of newsreels. We always had quite a good show. We'd only show them once and they wouldn't be shown again. The next night there would be another movie.

28:00 You just can't remember them that way. There was Gone With The Wind. I saw that twenty odd times, so I remember that one.

And what were the American troops like? What impressions did you have of them?

They were all right to me, I had no problems with them. They used to think they were better than us, but

28:30 still, they might have been, too. They got paid more. But still, that was all right. We got away with that, and nobody worried about it.

Did they give you anything, or did you gain anything from this…

Well, after we left there, I took a projector to sea. They gave me a portable projector to take to sea. We'd come to an

29:03 American ship and we'd get new films and that type of thing. The boys gained something out of it because they had movies occasionally. It's one of the perks. That was quite good.

Did you keep this projector through the….

No, I handed it back. Every time you struck a ship you would hand back

29:33 your old films and get a new lot, or two or three. It worked well for a while. It was from there that we went to patrol the east coast of Japan. That was about six weeks straight. Up and down the east coast of Japan.

30:02 Just trying to tie Japan up so they couldn't go anywhere. So we had the whole Australian fleet up there, patrolling the whole time.

Was this a dangerous job?

It wasn't really too dangerous. The only thing you had to look out for was planes or subs. The surface fleet was in tatters by that time.

30:35 They only had one battleship left, and it was sitting in Tokyo Harbour, burnt out, so there wasn't much left. Even though you could still see a ship, a beautiful looking ship, it was burnt out so it couldn't do any damage. So all you had to worry about was planes or submarines.

31:00 **What was the morale like on board at this stage?**

It was getting pretty high because they were starting to think that the war was getting close to finish. It actually was, too, because we got a message at two o'clock in the morning that the war was over. And then we got orders that we were to go straight to Tokyo so we went in the next morning.

During this six weeks

31:30 **of patrolling, were there any specific times that you came under threat from an aeroplane or submarine?**

You never saw one. We saw planes, but they were all American planes. We never saw a Japanese plane; we never saw a Japanese sub in all that time.

So was there a feeling like it was just a matter of time?

Just a matter of routine, yeah.

32:02 That was the feeling. And once they dropped those bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, it was only a matter of time, it had to be. Because they were dangerous.

How did you hear about the news of these bombs?

They were just on the news, I think. I think that was the only way we heard about it. We got no special despatches about it, we just heard it on the news.

32:32 **What did you think of this idea of just one bomb? Could you believe it?**

You believed it because you knew it had been going on for a long time. You knew they were testing them. We knew the English were testing them in Australia. We knew the Americans had them. We knew the Germans had them. But nobody was game to use them.

33:01 But I would say it cut the war down by at least six months, by dropping those two bombs. I mean, they would have only dropped one if it showed any sign of ceasing then. But it didn't show any sign of ceasing, so they dropped the one on Nagasaki, which was closer to Tokyo.

And how did you feel about this on reflection? Did you think this was a good thing?

33:30 We thought it was if it was going to stop the war. Because I tell you, we were sick of the war by this time. Even though we didn't have a lot of contact with it, the danger was always there. We didn't like them being used, but if they

34:00 cut down the war down by six months, I think they were a good thing. But I would hate them to be used again. As a matter of fact, I would hate to see another war, because I think that nobody can win a war.

What's the worst thing about war?

34:31 Killing innocent people, I think. An ordinary soldier is an innocent bloke and he's doing what he's told. That's all that he's doing. And he's the bloke that's getting shot. It's not the big wigs that are getting shot. They're out of the road. No matter what side you look at, the ordinary soldier is the bloke that's

gotten the blood of it,

35:00 and he's the bloke that's done nothing. He's done nothing wrong. But war is stupid. I don't know why anyone ever diverts to war, because it never solves a thing. It's like a fight in the bloody street, it never solves a thing.

35:34 **What about the war that you were involved in? How do you feel about that in relation to those kind of thoughts?**

The same. I was only doing what I was told, the same as the Japanese and the Germans were doing what they were told. I mean, the Japanese were vicious little keets, but they still didn't deserve what they got.

36:00 Germans were more sympathetic. At least they thought by the rules. Which the Japanese didn't. By the same token, I don't think any of them deserved what they got.

I was going to ask you how the men

36:31 **on board celebrated hearing the news that peace had been declared?**

Well, they must have appreciated it because they didn't throw a boot at me. Any other time they would have, had I woken them at two o'clock in the morning.

So you told the news? Tell us about that?

We got the message, so the officer of the watch told me to go and wake everybody and tell them that the war was over.

37:01 So I did it. I went through the decks, blowing a whistle, telling everybody that it was finished. And when I got back on deck, I was told to steer for Tokyo, so we did that. We got there about eight o'clock in the morning, outside the heads. The Australian fleet was sitting there. So the Pirie and us went in first, the rest of the fleet followed, and the other two corvettes came in last.

37:32 We get inside and there's a big mob of American navy there. There was a big mob still at Manus, too. There was a big mob of American navy in there; there was a big mob of English navy in there. There was French ships there, there was Indian ships there, there was Dutch ships there, there was everybody there. And the sky was absolutely black,

38:02 absolutely black with planes. B-42 bombers just flying over in formation. They didn't have bombs on them, but still they were putting on a show. And that went on the whole time the fleet was going in. We anchored about half a mile away from the Missouri, I suppose it was.

38:31 So we were quite close to it. At the time of the signing of the peace treaty, we were even closer, because we were on a patrol. We had to go somewhere and do something, so we went as close as we could get, so that we could see what was going on. It was quite interesting, the time we spent in Tokyo.

Tell us, what do you think the effect of these planes,

39:01 **these massive planes was signalling? What was this symbolising?**

I think it was just to let the Japanese know that the force was there, because they hadn't made up their mind at this stage, I don't think, that it was really over. So these planes were flying over and giving them the message that the planes were still there and that the bombs were available if we want them.

39:34 I don't think they were too enthralled about signing the peace treaty at that stage. The only reason was the force of the navy and the army and the air force that was present, that was forcing them to do it. At least, that's my view anyway. I could be wrong.

We'll just take a short break now...

Tape 7

00:37 **So we just finished talking about how you delivered the news that the war was over. What happened immediately after that?**

Immediately after that, we were told to head for Tokyo. And I was given directions, we turned the ship around and away we went. We got there about eight in the morning,

01:02 and the Australian fleet were waiting outside the heads. So two of us fell in front of them and led the fleet in and two others followed the fleet in. There were many, many ships of many nations in Tokyo Harbour.

How many ships were there in the Australian fleet?

There was about ten.

01:32 There was two cruisers, two destroyers, a couple of frigates and four corvettes. Well, that's the part of the Australian fleet that was there. The rest was at Manus or Philippines or somewhere else.

02:00 Anyway, we led the fleet through. High walls on both sides of the entrance, and the reason why the two corvettes were out in front was that both the cliffs were impregnated with gun positions. So, not being too sure of what the Japanese were going to do, they put the two little ships in front. Anyway, we got through. And inside the heads

02:30 was the British fleet, the American fleet and fleets of many other nations. There were a lot of ships in the harbour. As I said before, the sky was black with planes. Absolutely black. B-42s and all those big bombers. And putting on quite a show.

Could you see anything of the infrastructure

03:01 **around the harbour?**

It was a terrifically big harbour, Tokyo Harbour, and you got to go around it individually to pick out different things. We went to Yokohama. That's where we used to go to pick up the mail, when we were on mail delivery. And we also went to Yokozuka[?]. Yokozuka was the

03:31 place where all the midget subs were stored. And there was quite a lot of them, there. And we did plan to pinch one. But a destroyer came along at the wrong time and destroyed our fun. So we didn't get one.

So after you sailed in through the heads, where did you take up position then?

About half a mile, practically abreast of the [USS] Missouri.

04:04 That gives you an idea how big the harbour is. We were half a mile and there was many, many, many ships out further than we were. There was a lot of ships in there, and there is a lot of water in that harbour. It's a big harbour.

And can you describe the sight that you saw, what was going on, on the Missouri?

That was

04:30 quite a lot later, when the peace was signed. That was signed about a week or two later, after we got there.

So what did you do in the meantime?

We just delivered mail, and did this and did that. Whatever we had to do around the harbour.

How did the mail work?

It used to come in and we used to pick it up at Yokohama, and deliver it to all the ships.

05:00 So I take it it was flown in, probably from Manus.

Would you only deliver mail to the Australian ships?

No, all ships. All the ships in the harbour.

So did you get to know the other ships?

I got to know the ships, but I didn't get to know the people on them. We came in contact with the ships,

05:31 then we were gone again. We saw people, but we didn't know who they were.

And what was the feeling like to be the first ship to put ashore?

To put foot ashore? It was quite good, actually. But it didn't last for long. The ones that came after us all went ashore, but we didn't get ashore at all. Only to get on wharf at Yokohama.

06:02 **And what was Yokohama's condition like?**

It was quite good, very modern sheds on the wharf. And the sheds were full of silk, full of radios, full of all sorts of things. There was some beautiful things to harf off [souvenir] if you wanted to, but you weren't allowed. Some of the boys picked some stuff up, but they had to take it back again. The only Japanese we came in contact with

06:30 were ones that were put on the ship to work. And we were supposed to get them to work, but it was an impossible job. They wouldn't work.

How many were put on the ship?

About ten.

What were they supposed to do?

Chip decks and paint it, and all that type of thing. Instead of us doing it, we had to supervise them doing it. But we could have done it quicker ourselves.

Where had they come from?

From ashore.

Were they Japanese soldiers or civilians?

They were Japanese people.

07:03 They weren't soldiers, I don't think.

And how would they refuse to work?

They just didn't work. You couldn't force them to work. We were under instructions that they had to be treated well, so you couldn't force them to do anything. So nothing got done.

07:32 There's some pictures in there of the actual signing of the treaty on the Missouri. That was quite interesting. We viewed it on the run, of course. We had a job to do, so we just sailed past the Missouri as it was going, and after they finished signing the charter

08:00 the air was alive with planes again. Just another fly-past. It was terrific. As if it was time and it probably was. But it was quite interesting to see. But we didn't stay there long, unfortunately. We were supposed to go to Hong Kong, to do some sweeping there. And

08:30 we were halfway to Hong Kong and orders came through that we had to return to Australia for a refit. So we headed south, went into Manus. Came home from Manus into Sydney, and that's where I left the ship.

Did you expect to leave the ship there?

No, I expected to go to Adelaide with it. To the refit point, I was expecting to go to.

09:00 They took me off and sent me to Brisbane to have leave, and then come back and line up for my discharge.

And what were your feelings like when you sailed back into Sydney?

All the celebrations were over by then, because it was two or three weeks after the peace had been signed.

09:30 But I believe it was a little rousy [boisterous] during the time of the signing of the surrender. Particularly in Perth, I believe. They carried a car into a café in Perth. I just heard that one, I never saw it, but I believe that it did happen. But I believe it got a little bit rough in some places. Of course,

10:00 I think everybody was very pleased that the war was over.

And what were your feelings seeing Australia again? Coming through the Heads in Sydney?

I was glad to be back again. At that stage I didn't know I was leaving the ship. I expected to be there for a couple of days, then head on down for Adelaide.

Were you eager to leave the ship?

10:31 **Had you had enough?**

No, I would have stayed on for a while. But the orders came through that I was to leave the ship, so I had to leave. I wasn't the only one, I don't think. I think there was a few others that had to go, too.

Did you have any thoughts or plans about what you might do…

Afterwards? At that stage, no. I had no idea what I was going to do. And I didn't know

11:00 when I got demobbed [demobilised], what I was going to do. But I got demobbed in Brisbane…

What are your last memories of the ship?

As you probably know, the corvette crews are still very active together. They were small ships. They were a very close, little community. And they have been active together for many years now.

11:33 They have another reunion in Canberra next year, actually. There is usually about fourteen hundred that turn up for these reunions. They're usually pretty good. But they're getting very dear [expensive] now. Terrifically dear. You're paying eighty dollars for a meal and this type of rubbish.

Were you a bit emotional when you found out you wouldn't be going back?

12:01 Not really. You get used to being shifted around and it doesn't seem to worry you any. It's no good

getting attached to some place, because you know you might not be stopping there, and this type of thing. So it's a case of you do what you're told, and you go their way until you're out of there, and then you can do what you like.

12:30 When I got out I decided I was going to Perth. And that was the first thing I did. I hopped on the train and I went over to Perth. I got the train all the way.

What was the process of being demobbed in Brisbane?

It was the same as getting out of the army actually. You had to go in and you had to sign papers and you had to have medical check-ups and things like that. Or if you didn't have a medical… you had the right to refuse them.

13:00 But most people didn't, of course. When I got out I thought I was A-1. When I tried to join five years later I was told I was medically unfit for overseas service. So I don't know why. I still don't know why I'm still unfit for overseas service, at that stage. Particularly as there was no war at that stage, but I did

13:30 try to go back in.

Why?

I don't think I was too happy in my job at the time, and I decided to… It would be about the time that I left the bloke in Gladstone, I think. The builder in Gladstone that I didn't get on with. I think I thought I might as well be back in the navy. I gave it a try but they wouldn't accept me, so…

14:00 **Did they say why you were medically unfit?**

No, they just said I was medically unfit.

So what was it like in Perth when you travelled over?

Very nice. It had settled down by then. I had a good look around Perth. I had two weeks in Perth, I think it was. Then I decided I would get myself a job, so I went up in the wheat belt, the wheat and sheep belt.

14:30 I was working on a farm up there. Only a couple of cows then I had to milk every morning. Then I'd start up the tractor and start ploughing for the wheat to go in and stuff like that.

And how were you feeling about life not in the navy? Was it a shock? Did you miss it?

Not really. I mean, I could have been going to sea again, afterwards,

15:00 because I was offered a job on an American ship. A coastal ship. As a helmsmen. But I didn't take it. I was quite prepared to settle down at home again.

And did things work out with the girl in Perth?

No. We didn't have enough time together. She was a nice girl, but we never

15:30 had time to get to know each other well. Then I came back to Queensland. I went back to Barcaldine for a while…

Did you miss that sort of… You mentioned that the corvette is such a small ship and there is that sense of community… What was it like living without that community when you've lived with it for so long?

I just think you shut it off for a while. And you never thought much about it until

16:00 later in your life, when they started holding reunions and things like that.

How about, for example, the two mates that had come with you from Brisbane to Melbourne, then Melbourne to Darwin, then all the way… Did you keep in contact with them at all?

I didn't for a few years after the war, until about thirty-five years ago I started going to Naval Association meetings,

16:30 and I went to one up the Gold Coast. We did a march down there before the conference, and we just pulled up and I heard a yell out, "Tug Wilson, stay where you are!" So I stayed there and my two mates came up to me.

What was it like to see them?

That was quite a thrill, that, it was very good. We stayed very close right through

17:00 until Lofty died. He died a few years ago. And George and I are still great mates. And we get on very well with each other's wives, so… We still get on together well, so that's the main thing.

Do you ever talk about stories of the Ipswich and stuff?

Not to go back that far, because there has been books written about it, and we've all read about it,

17:31 but we have a little natter [chat] occasionally. Something will pop up and we will have a talk about it and it will remind us of something that happened years ago. We live for the present day. George was very active in the Naval Association for a lot of years, and I've been in it for donkeys years, so we've kept fairly close together.

18:00 **And do you ever feel a special relationship with the sea, after having travelled…**

Not really. I know the sea, and I know it well, and I know it's stupid to go out there in small boats. But people are still doing it. But I'm not going to be one of them. I've been out there and I've copped a hiding out there, and I won't go out there in a small boat.

18:32 But I don't regret my time in the navy. I had a marvellous time. I saw a little bit of the world. I didn't see much of it, but I saw a little bit.

And tell me about this when they told you, you could do carpentry or carpentry or carpentry, how did this system work?

When I came back to Queensland, I put in to

19:00 do a rehab [rehabilitation] course. And I wanted to do mechanics. And they told me I could do anything I liked, so long as it was carpentry. So that's what I did.

Where did they train you?

In Rockhampton, at the…

19:36 It was a special section set up to train carpenters and joiners after the war. They were doing theory at the school, then they were going out and they were building houses and things like that. So they were learning from the ground up.

And did you notice any differences

20:00 **in Queensland, from before the war to after the war?**

Not really. At that stage, there was still shortages of everything. Food was short. It was still rationed, and petrol was still rationed. That went on for months after the war. Until

20:30 the Menzies government got in again. They stopped the rationing and things went back to normal then. It was strange. He was in power before the war started and he was in power after it finished. He went on for a lot of years after it finished, too. He was a very popular man with some people, and he was hated by others.

21:07 **Just to go back a little bit, there was a couple of more questions about the time on the ship. About the projector and the films that you showed on the Ipswich, do you remember any of the films?**

No, they were just films I picked up

21:30 from the ship that day, and showed them that night. I sent them back the next night.

How would you pick them up from another ship?

With a motor boat. Go over to an American ship, take some films back, and I'd get some more.

How would you know that they had films?

Because they all had them. All the American ships had them.

22:00 It was only a portable projector, just a little one, and it was very handy. Played onto a small screen, about six by four, something like that.

Were the Americans happy to give you the films?

Yeah.

Would you give them anything in exchange?

Just the old films back, that's all. They didn't necessarily go back to the ship that I got them from, they went back to any ship.

22:31 **And how popular did this make you with the blokes on your ship?**

They just took it with a grain of salt, I think. Same as I did. I was given the thing and I was prepared to use it. So they were prepared to take it, so…

And how do you think it affected their morale?

23:01 I would like to think that it bucked it up a bit, but I don't know for sure. Their morale was fairly good all

the way through. I don't know how it would have affected them, but they seemed to take it well, anyway.

23:31 **And was the skipper and that happy for you to take a motorboat and go over to other ships…**

You had to ask permission before you could go, but still… When I took the boat out I had to have a stoker with me to drive the motor. I wasn't allowed to do both. I had to look after the boat, and he had to look after the motor.

24:04 When we were in Tokyo and I went alongside the Missouri I got a bellow from the bridge, I had to report on the bridge…

Of the Missouri?

Hmm. I got chastised because my stoker was out of uniform. Being an Australian, he was in shorts and nothing else. The Americans had to have a full uniform.

24:31 So I had to report back when I went back to the ship.

And what did you say?

Nothing. I just told them that I had to go on the bridge of the Missouri. And he said, "Don't worry about it." He was pretty good, our skipper. A good man with a boat.

What was he like, personality?

He was all right. He was ex-merchant [navy].

25:00 He come in as a skipper, and he was a two and a half ringer [his braid]. He could do anything with a boat, no matter how big it was. I've seen him in between the ship, right up to the bow of the ship, then another one up the stern of the ship there, and he still took it out. He didn't muck around, he was good.

25:34 **And what were your thoughts of being a projectionist back in civilian life?**

Do you mean after the war or before the war?

After the war.

I knew there was no hope of me getting it after the war because there were too many coming back from the war that were projectionists before they went away. So I knew that I would never get into a theatre, so I gave it away and just concentrated on something else.

26:00 **Did you enjoy carpentry?**

I didn't mind it. I still do it. When you're working on big work, it's very heavy work. What I'm doing now is very easy work. But when I was working on big buildings… In the old days you had to pick up a six by four [inches – a timber measurement] down the bottom of a roof, just two rafters going that way.

26:30 And you had to carry the flaming thing up and put it down and nail it on. Then go back and get another one. This was the way we had to do it in those days. These days you don't do that sort of thing. It's all lifted up by crane and put into place by crane and everything. So much easier now than it was then. But, I still enjoyed it while I was doing it. But I thought there was

27:00 better things out there than just carpentry. The first building job I worked on was the boys' college at Yepoon. St Brendan's. That was my first job as a carpenter, and that was before the war. I was out of a job once more, and I decided I would put in for a job out there, and I got it.

27:32 That was too heavy for me. At that age. I was too young.

And was there anything in particular about the navy that stayed on your mind? Or about the war that stayed on your mind?

No, I haven't forgotten a lot, but there's nothing particular that stands out.

28:01 Or nothing particular that I could think of, let me put it that way.

When you went back to Queensland or even went back to Perth, and met people who had known you earlier, did a lot of them ask you about what you had been doing during the war?

No, they just took it for granted, I think, that I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. The people outside

28:30 just didn't have any idea of what we were supposed to be doing anyway. Because there was a case of day by day. You would be told to do one thing today, and be told to do another thing tomorrow. It's a different thing.

Did you sense that people in Australia were interested in what had happened?

They were interested. I don't think they ever missed a newsreel or anything like that. Because they

29:00 liked to keep up with the news every night, and know what was going on. Even when the war was in Europe, they used to switch on every night and make certain they listened to the news so they knew exactly what the troops were doing at that certain time.

And yet after the war they didn't ask you what you had been doing?

No.

Do you wish that they had?

Not really. I wasn't too keen to talk about it. I don't think you would find too many people,

29:30 at that stage, that wanted to talk about what was going on.

Why?

I don't know. Just wanted to forget it, I think. I don't think anyone was very thrilled with having to do it. I don't think you would find anyone, of the returned men, that agree with war. I don't think you would find one, anywhere in the world.

30:00 I don't care what nationality he is. But still, we still have them. In this day and age we still have them.

You say now that you don't agree with war, having been through it. If you had known this before

30:31 **the war, would you have still gone?**

I think so. Well, I would have had to, I was called up. So I would have had to go anyway. Unless I was a conscientious objector. Which I wouldn't do, anyway.

Why is that?

I don't know. I don't believe in that type of thing. If you've got a job to do, you do it. You don't hide from it.

Even if you don't agree with it?

Well, when

31:00 you're in the army, you have no say whether you do it or whether you don't. You've got to do it, and that's it. You're going to do it whether you like it or not. Because it's not good. That's not just our army, that's anybody's army, they're all the same.

31:30 **And what would you say was the most important lesson that you learnt in the navy was?**

Now that's a hard one. I suppose the most important thing that I learned was to take the bad with the good.

32:02 Because not every job you got was good, and quite a lot of them weren't very good at all. So you just got used to taking the bad with the good. I'd say that would be the most important thing you learnt.

How would you say that has affected the way you lived the rest of your life?

For a few years it did. It might have been

32:32 quite a few years it did. Because it was difficult to settle down. And live a normal life. As the years went by, things settled down and I more or less came back to the field and settled down and lived a normal life. But it took a few years to get around to it.

Why do you think it was hard to settle down?

Well, I think because you were

33:00 moving around so much in the navy. Then you come home and you sit in the one spot all the time. I think that might have been why, I don't know. But I'm guessing that would be why. Because we all found it very difficult to settle down. And that wasn't me, that was a lot of people. Some people more than others. Particularly in the First World War.

33:31 It was the same then. They came back and they didn't know what to do with themselves for years. But there was no counselling in those days either. I don't know whether it's a good thing having the counselling, but by the same token, we didn't have it then to find out anyway. I think we, in the first two wars, settled down better, than the young blokes that have come back from the wars that have gone on since.

34:00 And they've had counselling and we didn't have it. I don't know, I think we settled down better. Without the counselling. I don't know whether it does any good or not, but apparently the powers at be think it does.

And what prompted your involvement with the Naval Association?

34:30 Well, I was treasurer here for a number of years, before we started going to conferences. We started off here as the Naval Club. I didn't start it, it was going here when I came here, but I had been in the Naval Association before that.

And what had made you join that for the first time, or get involved?

35:00 I don't know. I'm one of these people that go to a lot of meetings. They were getting together, so I decided to go to it. It was in Rockhampton, my first one, that was in 1947. That was the Ex-Navalmen's Association in those days. I joined up. I became president of that branch.

35:30 And that was when I was doing the course for carpentry. After I had finished the course I had to leave there, and I went to Gladstone. There was no naval association of any sort there. I didn't find one again until I came back here, when I left the railway. It was the Navy Club here then,

36:00 so I joined them. About two years after I joined, they decided to go national, go to the Naval Association of Australia. So the Navy Club folded. I became the first treasurer of the Naval Association here. I held that for about eight years.

36:31 Then we had a conference here, and the secretary at the time said, "I can't run a conference." He said, "I'll resign." I said, "I can run the damn thing." So I took on the job, and he took on the treasurer's job. We ran the conference and I held the secretary's job for about seventeen years.

37:01 I've held the president's job for a few years. Now I've settled down into retirement and I've taken on patron.

Why was it important for you to be involved in this association?

It was important for me to be involved in this particular one here, to keep it alive. Because it looked like folding here, many times, during the years.

37:30 I seemed to be the only one that seemed to try to keep it alive. So I stayed in it, and I went to all the conferences. All at my own expense, I might add. I got through. I've got life membership now of the Naval Association. I've also got an MSM, which is a Meritorious Service Medal. That was for twenty-five years' continuous service

38:03 as an officer bearer. So I got something back from it. I'm still active in the Corvette Association. I'm still active in the RSL, and I'm still active in Legacy. So I'm a busy boy.

And what does Anzac Day mean to you?

38:32 Well, it's a get-together to hash over old times. There's no admiration of war or anything like that attached to it. It's just a chance to get together and talk to people, because you never see them any other time of year.

39:00 **Do you have anything to add? Any final words that you would like to record?**

I think we've covered everything that I can think of. But I do think that in a very short time that most of our crew will be too old to attend functions like reunions and things like that. It's only a matter of years before that cuts out. It will be a sorry day when it does, but it will cut out. Because it's nice to get together and talk to old mates and things like that.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS