Australians at War Film Archive

Guy Griffiths - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:33 **First of all you could just – we'll just start at the beginning and get a bit of an overview of your life and career. Can you just start by telling me where you were born and where you grew up?**

I was actually born here in Sydney, but I grew up in the Hunter Valley. My father had a vineyard up in old Rothbury which is near Pokolbin and I

01:00 spent my first really sort of 12 years up there. At one stage, around about 1935 I imagine, my parents were worried about what to do with the boy and somebody suggested that I join the navy. I wanted to do engineering. I was mad keen on mechanical things that one has on the farm and the vineyard and crushing equipment and so on. So I eventually sat the

01:30 examination. I was very fortunate to get in in early 1937. In fact we joined college in January '37. There were 17 chosen out of some 470 or 80 applicants from around the country. So one was very fortunate and I spent four years at naval college and then went to sea at the end of 1940 and went across to England in the merchant ship. Firstly across to New Zealand and then across the Pacific and the Atlantic in a merchant ship, a

02:00 Shaw Saville ship, the Karamea and went to England and the ship we were due to join was the cruiser [HMAS] Australia but of course deployment from the time we were appointed at the end of '40 to the time we got there in early February '41 she was then down on the Cape on the way back to Australia. So they looked around where to send five Australian midshipmen and they decided on the battle cruiser [HMS] Repulse which at the time was in Greenock

02:30 and due to escort a convoy south. So we joined Greenock I think it was about 4th March '41 and then we stayed in, we worked around Gibraltar and Freetown for a while and then came back to the Clyde towards the end of May and then we took part in the chase of the battleship Bismarck in late May '41. We joined the home fleet which was led by Admiral Tulley and

03:00 in the [HMS] King George V, the new battleship. There was the carrier [HMS] Victorious, also a brand new carrier and ourselves and we chased the Bismarck. At that time of course she had sunk the [HMS] Hood, the [HMS] Prince of Wales had been damaged ahead of us and so on but Repulse which had been built in 1916 was getting very short on fuel and the old boilers were chewing up too much oil and fuel so we had to withdraw from the chase

03:30 and we went across to Newfoundland for refuelling and then went to Halifax and escorted convoys back. Then I think in August/September we went to Rosyth for a while. In August/September we once again escorted a convoy south taking stuff to the Middle East and we worked off the east coast of Africa for a while working out of Durban and Mombasa. Then eventually when they deployed the Prince of Wales and Repulse to

04:00 Singapore we arrived in Singapore in early December '41 and of course the Japanese came into the war on the 8th December our time, this side of the dateline and we sortied out with Prince of Wales and four destroyers. Unsuccessful trip so to speak. In brief we were sunk on the 10th and came back, the survivors were brought back to Singapore and then the

04:30 midshipmen were lucky. We were moved out of Singapore the following day on the 11th December in the cruiser [HMS] Exeter and were sent back to Colombo. Our captain, Captain Tennant who survived, said that the midshipmen ought to get on with their training and they wouldn't commit, they wouldn't contribute much to Singapore and I think of course he was absolutely right. And in a way I think he probably saved our lives at that time. We didn't get taken prisoner or end up a prisoner of war. So after

05:00 that I joined, we joined, there were four of us out of the five, we lost Bob Davies in Repulse, he went down. He's got a story. And then we joined the battleship [HMS] Revenge which was in Trincomalee Harbour as a guard ship. We spent about five months in Revenge or six months, end of December '41 to about May '42 and then we went back to England for training and we spent

05:30 the last half of 1942 in England for training and I was in the old destroyer HMS Vivian working between Rosyth and Sheerness on east coast convoys and then in April/May '43 the cruiser [HMS] Shropshire which had been given to Australia by the UK to replace the [HMAS] Canberra which had been sunk at Savo Island in August '42 and we commissioned in Chatham

06:00 dockyard and I stayed in that ship, we of course came down to Australia and we worked in the south west Pacific with the US [United States] Seventh Fleet all the way through to the Philippines and Borneo and so on and eventually ended up in Tokyo Bay for the signing of the surrender. So I stayed in Shropshire right through that last two years of the war, quite active time. Now at the

06:30 end of that I was sent back to England to do a specialising course, a specialist course to become a gunnery officer which I did for 15 months in England ashore, scraping away the cobwebs on the brain because it gets a bit rusty. I then spent two years ashore in England on what we call exchange service. I then came back in the middle of '49 in HMAS Sydney,

07:00 our first aircraft carrier. I took passage. I wasn't a member of the crew. And came back to Australia. Went to the gunnery school at Flinders Naval Depot for about, when was it, till about January 1950 and then I joined the Sydney as the gunnery officer. I spent two years on her until March '52 and that period saw us come back to the UK [United Kingdom] to pick up the new carrier air

07:30 group and saw us go to Korea for deployment up there in the Korean War in that latter part of '51 early '52 and then come home. And after that I went back to the gunnery school for a while and I wasn't terribly keen on that because I reckoned I hadn't had enough sea time and so I agitated a little and I was then appointed to the destroyer Anzac, HMAS Anzac which was already in Korea and I joined her I think in November '52 and stayed in

08:00 Anzac until the end of 1952. So that saw us operational service again in the Korean War from November '52 until the cease fire in the middle of '53. After that came back and worked locally in Anzac. I left Anzac in January of 1954 to go back to England for a Royal Naval staff course. That was at

08:30 the Royal Naval College at Greenwich. That was six months. After that I did a couple of other training courses and then joined HMAS Melbourne which of course had not yet been commissioned but was being finished building, the building process finished in Barrow, Furness in Lancashire in the Vickers shipbuilding yard. And so I came back to Australia in Melbourne and stayed in her until actually 1958 which meant I had quite a

09:00 long period aboard but fortunately during that time I was promoted to commander and I was then appointed out of the ship's crew into the staff of the admiral, Admiral David Harriers and I was his fleet operations officer. So then at the end of '58 I went to back to the navy office which was then positioned in Melbourne in Victoria Barracks. I was in the

09:30 personnel department so to speak now called human resources. And 1959 was a pretty momentous year because Carla swept down from Hong Kong. We had met in '57 and we got married here in Sydney on the 1st August '59. So that was quite a change of pace and a wonderful change of phase in one's life. So I stayed on in the navy office which we were then moving

10:00 from Melbourne up to Canberra where they still are. They were moving all the Commonwealth departments into Canberra in those days. Stayed there till the middle of '61 and I was lucky to be appointed as the first commanding officer of the new frigate HMAS Parramatta and that was great fun. Spent from July '61 until the end of 1962 and during which time

10:30 we did a six months deployment up to the Far East Strategic Reserve as it was known in those days. We went up, the Parramatta and Yarra went up in company and visited ports of Singapore, across to Borneo, up to Hong Kong and also the admiral at the time in '62 was Admiral McNicholl and

11:00 we did a flag showing cruise with the Melbourne, two destroyers and two frigates up to Japan for three weeks. It was the first flag showing cruise to Japan after World War II. So that was good fun. Came back at the end of '62 and '63 went back to navy office in another staff job and stayed there until the middle of 1965. During that time I was promoted to captain. In

11:30 the middle of '65 all the lotto numbers fell my way so to speak and I was appointed as the first commanding officer of the new guided missile destroyer [HMAS] Hobart which was built in Bay City Michigan in the United States. So I went across there and did commissioning courses, assembled the crew and watched their training and so on and we commissioned in

12:00 Boston Massachusetts on the 18th December 1965. After that we stayed over there until the middle of '66 doing shakedown trials etc and returned to Australia arriving in Hobart City which was very appropriate on 1st September '66. Short visit there. We were given the Freedom of the City

12:30 which was rather nice and came up to Sydney, had leave, did an exercise off the east coast of New South Wales, Queensland with the Royal Navy ships that came down from Singapore and then went for Christmas leave and so on and at that time it was decided that Australia would commit a

13:00 destroyer to the US Seventh Fleet in the Vietnam War. And so we eventually deployed to Vietnam. We were based at Subic Bay in the Philippines and we deployed to Vietnam in March '67. We spent six

months up there till September '67 and then came home and people decided I had had enough time on Hobart and should give somebody else a crack at this wonderful ship. Then I won again at the end of '67. I was lucky to be

13:30 appointed as adviser, the naval adviser to the chief of naval staff of the Royal Malaysian Navy and that meant spending two years at Kuala Lumpur. So I took the family up there. It was a wonderful two years. It was wonderful working with the Malaysian people. So at the end of '69,

14:00 end of '67 to end of '69 we were in Kuala Lumpur. Then went across to England at the end of that time to spend 1970 at what was then the Imperial Defence College in London and at the end of that we returned to Australia and back to Canberra again for another staff job '71 to mid '73. Then I went to HMAS Melbourne as the commanding officer and stayed aboard there

14:30 until, let me think, end '73 to mid '75 I think it was and during that time probably the most startling event was the relief of Darwin after Cyclone Tracy, Christmas '74. That was quite an operation and I think gave great assistance to the city. So then at the end of '75 went back to navy office,

15:00 this is the price of promotion I think or the cost of it and continued in personnel for a while and in the middle of '76 I was lucky to be promoted to rear admiral and I became chief of naval personnel and stayed there until the end of 1978 and then in January '79 until January '80 I was the flag officer naval support command here in Sydney. I think the final date was

15:30 18 January 1980. I left the service after I think it was about 43 years in total. So that's roughly a round up, a sketch.

16:00 **Let's go back to the beginning. You went to the naval college at age 13, did you have any family in the military? What prompted that decision?**

I didn't have, well subsequent family history research shows that back in England there were family members who were actually in the navy but immediate family the answer is no, there were no sort of cousins out here in the military. And the reason I went in was that I was mad keen to be an

16:30 engineer at the age of 12 or 11 or 12 and I went to a junior technical school in West Maitland for a while, in fact a couple of years I think at the ages of 11 and 12 during which time I think mother was wondering and father was wondering how on earth to progress from there into engineering and somebody said why don't you join the navy and they'll train you to be

17:00 an engineer and look after you etc., etc. So I had a crack at that and was lucky. I joined. And I joined initially with the idea of being an engineer but one day, it must have been in our second year at college I think, at the end of the second year of four you had to decide whether you wanted to continue, whether you wanted to be an engineer or an executive officer and

17:30 the old destroyer [HMAS] Vampire was the training ship working out of Flinders Naval Depot in Westernport Victoria. We went down one sort of cold wet and windy Bass Strait day and walked around the dear old ship and went through the engine room and boiler room which I didn't find particularly attractive and I then thought, I can remember quite distinctly coming back and standing on the quarterdeck in the light drizzle and thinking and I

18:00 looked at the bridge and I thought to myself I don't think I want to be down below. I think I'd like to be up there driving the ship. And so I changed my initial bid for engineering and when it came to the decision at the end of the second year I said no thanks I'll be an executive officer. Never regretted the change.

18:30 **Just going back even a little bit just before that, this was in the early 1930s, late 20s, 1930s that you were growing up wasn't it?**

I was born in '23, so one was in the countryside and country Australia in the late 20s, early 30s, which was a time of droughts and Depression here in Australia and life was a bit rough. It sounds grand now to say my father

19:00 had a vineyard, but relatively we didn't have many pennies to rub together. So it was tough times because the whole country was you know really not doing terribly well in that period. And so I had no real desire to follow on the vineyard which didn't really appear to be much of a success nor fortunately did father sort of drum into me that I had to do that. There was

19:30 no sort of royal command that you know the paternal command that you had to do that take over the vineyard. So I branched right away and went to sea. So hence going to the college was the preliminary. College at that time was really navy high school for four years and you came out with HSC [Higher School Certificate] and equivalent in those days at the end of 1940.

20:01 **So at that time did you have any kind of sort of idea at all of what going to sea was going to be like? Did you actually think about what the navy was going to involve?**

I think it basically came under join the navy and see the world. The developments in Europe in those days because war was declared in '39 that tended to focus the mind in some way but we personally

were very

20:30 involved in our training and our education and our military drills and so on, naval drills. I don't think we really thought of the consequences or what the consequences could be of going to sea and being sunk or being bombed or anything like that. That didn't really enter our imagination although we read about various incidents of course in late '39 and '40.

21:00 **What did the training involve specifically? What kind of things did you do?**

At college?

Yes.

Well it was fairly rigorous training. We were tended to be roused with bugles in the morning and shower and change very quickly and a bit of a run before breakfast in uniform, breakfast and then every morning had divisions which included prayers and then we adjourned for studies which

21:30 began as I recall about 9 o'clock, 8.30, 9 o'clock and studies continued through until 4 o'clock in the afternoon but that varied. In that time we moved out of our normal education block, we would go to the engineering school, we would go elsewhere from seamanship training down to the seamanship school and so on. So we were not always locked in our particular classroom. But we did the normal subjects of maths, physics,

22:00 trig [trigonometry], calculus in the end and all that sort of stuff which I've never remembered anything about. And navigation of course was a study, history, naval history in particular. We seemed to do a lot of study of naval history, English naval history from the beginning of time you know starting off with Alfred and his building of the fleet right through, through Nelson and so on. We never really seemed to deal with any Australian

22:30 naval history albeit that there wasn't much of it at that time in 1937. The major thing that had happened before then was we had the battle cruiser Australia in World War I and we had HMAS Sydney the cruiser which sank the [SMS] Emden at Cocos Island but what the rest of the navy did wasn't taught to us and so it was a bit of a gap in a way. However, that was the way it was. We also learnt French as a language which I'm sure was good

23:00 for exercising the brain but wasn't entirely appropriate because when we got to England in 1941 it wasn't the time to go to Paris for the weekend to brush up your French. So French quickly fell into disuse. But we had this daily routine of Monday to Saturday, a lot of sport, sport every afternoon

23:30 after studies and study in the evening, prep we used to call it and then turn in at 9 o'clock and one was ready for bed. And of course it's a bit of a culture shock really in the early days for coming out whether it was city life or country life to getting into college and suddenly there would be a consequence if your boots weren't polished every morning and that sort of thing and hair brushed and cleaned yourself up. It was quite a rigid

24:00 discipline but I don't think it did anybody any harm.

How did you feel about it at the time?

I didn't feel, it didn't sort of get to me at all. It just happened to be that that was it and okay. Many years later in the service one used to run up against the expression if you can't take the joke you shouldn't have joined which really applied in those days but some of the young fellows and we

24:30 watched the younger ones come in after us for some of them it was a little too much and one or two fell out which I don't think was any great crime of falling out. If it didn't suit you it was much better to get out then rather than flog on and try to make a go of it.

I suppose you'd have to start getting used to being away from family anyway?

25:00 Well it's interesting looking back because we were talking about lots of family communications and so on in these of 2002, you look back at those days, going to college one was removed from the family from the age of 13 but you never ever really went back to live with them. So in your teenage years and growing up you didn't have the opportunity to converse with my

25:30 father other than when I went up for brief leaves which is the same as the normal school, holiday periods in May and September and then Christmas and you'd go back and you couldn't really start the conversation you had yesterday because you didn't have one and what you talked about in a previous holiday was probably forgotten anyway and things had taken over and there was something. So you were lifted out of your family and I didn't hear her say it, but my dear mother many years later apparently after

26:00 I was at sea, "Oh I've given Guy to the navy," which really meant that I was there as a family member but I really wasn't actually in the family and that's something which of course people can't, couldn't understand now because fathers and sons are supposed to be terribly close together. We were just physically removed and although my father was a dear fellow

26:30 and my mother was a wonderful lady you weren't really friends with them as a normal person is these days with the opportunity to live, grow up and so on. So it probably affected one later I would think, attitudes here and there.

And in terms of sort of support and pastoral care for the boys at the college, was it a very masculine environment? Who looked after you?

27:00 It was basically an all male cast so to speak. We had a commander of the college who was the boss of the college and each term had a term officer and we had a prefect hierarchy, had a chief cadet captain and cadet captains either in charge of their own year or in charge of the junior years

27:30 for discipline. Doctors and dentists in the depot were the ones that looked after all the sailors in the depot. All the instructors were all male. The only females we saw was when somebody like the girls schools from Melbourne would come down and play us hockey or something like that. So it was, yes it was not in the modern context at all. It was totally

28:00 different. You were down there and that was it. Yes it was in a male society.

So not much chance of a social life with any girls then?

Basically none no not during college time. There was no time for social life anyway except you know at a weekend when we would hop in a coach and go and play, we used to go up to Point Cook or somewhere to play rugby or to go up to Melbourne Grammar or Scotch College to play them

28:30 rugby or cricket or tennis or something like that but during the sporting routine that we followed each year which was pretty exacting but social life as seen in the modern context there was basically none except when you were on leave and then you looked around for some social life yes.

What sort of things did you do?

29:00 Well I not always went home or I would go home for a portion of my leave and then I'd go and stay with friends. I went to stay with my college chum John Austin and his family up on the coast once which was great fun. Or I would also go down to my aunt, who was mother's sister who lived at Chittaway Point and I'd go down and stay with them for a week and do

29:30 some rowing out on the lake and so on, read lots of books. But that sort of thing. Later on from the ships I would go home and see the folks. They actually separated later on so I would go and see one and then the other and you'd go spend it with your new mates from the ships and so on.

You said that you didn't learn any Australian naval history at all, it

30:00 **was very British. What was the sort of set up at the time? There was obviously a very strong affiliation with the Royal Navy.**

Well that's right. The college curriculum I think was based on that of the

30:30 Royal Naval College at Dartmouth and the whole of our training was basically identical to the Royal Navy. Our uniforms were identical, our rank structure was identical, the whole training program progression through ranks and so on was identical to the Royal Navy because all our ships were either built according to Royal Navy design or we purchased from England and so on. So we were very interchangeable. Royal Navy,

31:00 whilst I was at college Lieutenant Commander Skipworth, he was Royal Navy and he was one of the term officers and later I think I met with him again in the cruiser Exeter on the 11th December '41. So we were very interchangeable with the training and the whole development ethic so to speak.

What were Australian naval ships doing at the time that you were

31:30 **studying? What was the navy being deployed to do at that point?**

I can't quite remember exactly what everybody was doing in '37 to '38 because in '39 and '40 they were doing, Australia was across in England for instance in 1940, the cruiser Australia. Canberra was escorting convoys in the Indian Ocean and patrolling looking for German raiders, raiding

32:00 merchant ships. Australia was across in England working with the Royal Navy. I think at one stage she went to Dakar and she was convoying in the North Atlantic. Australia, Canberra, Sydney. Sydney of course was in the Mediterranean, operating in the Mediterranean fleet. Hobart was a new ship and went to the West Indies and came home I think and then Perth

32:30 also went into the Mediterranean in 1941 because that was slightly after I had left college.

Just let's go back to being at college. So war breaks out in 1939 and you're still at college at that time. Can you just remember exactly what happened when you heard? What were you doing? Do you remember that?

33:00 I can't exactly remember but of course like any youth of those days sort of being trained and nearly at the end of your training you felt that you wanted to go to sea. One of the first things that we were told,

we were in the third year then, the year ahead of us had nearly finished and they had three months to go you see so they were immediately packed off to sea and we thought boy we'll get out early. We were immediately told oh no you

33:30 will stay here and you will finish your time which we did until December 1940. So that was interesting and of course we followed the war in the newspapers. So we had to finish our training there which was very wise of course.

But a bit frustrating?

I think we were a bit frustrated but you were then absorbed totally in what you were doing and you're able to forget about the frustration and get on with life.

34:00 **So suddenly you had much more of a purpose now I guess?**

Yes very much more, very much more. Yes purpose unknown almost.

So at that point while you're still doing general training, you hadn't specialised in any particular area of a ship at this point?

No, no. You were getting general training on naval ships and seamanship and just general duties around the place.

34:33 **So when you were actually posted, you finally get a posting, just tell me about that when you actually find where you were going to go so you actually going to go and see some action.**

Well when we heard that we were posted appointed to the cruiser Australia which was in England I mean that was fantastic. Oh boy you know this is

35:00 really seeing the world. So the five of us who were appointed were very happy and we eventually mustered in Sydney and we went across to Wellington in one of the cross Tasman boats, I don't know whether it was the Wanganui or something like and spent a couple of days in Wellington and went across the Strait down to Christchurch or Littleton, the harbour Littleton for Christchurch. But eventually went aboard the

35:30 Shaw Saville ship, the Karamea, merchant ship about 10,000 tons and we took passage in her across the Pacific through the Panama up the east coast of America and that's when things began to change. The passage across the Pacific was indeed peaceful and clear and it was interesting. We sailed past the Galapagos Islands which of course we didn't know about in those

36:00 days too much except from our geography lessons in college but I must say looking back I think one knew quite a lot about various places in the world and where they were and so on in those days because geography and the learning of other countries and where towns and cities and rivers were was fascinating. And then suddenly to be faced with this voyage to England you were actually going to see some of the things that you'd learned about

36:30 over the years and of course the first was really going to New Zealand. You know that was an adventure. And then going across the Pacific was fascinating. Miles and miles and miles and days and days and days flogging along with nothing in sight and nothing sighted. Through the Panama Canal, I mean that was really tremendous fun seeing the working of the locks and this incredible engineering feat. The big change after we

37:00 got through the other end of the Panama Canal was of course the weather began to change to winter in the north and I can remember we sailed past Miami and it was all lit up, lights, yachts all over the horizon and everything and you know there we were chugging through on our way to the war. And everything was lit up along the American coast, of course

37:30 they weren't in the war in January '41 and the first change of weather came when we were up somewhere abreast of New York, the first blizzard came through. That's when we realised perhaps we didn't have quite enough warm clothing. The situation didn't much improve regarding temperature after that. We had a blizzard, we had gales and I can remember one crystal

38:00 clear morning when the temperature was probably about zero going past Cape Race, Newfoundland before we headed across the North Atlantic to go to Glasgow and then we ran into gales across the Atlantic and of course that was an incredible experience. One was a bit seasick in the early stages. Incredible experience really. It was the first rough weather one had ever experienced. The size of the swells were huge and the gale force

38:30 winds were incredible but that was life at sea and that's what we were for so you learned about it and took it in. The other thing was that of course February '41, January '41 and February '41 wasn't a good time for lone merchant ships to be in the North Atlantic Ocean because of a certain number of u-boats around keen to send you to the bottom. And I can

39:00 remember one day in a gale the third mate I think mentioned that a ship had been sunk about four hours distance from us. Well four hours in gale force weather may not necessarily have been very far so you begin to think yes the war is getting a bit closer and two days out from Glasgow when we thought ah at last you know we're nearly there spotted a couple of aircraft

39:30 on the horizon. Hooray we've got some air cover you know some patrol vessels or patrol aircraft to shelter us from the submarines and so on. Well yes they were very keen. They came and had a look at us but just when they were having a look very close, they opened the bomb doors and dropped some bombs on us because they happened to be Heinkels from Germany or perhaps they were based in Norway and that sort of changed

40:00 the day. It tended to focus the mind. They machine-gunned the ship. One of the bombs hit the ship but fortunately glanced off and landed in the sea. The ship was actually undamaged except for a derrick dented and hit by one of these bombs. So suddenly you were there. You were in the war and I think it was a day or so later we got into Glasgow. Went up the Clyde.

Tape 2

00:27 **Let's just go back a little bit. This is your first time on a ship. Actually can you just tell me what you took with you? What did you pack to take with you?**

Well we had, when we left naval college all your kit that you had been provided with went into a trunk, a special trunk if I recall and one of the interesting things in those days which sounds a bit irrelevant to your

01:00 question but we had a special tin box for a pith helmet, you know the old white pith helmet that everybody imagines is linked with the British Raj in India, those were issued to us. I don't think I ever wore it but there was a tin box. So we had tropical uniform with us and we had blue uniform with us. I think our warmest coat was a Burberry and you know Burberrys were

01:30 pretty thin and that was about it. We had some pullovers and so on but we didn't really have any cold weather gear but that was the way we did it and we unfortunately continued that way for decades after out here instead of

02:00 when deployed ships into semi sort of Arctic type chill they never really kitted our fellows out properly. However, what did we pack in the truck? Well you packed all the little bits and pieces you had. One of the things of course that I packed that I should never have packed was my midshipman's dirk. Midshipmen have a little sort of short dirk, little short sword so to speak, strictly not for aggression purposes but for ceremonial. You had a

02:30 dirk and you had a midshipman jacket, full kit. Of course your dirk and your midshipman's jacket and all that sort of thing are entirely useless in the war. You never wore it and if you survived the war and so on without losing your kit you still have it but if you didn't you don't have it. Anyway all those bits and pieces went into this truck and a suitcase or two and that

03:00 was it. You went off and that was the way. You packed your photographs and a few bits and pieces from the family but one wouldn't have had too much of those in those days at the end of high school so to speak and away you went.

And it was just the five of you on board?

Just the five of us yes. I'm not sure how they chose the Karamea but I must say it was quite a good choice. It was comfortable. We shared, we shared

03:30 a cabin, there were two of us in a cabin. Not too much space but you don't need too much or we didn't really at that time. Yes five of us. There was John Austin, Bruce Dowling, Peter Gyllies, Bob Davies and myself and John Austin is still alive. Bruce Dowling is still alive. Bruce had to leave

04:00 the navy in 1946 because he was badly wounded at Leyte Gulf and Peter Gyllies died in the early 70s and Bob Davies was lost in Repulse but we'll come to that later perhaps. But yes just the five of us yes.

And an officer with you – and was someone looking after you?

04:30 Yes, Commander Rosenthall, yes. Very nice chap.

Tell us about heading out on the ship. You were talking about the star shells. Tell us about that.

That was just a destroyer patrol in what would have been the west approaches in those days, approaching the top end of Ireland going over into the Clyde or into Liverpool and they would have been out there patrolling and they we were coming in as a single merchantman. Maybe

05:00 he hadn't been told that we were on the way but we were there and so he illuminated the star shell. He came along I think within a couple of hundred metres or so and after star shell and identified us, there was some talk through megaphones and so on as to who we were and where we were bound and then we went on after that into the Clyde.

This was after the attack?

From the two aircraft, the German aircraft, yes.

05:30 **Tell us a bit more about that, about your actual experience of that.**

Well we were standing on deck. I recall two or three of us we were standing on deck looking at the aircraft quite convinced in our own naïve way that they were friendly but then they flew towards us and we thought oh they're going to buzz us and go on over. Well they certainly buzzed us

06:00 and open fired with a machine-gun by which time and when the bomb started to drop we headed into the nearest hatch very quickly and got inside out of the range of bullets. Nobody was wounded fortunately from the machine-gun attack but nobody, the bombs didn't go off in the right place so the ship wasn't damaged by the bombs. We were very lucky, very lucky. They could have burst on deck and caused quite some damage but I

06:30 think the ship would probably still have gotten into Glasgow but we didn't know that then.

So how did you all react to that? Did any of you think what have we done, we might get killed?

No I don't think so. I don't think so. Everybody said it was a bit of a close shave and left it at that.

You were saying that there was some rough weather and you got

07:00 **seasick. When the camera was off you were just saying that there wasn't much you could do about that.**

Well there isn't actually but there didn't seem to be any pills in those days and if you were feeling off you went and lay down on your bunk or something and when you felt like eating you ate some food. It sort of tends to take away the appetite and there were no – as I said – no seasick pills in

07:30 those days, nothing you could take for it. So you just got over it with the whole sort of balance system. You eventually accommodated the movement and the ears settled down and so the nausea settled down and you went about your duty as you would normally do.

Some sailors never got over their sicknesses?

Some people didn't. Not in our group, they were all right but as I mention

08:00 I have known fellows in the service who have been a little bit seasick most of their serving time. I think it's great courage, it requires great courage to continue sailing under those conditions because if you are feeling seasick you're not very comfortable at all. It's a nauseating feeling and you can't crawl away and you can't stop the ship and you can't sort of stop the world

08:30 I want to get off or anything like that. You just have to stay there. And I mean there have been fellows, one chap I knew there was a bucket at the back of the bridge and when he was on watch and when he felt sick he'd go and be sick and then come back and carry on with his watch. Now that's a fair amount of fortitude required in that sort of thing.

09:00 **Very difficult when you're fighting. Tell me about arriving in England and your impressions, or Scotland.**

Well firstly of course going up the Firth of Forth you were surrounded by these magnificent entrance really to the Clyde and the whole countryside was covered in snow and that of course was the first time one had seen countryside covered in snow. We'd been through blizzards and I think if

09:30 we properly looked some of Newfoundland in the distance might have been covered in snow. I'm sure it was but that was the first time one had seen the normal, what you would feel is normal green hills and mountains and so on all covered in snow and it looked cold and it was cold. It's an indelible impression on my mind. I've never forgotten going up the Clyde

10:00 and looking at either side of the river at the fields and everything, trees and so on covered in snow. We went up. We passed shipyards such as John Brown's shipyard where they were probably finishing another battleship or something. We passed a Fairfield yard where they were finishing destroyers building and you know it was a hive of activity. And we went

10:30 up and got to our berth and went ashore in Glasgow and eventually I think we were there, I can't remember what time of the day we arrived, probably about noon or something like that, I'm not sure we really stayed on board for more than one night and then went down to London in the train. And of course we went to London and reported to Australia House where

11:00 people were sorting out what to do with these five junior midshipmen and we were offered hospitality and they had a wonderful scheme running in Australia House for people like ourselves arriving and we were billeted out, wonderful people and I think three of us went to a doctor and Mrs Logue. She was a wonderful lady and he was a wonderful person. He was

11:30 a speech therapist I think you would call him these days. But he was actually helping the King who you

will recall had a stutter. He was assisting the King in improving his speech. He was quite a fellow, Lionel Logue, he was a West Australian. Never hear about him at all. They lived down at Sydenham and there we hopped in the tram and went out and took

12:00 our little bag and left the main trunk somewhere. And we spent, I can't remember now but quite a few nights with them and that was when one was first, when one first heard the air raid sirens go and saw the flak going up and hustle down into the basement of the house out of the way to wait till the all clear went and so that was one's first experience with air raids.

12:30 And then after that we were billeted out into the country. Once again by people who had volunteered to house servicemen or servicewomen servicemen before they went on wherever they were going. We went down to two places. One was a Mrs Marchant, dear lady who lived in the village of Chalfont St Giles, if I recall, near Gerrards Cross. She had a little cottage

13:00 and she had a heart of gold and fed us more food than we could, I don't know how she managed it but she did. And we were just waiting there walking around the village, going to the pub in the evening for a beer. We couldn't afford much because I think midshipmen had the princely sum of five shillings a day. It really didn't get you far. And then we also went and stayed with a wonderful family in Beaconsfield, Lady Helen Byrne.

13:30 They were kindness itself. It was really a lovely house. From there we were then ordered back to London. Caught the overnight train I guess up to Glasgow again and we were sent to Repulse. We joined Repulse off Greenock, Greenock as they say down the Clyde and she was out there

14:00 waiting to escort a convoy south to Gibraltar or Freetown area. We joined I think it was late in the afternoon. It was growing dark on a February day so it couldn't have been much beyond 3 o'clock. It was pretty dark. Anyway it was about 4 or 4.30 in the afternoon and there's this huge ship. We went out on a boat which came in for us and our bags and hammocks

14:30 and things and so on and joined. You know this was real. You know this was the first ship and there we were. Then there was the first night in a hammock. The ship sailed at about 5 o'clock I think and there we were at sea with our hammocks slung on our first night at sea as a midshipman in a

15:00 warship. And we had a great time. Wonderful captain. A great, great crew, a friendly team in the gun room. The gun room is the small eating and lounge room mess so to speak where the midshipmen and sublieutenants live. That was right down the aft end of the ship down

15:30 beyond Y turret. The ship had three turrets, twin turrets. A and B up forward and Y down aft, three of them and we lived there. But we were quite warmly greeted you know there was no sort of who on earth are these colonials although I think probably people might have thought it, didn't say it. And we got along very well and we had a wonderful officer in

16:00 charge of our training who was at that time Lieutenant John Hayes known as Jock because of his initials and he looked after us. He was later Lieutenant Commander Hayes and much later on Vice Admiral Sir John Hayes when he retired from the navy. And we had a terrific captain, Captain Tennant but a bit forbidding in the early days. I mean the captain

16:30 was God you know. As a midshipman you were right at the lowest bottom end of the limb. But our training as we got into it over the months ahead we became part and parcel of the team as much as we could contribute. We were learning really and we were absorbing more than we were giving I think. But it all went well. It was great and the ship was active also.

17:00 **You said you were welcomed on board. Do you think there was a difference between, did they perceive Australian sailors as being different?**

I don't think, I don't think, I don't want to mislead people. Nobody sort of rushed up and grabbed us by the hand and said, "Welcome aboard! We're real glad to have you on board," or anything like that. On the other hand we weren't, we weren't viewed as total strangers and we were accepted as members of the ship and that to me was a passive welcome.

17:32 **You were billeted with English people. What was your perception of Britain and England at that time as an Australian?**

I mean you felt it the moment the ship went up the Clyde, when the Karamea went up to dock that this all looks a bit different. A it was

18:00 wintertime, mid winter, B there were blackouts which we had never experienced before. The train journey down to London was in the clickety-clack was you know everything was shuttered up and no lights. Look out, there were no lights outside. London, blackout and of course London had

18:30 by that time absorbed its major blitz, 1940, end of 40/41 and so the people were very seriously minded as you can imagine and you could almost say that they didn't laugh a lot. It wasn't a scene of beautiful sunshine that we have out here. It was cold, winter, miserable, people had been killed and hurt, air raids were something which people you know worried about, it

19:00 wasn't just oh there's just another raid I'll keep walking type thing although of course history recounts in detail their bravery, their courage and so on but it was for real you know you were in the middle of a war and England was the headquarters so to speak. So again the bright life of Australia was a million miles away and you were there in the UK with its blackouts, with its food shortages and all those sorts of things.

What was your sort of closest shave with an air raid?

Sorry?

19:30 **What was your sort of closest experience with an air raid?**

With an air raid? Oh I can't really remember. I don't think any bomb exploded nearby. You get the impression there were raids going on you know within a few miles here and there. No I don't think, I was lucky that nothing exploded near where we were.

20:00 **And as an Australian in Britain, I mean what was your perception of yourself as an Australian and as of Australia in relation to Britain at that time? We're sort of moving away from Britain now but what was it like then?**

Oh we were totally linked, totally linked. There was no thought of separation. Yes we were Australians but we were over there. We were in a Royal Navy ship and we were getting on with the job. I mean there was

20:30 no, yeah we felt Australian at times there's no doubt about that but not from the point of antagonism or great resistance. We were entirely proud to be what we were and we were quietly committed I suppose, we didn't talk about it, quietly committed to proving that we could be efficient officers just as the same as everybody else. But there was no sort of we,

21:00 they. Some people felt we spoke English in a funny way, but the chap that said it to me was actually an Indian at the time, later became good friends and he said to me one day, "You Australians do speak the English language in the funniest damn way, you know," and as he was a senior midshipman and I was junior there was no reply to that. But okay, so we spoke English

21:30 in a funny way. I thought he did too.

When you first got on the ship, did they have a name for the person that looks after you?

Oh the midshipman's training officer, midshipmen are known as snotties because they have three buttons on their jackets, on their dress jackets which stories used to say they put them to stop wiping their nose on their

22:00 sleeve. So midshipmen were known as snotties and the officer in charge of our training was known as the snotties' nurse which was one of those you know naval expressions that was quite normal. Where's the snotties' nurse? It wasn't a put down on the officer. He just happened to be the midshipmen's training officer and that was it.

22:30 **How many men were on the ship?**

We had about 1350 aboard total. Quite a large, she was a ship with some 32,000 tons in weight and she was built in 1916. She didn't get to Jutland, the Battle of Jutland. Built in 1916 and she was one of the battle cruiser

23:00 squadron. There was the Renown, Repulse, Hood and so on and others in the battle cruiser squadron commanded by Admiral Beattie at Jutland and Beattie was a bit of a character as can be read in many books. One of the things – he was a nonconformist in his fashion and instead of buttoning up his jacket with four buttons Beattie decided to have a jacket with three. So

23:30 as nobody else was allowed to have a jacket with three all the battle cruiser officers undid their top right button. That was their privilege. And so we used to proudly undo the top right button as midshipmen and that was, we were in the battle cruiser squadron. It was great fun.

Tell me a bit about how the ship was sort of set up in terms of you know where you slept, where you worked because it's a massive ship.

Well she was big, that was the first thing. And we slept, we slept right in

24:00 the stern portion of the ship. She was lightly armoured but she had side armour on her and it ran down as far as the protecting Y turret magazine which was right on what we call the quarterdeck, the stern of the ship. Now there's a hatch down there just by the Y turret and you then went down into the midshipmen's chest flap. Chest meaning chest of drawings

24:30 where you stowed your kit and the baggage store and the hammock store and the gun room and a training room, sort of a classroom which had a piano in it as well, a classroom and our bathroom and a couple of other stores aft. Well we quickly learnt that aft of where, aft meaning behind,

25:00 where the armour stopped and you had this fine stern that was nothing when she hit a swell forward. You know she shook. The back end would waggle like a duck's tail you know and so there were times when you were in hammock and you were sort of moving around a bit while you were sleeping. And the other interesting, ridiculous thing that happened.

25:30 A bathroom to get rid of the water, you know it's below sea level and you know you have bathrooms down here, we had an ejector system which sucked the water out of the bathroom, there was a sump for your shower water which sucked the sump dry by a valve up until the speed of the ship

26:00 was about 14 knots and as she went to sort of 16 or 18 knots if the water if the valve hadn't been closed off the water would come back in and fill up the bathroom. By the time the bathroom deck had filled up and we crossed the door, you used to have what we called a sill which is about 8 or 10 inches high to stop water coming out easily but of course if the bathroom filled up the level of the sill and kept filling if the ship was doing say 18 or

26:30 20 knots and the water would come into the chest flap and you'd wake up in the morning as the duty midshipman was supposed to look at the valve and you'd wake up in the morning and look over your hammock and your boots were floating in about you know a foot of water. Very uncomfortable and you sort of get down and paddle around until we got this thing straightened out again. You weren't very popular, I can say. I

27:00 think it only happened a couple of times but in the evening you had to make sure that the bathroom was dry and the valve closed just in case sometimes during the night you had to, the ship had to increase speed. But working around the ship you were given, the ship was in defence stations and that means about a third of the ship's company closed up a part of the armament, portion of the armament and that included probably one of the

27:30 turrets, some of the high angle guns for anti-aircraft and some of the, we had low angle triple 4 inch guns for low angle close range work. I can remember in my early days I was up in the control position for the triple 4 inch at the aft control position under the main mast was just above the after

28:00 funnel, two funnel ship and of course with the wind from forward all the funnel fumes would draw down over this control position and you had this sort of sulphurous atmosphere which you were drinking in this stuff all the time. Very uncomfortable I must say and you were terribly happy, you'd get them on a zigzag. The ship was always zigzagging, altering course

28:30 according to a plan for submarine avoidance and there were legs when the smoke would come straight over your control position or inside it and you would hope it would soon change. Very uncomfortable I must say and you were of course in the forward control in the air defence position right forward it was high above the forward funnel so if you were steaming down wind and the wind was stronger than the speed of your ship then

29:00 those funnel fumes would come over the air defence position forward or the control positions forward. Once again very uncomfortable breathing this sort of air. But we kept lookout on the air defence position or lookout on the bridge, midshipman of the watch, had somebody assisting the navigating officer, gunnery officer and so on learning about the ship and what was happening in her and who was running it and who was operating

29:30 stores, you know boiler rooms, engine rooms and so on although I must say we didn't spend very much time down in the boiler room and engine room but I wasn't terribly interested because I didn't want to do engineering.

What was the first time the Repulse actually was in action? What are your first memories of actually having to sort of fire the guns?

In anger? Well in anger against the enemy really was the first time against

30:00 the Japanese aircraft off the east coast of Malaya on 10 December '41. We had expected of course, we had looked forward to with some I guess apprehension of shooting at the Bismarck in May '41 but that didn't happen.

Tell me a bit about that, about your perceptions of that time and when you were involved in that. What were you doing at the time?

30:30 Well we didn't see the Bismarck. We headed off at 27 knots into a north westerly breeze so to speak, strong gale from Cape Wrath which is the north west corner of Scotland heading across to the south of Iceland. King George V, the battleship leading the flagship and the carrier Victorious ahead of us and then Repulse with a screen of destroyers and cruisers. We

31:00 left, I forget the dates now, 24th I think it was. 23rd in the evening we sailed. We joined with King George V, I think it was on the 24th, 23rd, the morning of the 24th off Cape Wrath and away we headed but of course we

31:30 woke up to breakfast on the 25th to learn that the Hood had been sunk and that sort of tended to indicate that once again the war was for real. And we were expecting to meet Bismarck on the night of the 25th sometime between you know sort of midnight and daylight, closer to daylight than midnight

and so the lookouts and I was one of them during the night, I

32:00 think I was on the first watch, 8 till 12 at night were looking very keenly into the dark North Atlantic sky waiting to get an impression of the silhouette of Bismarck. You can see the silhouette of a ship against the horizon but not at a huge distance but you can see it. And so one was looking out, looking out through the binoculars very, very keenly to catch a

32:30 glimpse of this ship. The ship was keyed up, ready for action and great feeling that at last she could have the opportunity to fire her guns in anger. Then the following morning at about 6.30 we realised that Bismarck wasn't around and the course, had altered course and I forget what time in

33:00 the morning it was, probably about 10, the signal we were running out of fuel on Repulse and we couldn't do anything about it. We had to be detached. The nearest place to go was Newfoundland and when we detached the whole ship fell absolutely flat, absolutely flat and frustrated. It really was quite a blow obviously more so to those a lot more senior than

33:30 we were, well everybody was senior to us, to the captain and all his officers who had been keen to get into action and the ship's company. Of course a lot of experience in the ship's company in those days, chief petty officers and warrant officers, petty officers. Very frustrated that we had been denied the opportunity and that spilt off onto us as well. But we went

34:00 to Newfoundland in Conception Bay and we fuelled from a tanker and I can remember a fishing boat coming alongside and the beautiful salmon in this ship and I think even the gun room managed to buy some salmon. The most delicious meal I had had for quite a while you know. Then we went on down to Halifax, Nova Scotia after that and of course when we went to I think somewhere between Newfoundland and Halifax or just when we

34:30 arrived there then we learnt that the Bismarck had been sunk.

How did you all feel about that?

Well we all rejoiced of course absolutely because she would have caused mayhem in the North Atlantic if she'd been allowed to roam freely around. She was a tremendous ship, absolutely incredible and beautifully built. I mean subsequently one found out details of it after the war and later and

35:00 beautifully built ship, very modern in every way with a good gunnery system, excellent gunnery system hence she was able to target the Hood and sink her very quickly. Years later I'd had an interesting meeting or contact, the senior surviving officer of the Bismarck was a fellow who had

35:30 the short name of Baron Burkard Von Müllenheim-Rechberg and he was I think second or third gunnery officer in the Bismarck and anyway he got away out of this wreck, blazing wreck and swam and was picked up by the Royal Navy cruiser [HMS] Dorsetshire and subsequently I learnt he went into the German foreign office and later he produced a book entitled Battleship

36:00 Bismarck. We were living in Canberra at the time and my wife who comes from Nuremberg, Bavaria knew the ambassador there and she got this book and the ambassador, we knew him, he said would you like the author to autograph your book. I said that would be something you know and anyway he obviously put in the diplomatic bag, sent it back and the Baron

36:30 sent a little message in the book which I still have and he said with all best wishes and so on and courtesies and I wrote him a letter and indicated to him he was probably puzzled as to why I was interested in Bismarck. So I wrote him a note and said I married a lass from Nuremberg and we went back to Germany some time and I told him about Repulse chasing, etc., and

37:00 said I would like to call and see him. So Carla and I went down to see him one day, we went to Germany and rang him up and he said come and have lunch and so on. So we went to his house in Herrsching am Ammersee which is just south west of Munich and we had a delightful lunch, absolutely delightful

37:30 lunch. And you began to wonder you know about the people on the other side at the time. Everybody hated everybody there was no doubt about that. I mean the causes were, what happened was one of the tragedies of world history. But on the other hand there were people on the other side who were actually quite nice people, normal sort of folk and you begin to wonder why the hell did it all happen in the first place, because some maniac goes the wrong way. It's interesting, his good lady, unfortunately

38:00 the Baron passed away about four years ago I think now and his wife may still be alive I'm not sure but we were chatting at the lunch table and she said what have you been doing on your trip. So I told her. I said I was doing a little family history research in England and you know all conversational stuff and she said oh yes she said Burkard has quite some

38:30 family history and I didn't make any comment on that because I wasn't quite sure what was coming and she said yes his family owned Alsace-Lorraine from the 1500s so I thought that was, so we didn't pursue discussion on family history after that. But it was a very interesting meeting. We didn't go back after that somehow or other. Our trips over there we've gone other places and seen other people not that we didn't

39:00 enjoy it. They were kindness, they said they had a flat, a self contained flat under their house did we ever come to Germany if so would we like to use it, it's there you know. Never met us before. It was terrific.

Tape 3

00:24 **Guy I'd just like to go back a little. Just a couple of things to pick up on in regards to your training. I was interested to know how did they prepare you for, you referred later to the reality of war, how was that talked about in terms of your training?**

01:00 I think basically in your training you're automatically carrying out your duty to do that duty in a case of action. So it followed you know that if, for instance in Repulse I was at one stage in charge of what was known as the high angle control position – an HACP – and there were two of these. One was in the forward section of the ship and one was in the after section of

01:30 the ship and they were a computer, a mechanical computer really working out the solution to known as the fire control problem, you track your enemy aircraft and you have your own ship's movement underneath it and so you have a relative velocity problem and you need to fire your shell shall we say at some lead off angle at a certain range to explode the shell in

02:00 front of the aircraft. So when one is doing that for an exercise you're doing exactly the same duty as you are when you're firing at the enemy. So that's an example whereby your normal training, how you're preparing for war by doing that peacetime exercise. Nobody talks about the war

02:30 environment. Nobody was saying that, although in a ship of course you have your damage control parties which are there to plug up the holes and put out the fires and so they train to do that without any damage existing but that's what they're training for and the moment the ship was damaged where the bomb hit that's what they were doing putting out fires and repairing damage and the medical parties are trained to look after the

03:00 wounded and the dead etc and they're trained to do that. They have mock stretcher parties and so on for somebody in the stretchers so that they take them to the medical station and so in all these training things you are trained to do that action when you're actually engaging the enemy. But nobody is likely to tell you how many wounded you're going to have to deal or how many dead bodies you push out of the way or that sort of

03:30 thing. You know at least, I'm talking about when I was aboard Repulse. Nobody was saying you know in the event of so much damage, I can get tied up in this. Nobody can actually give you the environment to train in otherwise when you get into action of course you're still working but

04:00 nobody is saying to you that when you get into action it's going to be like this. The only way is a rough petty officer will say well when you young fellows get into action you better have your wits about you, something like that because it's going to be tough and that's about as far as it goes. How else can you impart the environment of an action? Not on really.

04:32 **We'll talk about the environment of an action a little later when we get onto the Repulse and other battles. But I'd just like to stay for a little while, particularly going back to your early school when you were sent off to training school as a teenager, to navy school as a teenager. You**

05:00 **discussed that you basically lost your connection with your family. Was there someone for you who became like a father figure at that school?**

Your term officer really became a father figure I guess, yes albeit that they were probably, yes they were old enough to be our fathers. Yes they

05:30 would have. The captain of the college was a father figure not in the same way as being a father though. I mean there was not sort of a discussion about how you young blokes feel about this, that and the other but the term officer was there guiding you when guidance was necessary. In a way I suppose in a modern term counselling a little if it was necessary but

06:00 making sure that you were keeping up with the team and so on. But nobody, there was nobody there really to substitute for a father, no. Under the discipline and the rank hierarchy you couldn't sort of short circuit that back to what I think you're getting at. Yes there were father figures around

06:30 but they were fairly remote, not in the family sense you know they were remote in the family sense.

You said that in hindsight that's perhaps caused some complexities for you as a result of that distance from your family, etc. I'm just wondering in terms of your experience and your relationship with the

07:00 **navy over the years, has training shifted now with sailors coming in to the navy, are there**

facilities in place for them to have a closer connection with their family these days or does it still echo what it was like?

07:30 I think, I find it difficult to compare the two because I don't really have enough knowledge of the present day training and the present day conditions of service except that I do know that fellows go off to sea with a mobile telephone and they do have contact with their families. You would have read in the press whereby somebody in a ship up somewhere can talk

08:00 to their family on sat, sat telephones and so on. That of course never existed in our day. So yes there are major changes I would think, major changes and there's much more ability to, many more facilities allow you better contact with your family. Although of course depending on the nature of the operation that has to be closed off at times. You can't have a

08:30 ship's company of 200 all on the telephone to their family all the time. I mean they've got a job to do and so it has to be controlled I would imagine at sea. But yes mobile telephones, satellite communications change the whole scene I would think.

No doubt the Internet too.

Absolutely – completely different. I mean we have waited for mail and

09:00 mail had move round and chase you. I mean for instance our mail from home when I was in Repulse would basically reach us when we went back to England something like that. It wouldn't have been sent to meet us at Gibraltar. We wouldn't have collected it at Freetown. There were no daily flights taking airmail in and no mail would get across to Halifax when we

09:30 were over there so yes there would have been mail in UK and they probably save it up for when we got there and likewise when we deployed to the East. I don't think, we might have got some mail on the east coast of Africa at Mombasa or Durban but I doubt it. I can't actually remember and certainly we wouldn't have got any in Singapore because once again it was a bit tense.

10:00 **So just going back to that moment of the selection of the five sailors who were heading to the UK –**

Five midshipmen.

Five midshipmen, I'm sorry. Why were those five chosen and from how many in the class?

10:30 Well in alphabetical order there's John Austin, Bodman, Harry Bodman chose to be an engineer. Austin, Bodman, Davies. Bob Davies was there. Bruce Dowling was there. Austin, Bodman, Davies, Dowling, Griffiths, Gyllies and you've got them in alphabetical order. We came off the top of the list. Some went to the cruiser Canberra or other places and so on but

11:00 yeah we were the first five executive midshipmen in alphabetical order in the term.

The other thing that I've become aware of is that you were all boys, you were all teenagers, were there any girls about? Was there any romance? Was there any opportunity to have a relationship with a girl, to have a girlfriend?

11:30 Not really. No not really. When we went to Halifax Nova Scotia after deploying, detaching from the Bismarck chase we received lots of hospitality from families in Halifax and they had parties and some families had daughters and that was sort of contact. There was some opportunity to go to parties at their homes and so on but that was about the size of it.

12:00 There was no sort of hopping in a car and going off somewhere for the weekend. I mean in those days you didn't do that, not at all. In England the answer is basically no. When we were in Rosyth Dockyard in about July 41 we would go and have afternoon tea with the some of the Wrens –

12:30 the Women's Royal Naval Service ladies – up at Dunfermline and we would go to a café and have afternoon tea and then catch the bus back to the ship and that was about it.

Was there ever the feeling that – was it disappointing? Would you have liked to have been able to you know taken one of these –

Oh yes I think so. I'm sure, I mean after all we were reasonably healthy

13:00 male fellows. Yes surely but it wasn't too be so there was no sense of total frustration about it because the circumstances didn't permit it so, you couldn't change it so why fuss about it and one was never very long at any one place to sort of form up what they term these days a relationship. It

13:30 was not on. A bit difficult to understand in 2002. 60 years ago life was different.

Speaking of which you said that on the Repulse you felt no animosity from the English sailors but you did say at times we felt Australian.

14:00 **What was it that made you feel?**

Oh I think when we did something well, that we knew we had done our duty quite well, we had acquitted ourselves well we thought that's one for the naval college and one for Oz [Australia] you know very quietly to ourselves. I remember one time, I forget which harbour it was in now, it might have

14:30 been Scapa Flow, we were, part of our training you had to sail and they had boats known as whalers and these had three sails or four a main and a mizzen and we had done a lot of sailing at naval college and sailed you know a hell of a lot of our training and weekends we'd go sailing in these whalers. So we actually knew how to handle them pretty well and so we were sent away in the whaler the five of us to do some training and bring the whaler alongside the gangway which is always a great gimmick

15:00 because if you don't get it right you smash something. So the five of us all hopped in the whaler and away we went and the first one we charge in you know and you lean over type thing and you turn up and the boat stops. So all five of us did that. Suddenly people realised oh these Australians can sail. It was interesting, it was interesting. We knew we had acquitted

15:30 ourselves that day. Quite fun. I suppose in a way back in those days we felt just a little bit smug about it but we were only doing what we had been trained to do and we had obviously been taught well at home.

Was there much interaction between the ranks on a ship? I'm talking here on a social level rather than at a professional level when you're at

16:00 **work but when you're off duty.**

No not really, we're talking about Repulse still in '41. Not really no. Between the midshipmen you know up and down a bit but we were the juniors and we didn't really go ashore with the sublieutenants who were ranked higher and we weren't really involved with the senior midshipmen

16:30 but we were friends of course with the Royal Navy junior midshipmen on board as well. They were round about our vintage. But between the gun room and the wardroom where the officers, basic officers lived, no there wasn't really any social connection. We would never go to a party with them or something like that no. Meet them on the sporting field and that

17:00 sort of thing but not otherwise no.

You talked about the captain as God. Where and how would you come in contact with the captain?

Well you would come in contact with the captain when you were keeping watch on the bridge at sea and that was basically where you met him or he

17:30 knew that you existed around the place. Captain Tennant was a very senior captain. In fact I think he was about the most senior captain in the Royal Navy at the time and he was very, in a way a shy retiring but a man with a big heart and good wisdom. You know he knew about his people and so he knew more about you than you thought he did. And it used to be the

18:00 custom in those days also and it may well be now for captains to invite midshipmen to breakfast, at his table for breakfast and I can remember a couple of us going along, I forget who was with me now, but a couple of us went along for breakfast with Captain Tennant and that was quite an event in your life to have breakfast with the captain. And it wasn't exactly what you would call a freewheeling conversation but it was warm, it was

18:30 interesting and it was valued, the opportunity to get to meet your captain.

What would you talk about?

Oh come on Patrick [interviewer], I can't remember, you know, sixty years ago! What did we talk about at breakfast with the captain? I have no idea. No, that one's too far away. We were lucky actually in Mombasa when we were working out of Mombasa on the east coast the captain was friends with the district

19:00 commissioner and his lady, Mr and Mrs Hodge and the Hodges were wonderful people and they said, "Do you midshipmen want to come up and have afternoon tea at our house and use the swimming pool and so on, it's all there." So we went up. So occasionally the captain was a bit on the sidelines there so you got a little of contact there but not too much. But you knew he was there and of course yes he was the boss. There's no

19:30 doubt about it. Always known as 'the Old Man', the expression for the captain. But he had the great respect from the ship's company. They all 'loved-liked' him and respected him very much. There was no dissension at all. You know he was the boss and that was it, acknowledged it but they

20:00 liked him. It was good. Very, very nice feeling amongst you know the ship's company and so on. Nobody was muttering about him not that we ever heard it but books have been written about Tennant since and everything is plus regarding him and those of us who survived only have positive thoughts about our captain and great respect.

Do you have any recollection of the time on the bridge with him?

20:30 Not really, no.

Would he see it as an opportunity to impart knowledge?

No I don't think captains in those days got involved in any deep discussion with their midshipmen. No not really. You were required to do your duty and you had an officer or watch you know a lieutenant or sublieutenant

21:00 officer of the watch and he would talk to you about what to do and what you should be doing and help train you at the time and the captain was, he was worried about the big picture and his ship.

Talk us through when you were on the bridge with the watch and the person in charge of the watch would teach you various things. What

21:30 **sort of things would they talk to you about?**

If you were zigzagging so to speak you were allowed to, at times that you were allowed to manoeuvre the ship for the zigzag. You would have to set the zigzag clock as I recall and make sure it was right because if the ships didn't alter all the same way at the same time you had unhappy situations

22:00 of ships perhaps altering course towards each other. You know the convoy that you were escorting was also zigzagging and so you had to follow the zigzag. So you set the zigzag clock and you would make sure that the timing was right and things like that. If you didn't know how to do it you would be taught how to do it. And then at some stage you might be allowed to manoeuvre the ship and alter course. Well it's not just a case of saying starboard 15 or something like that. You have to take the wheel off

22:30 before a number of degrees of the new course midships and counter the swing of the ship and so on. So you had to learn about doing that. You'd learn about sweeping with binoculars and you would know how the hands are employed on the ship, whether if the seas were getting rough did you have anybody on the upper deck from the safety point of view and things like. So yes general sort of duties.

23:00 **Just going back a little bit. You talked about this salmon boat that turned up and you were able to buy salmon off it. A couple of questions. Was there much interaction between other forms of sea boats on the sea in terms of you know was that a rare event that a fishing boat should pull up beside you?**

Oh yes. It was a very rare event that the ship was in Conception Bay of

23:30 course. I don't know that a Royal Navy battle cruiser had ever been in Conception Bay, Newfoundland before. So we were a bit of a novelty so to speak and I think the fishermen with good marketing sense thought ah I've got a sale out here why not go out and see. We welcomed him with

24:00 open arms as far as the money would allow. If you went in, sorry, contact between in harbour in between boats ashore or harbour traders yes in fact they can get to the stage of being utterly annoying in places like when we went to Freetown in Sierra Leone. You have to keep the traders away from

24:30 the ship side and also within Colombo otherwise you're never sure whether they're inboard or outboard and you know what they might take and so on. So yes you do have in certain harbours of the world quite some traders coming alongside in their small boats which have to be carefully controlled and in a way we used to discourage everybody from buying

25:00 anything out of a boat because you don't get the item until you put the money in the bag and then the item you get mightn't be the one you thought you were going to get and there's no way you can get down and pick it out of the boat.

How does the trade work? There is some pulley system is there between – ?

He'll throw up a line you see on deck and you hover at the guard rail and if you're looking at the boat and you want something down there whatever it

25:30 might be, a piece of cloth or something, you point at it and he says you know so many pesos or pennies or dollars or whatever. So you then, there's a little bag on this line so you put the money in the bag and it goes down and then he puts a piece of cloth on it, on the bag and up it comes. So there is a time when your money is going down and nothing is coming up. You have to be careful.

26:00 **And you said that even the gun room had salmon that night. Did each of the departments have their own mess? Is that how that worked?**

No there was a general galley for the, we had our own gun room galley. I think we shared the wardroom galley and had our food cooked separately

26:30 and then there was the wardroom had its galley and then the ship's company would have had their galley forward and the main messing of the ship I don't know whether the boiler boys forward got salmon that day or not. I just know that we did in the wardroom, in the gun room. I'm sure that the wardroom did. I imagine that the supply officer probably got some for the ship's company as well. 1300 fellows eating salmon is quite a lot.

27:00 **When it wasn't salmon, what sort of food did they prepare for you?**

It's where I first became acquainted with kippers for breakfast in the gun room of Repulse. We had eggs for breakfast and fish, kippers, haddock

27:30 and so on. The food was wholesome but not exactly three star so to speak. Food in those days was, you would call it wholesome but uninteresting I think generally speaking. It kept your body and soul together and so on and later on in the Pacific we'll talk about later the food was deplorable. But generally speaking, of course we were eating better than the people

28:00 ashore in England. They were on very tight food rationing in England and fortunately in the services you were getting a bit more food. So yes you know tough meat. Those are the days when everybody used to boil the hell out of vegetables you know. And of course ships weren't fitted for

28:30 keeping fresh vegetables. Fresh milk was basically unheard of except in harbour. Fresh vegetables only lasted a few days after we left and went on to tinned foods. So no big freezer rooms as they have today and so on, entirely different.

While we are talking about food just tell us why the food was deplorable when you were in the Pacific.

29:00 Well I think firstly they had a victualling allowance which was never really enough to feed people on and strangely enough I don't think in those days that there was much imagination regarding food. It sort of developed out of the old days and all that was good enough you know and that was it.

29:30 We had a revolution in food in the Australian navy after World War II mainly because we nearly had a revolution during World War II regarding, that's not true of course but our food was terrible up in the Pacific during World War II. But then later on we developed it and we began training

30:00 cooks in cooking in an interesting way and allocating sufficient food, sufficient money to allow the procurement of reasonable food and there were proper cool rooms and cold rooms to keep stuff which we didn't have before. So when you are in a ship without a cold room you go back to the days of the old cask of salted beef you know which used to be put down. A lovely story given by a fellow who was actually a signalman in the

30:30 cruiser Sydney when it sank the Emden, a chap called, I've forgotten his name, Ernie, anyway he told a story because after the Sydney sank the Emden off Cocos Island in November 1914 she took a lot of the survivors up to Colombo, landed them and then went on through the Red Sea through the Mediterranean to England. By the time they got into the

31:00 Mediterranean the ship was pretty low on food, I'm not sure why but it doesn't really matter but they got to Gibraltar and because the supply officer then known as the paymaster didn't have very much money they got some casks of salted beef from the victualling store in Gibraltar and on the side of these casks, Ernie Boston was this fellow's name, on the side of

31:30 these casks was stamped 1815 and we're now in 1914 and as Ernie used to tell, he spun this tale here in Sydney, unfortunately he's passed away, he should have been recorded, he said you could fry it, you could boil it, you could stew it, you could hit it with an axe, you could tow it astern but you couldn't eat it. Salted beef and of course those were the old sailing ship

32:00 days and salted beef. It just escaped Nelson and his team. But yes there wasn't much imagination in food in those days and I don't know why. It was something that nobody put any money into it, nobody put very much thought into it. Incredible. I can tell a story when we come later to the Shropshire. We had pretty dreadful food up there in the southwest Pacific

32:30 and I was friends with an ensign, a US ensign aboard the cruiser Nashville. The US of course had proper cool rooms, cold rooms and good food, excellent food compared with ours which was really down but we had some beer on board in the gun room so Fred would come over and bring some beer and we would go over and watch a movie and have dinner on the Nashville. We, one or two of us you know, have dinner on the

33:00 Nashville and then watch their movie or come back and watch our movie, in harbour you know not at sea, you're in the harbour and I can remember going over to dinner one night and we had been on bully beef and dehydrated vegetables for some time and went over and sat down to dinner and Fred said, "Say steward, what do we have for dinner tonight?" And the steward said, "It's chicken, sir." And Fred said, "God damn chicken again!"

33:35 **With all due respect to the British, the British aren't renowned for their cuisine and do you think it is because of the relationship with the Royal Navy that the food in the navy was not terrific and do you think that it shifted post World War II because the navy started to identify more as an independent unit at that stage?**

34:00 Of course it could be. I think as I said you know we were a pattern, our training, our routines, our orders, Australian Admiralty Fleet orders were in force out here, our whole system of running a ship, training a ship, everything was the same as Royal Navy and therefore we would have probably victualled our ships exactly the same way. Yeah I think it probably

34:30 was and then later on we said hey this is not good enough.

Just going back a bit to that moment with the Bismarck and you talked about the disappointment after it not being there and you expected it was and you said that at last we could fire the guns in

35:00 **anger. Can you just talk to us about what leads to that moment and what sort of preparations are gone through to that point where you think you are going to fire the guns?**

Well in your ship at sea on patrol in wartime you are ready for engagement. These defence watches, the third of your ship's company so

35:30 to speak, all your armament is closed up ready to shoot at any time. The rest of your ship is prepared for that sort of eventuality in that things are stowed in proper, where you want them stowed. Stored so to speak and stowed. Everything is in readiness. The ship is in proper order. You don't have in Repulse 20 hammocks lying in the middle of a mess deck. They're

36:00 all stowed away you know locked down, lashed down. The various preparations are all your damage control gear is in order but that is so when you go to sea in a conflict situation in defence watches you are ready to press the action hooter, buzzer, close up to action stations and get to work. So we would have been ready to open fire at anybody short of the

36:30 Bismarck so to speak not just waiting for the Bismarck. She happened to be the target at that time but you're ready so your ship, a navy ship when it goes to sea even on exercises even today I'm sure if they go to a watch system and defence in what we call a third degree of readiness, I'm not sure what they call it now, third degree of, a first degree of readiness is everybody is at action stations and you're ready to bring your total weapon

37:00 system against whatever you have to do. Second degree of readiness is that people remain at their action stations but they are relaxed. They stand down. They can sit. Somebody can go outside and have a smoke if they are still smoking. Third degree of readiness you stand down that big team and you take a third of that big team, about a third and you close it up and they work one watch in three. Four on and eight off. But at any time

37:30 during that you've only got to press the action alarm and you get the whole team back and you're ready again. But the build up in the case of the Bismarck came because we were anticipating the event occurring roughly in the morning of the 25th May. You know when we sailed from the Clyde on I think it was the night of the 23rd we steamed at high speed during the

38:00 24th, we woke up, it must have been the morning of the 26th I've got the dates somewhere, anyway it doesn't matter, day two day three we woke up to night one and night two and then we woke up to the fact that the Hood had been sunk. We then went on for another day and it was that night, the second night or the third night that we were supposed to meet the Bismarck. So you had this build up in approaching the enemy target. So

38:30 that's different to suddenly coming upon something in the ocean, some other enemy ship at short notice and closing up to actions stations and opening fire. So hence the build up in that case was not so much the build up and preparing the ship it was building up the anticipation of everybody in the ship and at last because as I mentioned she had been built in 1916, she had missed Jutland, the Battle of Jutland in World War I and there had

39:00 been nothing to fire the guns in anger at until World War II and up until that time in May '41 she had not had that opportunity. So there was a great sense of anticipation, at last we can have a crack. So that's when, why it all suddenly from that high peak of anticipation suddenly everything went down. There was nothing to do. We go to Newfoundland for fuel.

Tape 4

00:22 **Okay Guy let's move on now with the Repulse, can you just tell me about the journey across the Indian Ocean?**

Repulse, after we had escorted the first convoy we called into Durban and then continued with the convoy up the east coast of Africa and it of course went on to provide support to the Middle East and North African forces and we then operated for a while, probably a couple of months I think, out of Mombasa and between Mombasa and Durban. We went out to the

01:00 Seychelles Islands at one stage doing a sweep out there and doing convoy work up and down the coast and just general patrols in that area. Then when the decision was taken that Repulse and Prince of Wales would deploy to Singapore we were I think at Colombo or we had been sent to Colombo and then later of course Prince of Wales came via Cape Town

01:30 and we joined up off Ceylon as it was in those days and we both headed towards Singapore and Admiral Phillips had flown ahead because he was the boss and taking over the local job of C in C of the whole area and both ships arrived in Singapore. I forget the date, I think about the 2nd December and Prince of Wales went alongside at the naval base which

02:00 was on the north east side of Singapore Island on Johor Strait and we were anchored out in the stream in the Strait. I suppose it was interesting, we felt a bit put down by the presence of the flagship and the brand new battleship and so on and we still had to anchor out which meant we had to

02:30 run boats between ship and shore to take liberty men and so on. So anyway Singapore has been described now, recent writings of being in a sort of holiday mood, a festive mood rather than an area which was anticipating war at an early stage you know in the not too distant future. Anyway we arrived there and strangely enough in those days being a fairly

03:00 penniless midshipman I didn't go ashore. I didn't get into Singapore on that first visit. I didn't have any money. I think I had spent it somewhere in Colombo or wherever and I was doing duties for other midshipmen, some of them Royal Navy midshipmen who you know wanted to go ashore and felt that way and I thought well there'll be another opportunity I'll take

03:30 it next time. That was a wish at the time I think. Then a couple of days later Repulse was detached to go to Darwin with an idea to act using the two ships as a deterrent to the Japanese force coming anywhere near Malaya. We would go down to Darwin and sort of boost the morale of the people in northern Australia but of course at that time, I think it was 7

04:00 December or 6 December, notice of the movement of Japanese convoys, etc., had come through from the South China Sea area and Repulse was recalled. We went back to Singapore and we were in harbour on the 8th, 7th, 7th December, both ships were in the harbour and then on the morning

04:30 of 8th December at about 4 o'clock was the Japanese first bombing raid over Singapore City and the island and we were out in the stream and we were using our high angle guns so was Prince of Wales to fire targets which were flying over our area. They didn't actually bomb the naval base at the time but they bombed Singapore city because it was lit up like a Christmas tree and no difficulty in sort of putting a few bombs down on

05:00 Singapore. And then sort of later in the afternoon the Admiral's having meetings which I don't think we knew about at my level on the ship but anyway towards the end of the day at about 5 o'clock both ships sailed and went down Johor Strait and I think really the last photograph of the ship Repulse and Prince of Wales taken from our side was both ships just

05:30 heading down the strait before that final sortie. So we went out on the evening of the 8th and then we went east from Singapore around the Anambas Islands and then heading north to intercept the Japanese landing which of course had taken place at midnight on the 8th our time and the admiral had hoped to disturb the convoy, destroy it and whatever. And

06:00 one of the things, a major problem in this whole operation was the fact that the ships did not have any air cover either from shore or from aircraft carriers. Now the aircraft carrier Indomitable was supposed to be with us. She had been on flying exercises and training in the West Indies but had managed to nudge a reef I think somewhere off Bermuda or Jamaica or

06:30 somewhere and when we were in Singapore needing her services she was in Norfolk Navy Yard, Virginia in the United States being repaired. So we didn't have an aircraft carrier with us and the situation ashore was pretty tense with the Japanese having air superiority over Malaya and having landed in Kota Baharu at midnight then the following day they were

07:00 destroying airfields and aircraft you know RAF [Royal Air Force] and so on. And so when we finally, I mean I don't think we knew it once again at my level, midshipman level, the admiral was informed when we passed Changi that the aircraft would not be available to cover him. And so we went out without air cover either sea air or shore based air. So on the 9th when we were

07:30 heading north to intercept this Japanese landing the weather was very cloudy, squally, rain, in fact ideal for creating the element of surprise, developing surprise so that we would appear out of the clouds at some time and be there without them being able to find us. So we went on throughout the day and in actual fact we didn't realise it at the time but a Japanese

08:00 submarine on patrol reported us about I think about 1 o'clock or something like that in the day and reported to Japanese headquarters and they fortunately, once again I'm combining a little bit of recent knowledge with past events.

Before we should get into the actual action maybe we should go back and just pick up some details of the other, what you've said so far.

08:30 **You moved into tropical conditions from having been out in the Atlantic –**

Well coming south from the Clyde of course when you get to Gibraltar, Gibraltar is about the same latitude as Sydney. You automatically you're coming into the temperate zone and you change into tropical rig then and

09:00 then because it was, when did we get out there November-ish, we would have been probably in Cape Town and Durban we might have been in winter uniform again but it wasn't cold because we were roughly on our same latitude as here and it wasn't until we got up to Mombasa and up in the Madagascar and beyond north of the Seychelles and so on, Colombo and Singapore that we would have been in tropical rig in tropical

09:30 conditions and serving there for a while. On the way south from the Clyde we would have called, we called in at, in fact we called in at Freetown in Sierra Leone, not a very attractive place. Well it wasn't then. We also called in the island of St Helena I think right in the middle of the south Atlantic. I can remember walking ashore and just stretching the legs going up the road somewhere and having a look at this rocky outcrop in the south

10:00 Atlantic, St Helena. And anyway then we came on and we went out and we were in Singapore, in tropical environment, heat and humidity.

And you would have crossed the Equator.

Well we crossed the Equator on the way south. Yes we had a crossing the line ceremony.

What was that?

Well it was interesting because on our way to England in the Karamea we

10:30 crossed the equator on the way across so we were rated as you know we had made it but we had a huge crossing the line ceremony and in fact I have a copy of that printed ceremony, photocopied because subsequently after sinking and so on one of our chaps went back to Durban and the

11:00 ceremony was printed in Durban and he went to the printer and said can I have a copy, have you still got a copy of that and the printer had. So he took it and years later in England this chap he said would you like a photocopy of this. I said I certainly would and so I still have a photocopy of that crossing the line ceremony. It had photographs in it and which of course the five Australian midshipmen are part of the bears in the ceremony. They are the people who dunk them in the pool.

Tell us what happens exactly.

What in a crossing the line ceremony? Well it's fairly involved. There's a great announcement that King Neptune is about to board and cross examine the captain as to his purpose, would you like me to look at a bit, anyway you have all this gang of people, the barber who shaves people with a large spoon and somebody paints dreadful stuff on the face. And

12:00 then the penalty or judgement is read and the person sitting on the little box is then tilted backwards into a pool of water and dunked by bears and so on which partially washes the gunk off the face and partially doesn't. And I don't know most of the ship's company went through this on the way through and it really is a fun event. It really is quite a fun event.

12:30 Everybody takes part right from the executive officer who was a Commander Dendy right down to the ordinary seamen and so on. It was good. A great event.

Actually just while we're sort of that kind of topic, what other sort of recreational events took place on the ship? Like what sort of things could you do for recreation?

Well I have a photograph of a portable canvass swimming pool which was erected down aft and some of us are in the pool. That was available when

13:00 the weather was hot. I can't remember whether we played deck hockey or not. I think we might have. But there was exercise, gym exercise type thing on the upper deck at certain times for various parts of the ship's company but generally speaking there was not much that can take place, not as much as does now because there was no gym equipment that you

13:30 have on the ships now. Some ships have got a little a gym compartment where the fellows have got the machines and they can go in and do their weights and so on. In those days, no. So physical fitness was, looking back hindsight I would say it was not as high as it perhaps should have been.

Presumably as part of training to keep you as a fit and fighting sort of force did you have to do some sort of drills and exercise in that way?

What do you mean, from the personal fitness point of view?

14:00 **As training yes.**

Yes there was. We had physical training instructors on board and they would take you for physical training and that would be allocated as part of your training program. But there was no sort of voluntary area of gym equipment and so on such as you have in a fitness centre these days.

Did they get you to sort of do press-ups on the deck and things like that?

Oh yes they would have yes sure, sure.

14:31 **You said there was a piano in one of the rooms.**

In our training room yes there was a piano which one of the midshipmen, he was lost actually, Midshipman Hawkins, played great jazz. He really did. He was tremendous. I forget his Christian name. Midshipman Hawkins, he went down with the ship. So we used to have sing-songs

15:00 around the piano pouring the usual amount of beer into it occasionally or soft drinks or something into the piano.

Singapore. So you didn't get to go on shore at Singapore?

No I didn't no.

What were your impressions of the city? I know you didn't get to go

15:30 **ashore. No I won't ask that. You said that you felt a little bit sidelined because the Prince of Wales was first – I also was reading that the Repulse wasn't really mentioned by name in the papers as well –**

That's right. I think that disturbed the ship's company that the Prince of Wales came out in a blaze of glory so to speak and was highly publicised

16:00 in Cape Town as heading east to be a big deterrent and so on and Repulse having joined her there was no mention of us being there at all. So yes that put us out of balance so to speak. We were a little bit anti Prince of Wales but I think people eventually sat down and that was the way it was.

Did you get to interact with the Prince of Wales?

16:30 Not really. There was really no time. I mean some of our midshipmen knew midshipmen aboard Prince of Wales. We didn't know anybody aboard, I didn't know anybody aboard the Prince of Wales gun room so there was no contact really between ships although as I said the Royal Navy midshipmen did know some of the Prince of Wales because they were probably out of Dartmouth in another group. So yes there would have been contact. And there would have been contact between wardrooms too because somebody would have known somebody.

17:03 **There had been Australian ships sunk by this point –**

I can't recall that I was aware or that we were aware as Australians or that the ship was aware. Our captain may well have known that the Sydney had been sunk. I certainly don't recall being aware of the Sydney being sunk

17:30 and Parramatta would have been sunk in the Med [Mediterranean] I think. That was a long way away and I don't think we had news of that.

And I suppose as Australians on a British ship you probably won't going to hear a lot about the Australian navy.

I don't know that anybody would have kept it from us for any purpose. I don't think so. I have a feeling or almost have a feeling that if they knew

18:00 they would have told us but I just don't recall being aware of the Sydney being sunk and that is perhaps a problem I have with memory rather than the fact of whether we were or whether we were not informed.

Was much told to you about the war situation, about developments in other areas or even where you were?

18:30 I don't recall sort of receiving any briefings so to speak as I would expect one would have today on the situation regarding our forces in Malaya, what was there. I don't recall anything ever being spoken about and I don't recall anybody giving us a briefing on the Japanese navy or the

19:00 strategic intentions of Japan. I sometimes, in fact in years since I have felt that British Intelligence really wasn't quite as well informed as it should have been at that time because the attack on Kota Baharu in Malaya seemed to take everybody by surprise. So the Japanese intentions I think had been

19:30 well disguised or secretive and so the combined attack that happened and the many pronged attack on the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya, Pearl Harbour and so on that was really basically a surprise to the world at the time and we certainly weren't briefed on what Japan might be doing, what its intentions were about gathering and needing fuel in the Dutch East

20:00 Indies, oil fuel and so on. So I think we were blissfully ignorant of the pending situation.

What about when Pearl Harbour happened? You heard about that?

Oh yes we did. But of course that was on the 7th December Pearl Harbour time and that was on the 8th December our time so after the bombing of Singapore in the morning you know in the early morning of the 8th at 4 o'clock that morning we did hear that they had bombed Pearl Harbour.

20:30 That was known yes.

What was the response to that, from your perspective just personally?

I don't think, you know this was a pretty big thing that was happening. I don't think there was any analysis at the time. You tend to be – we have

21:00 to look the answers to an interview in 2002 realising that we're talking about the mind of an 18 year old midshipman in 1941

That's what I'm trying to get.

And I find difficulty in remembering how I felt as an 18 year old in December '41. It's quite difficult you know.

21:30 **I guess it's more in terms of like do you remember, fine it may not have made an impression but it's more I suppose how was that kind of news conveyed to you? You know what were you doing? How did it impact then on what you did next?**

Well it didn't impact on me of course as to what I was to do next because I was in the ship and it was a case of what the ship would do next. In the event of course Admiral Phillips sailed the fleet on the evening of the 8th to go and look for the Japanese.

22:00 **So the bigger structure of the war then influenced what you were going to be doing next?**

I think the structure of the war wasn't something we were dealing with.

That's what I mean. So the next thing that happens for you is that you're then sent to attack, the ship is then sent, so just tell us about the preparations for that, what your role was going to be in all of that.

Well you see the ship, once again we go through the business of defence

22:30 watches and when we sailed we went out. We were in defence watches. The ship was ready for action if you pressed the alarm bell and my job was in the high angle control position that I mentioned before. Having been in exercises one was ready for action. So that was my job. I was down there in three watches, one in three and that's the way it went on the 9th December.

23:00 **So in terms of what was – the first contact then with the enemy, can you tell us what happened then?**

Well basically the first contact with the enemy really was the Japanese aircraft, ship based aircraft from cruisers, their cruisers sighting us late in the afternoon of the 9th December. We saw these fellows out there and of

23:30 course they then turned away and that meant that the element of surprise had gone and once again we didn't know what was going on in the admiral's mind but he decided then that we would alter course and go back to Singapore at about 8 o'clock in the evening, about 2000 we altered course to go back to Singapore. The next thing that we knew was in the

24:00 middle of the night we altered course to head into Kuantan which is an east coast port on the east side of Malaya, Malaysia as it is now because there had been a reported landing so we had to go and have a look. So we steamed through the night and appeared at Kuantan in the morning. A destroyer went in to investigate, to see if anything was going on and he sent back the signal saying that all was quiet as a wet Sunday morning or

24:30 something and we then had a look at some barges being towed by a tug and we were sort of in that area off Kuantan. By 10 o'clock we were virtually heading back to Singapore again when we were sighted by Japanese aircraft and then 10 or 10.30 I think it was and the destroyer [HMS] Tenedos

25:00 which was about 150 miles to the south of us I think had been bombed by aircraft. So it was quite clear that there was enemy air in the area and perhaps not too far from us. And 10.30 I think we were sighted and in the first attack, a high level bombing attack came in at about 11 o'clock and that's when in my computer system down below we went into action and started shooting at the enemy and that was the first time.

25:30 **So tell me what your role involved in that sense, like actually what you specifically had to do.**

Well specifically I was the connecting link between a director up top which has sights to look at aircraft and follow it accurately and they transmit their data down to this little mechanical computer and there's a range taker, a

26:00 range finder up there, an optical range finder and he was getting, estimating you know assessing the range of the aircraft. Difficult job and the results of his range taking and the other items produced a plotted line across a plot that was in front of me and I had to align a cursor to that and in aligning that cursor I was doing a forecast of the future position of the

26:30 aircraft and from that we set out a training in horizontal training data and elevation data of the guns and the fuse measurement so that if we fired a round or rounds of ammunition they ideally should go up and burst adjacent to the aircraft. So that was what I was engaged during that bombing raid.

Was it just you?

27:00 I had a team around me. I think there were about eight people there all together and they were winding various handles, doing various things as part of this computer.

Was that successful attacking the planes?

We didn't shoot any aircraft down as I recall in that first attack. For a couple of reasons. A - I think they might have been a bit high for our old

27:30 guns and B - the ship's course was altered towards the enemy attacking which of course if you've got the ship going towards the aircraft you can't, your guns on the side of the ship won't bare on the aircraft so we altered course towards and that masked the starboard guns and we altered back to port a bit and we masked the port guns. So as I've said you know altered

28:00 to starboard and masked the guns in the port, 40 love to the Japanese. They had a very good run of high level bombing and a very accurate drop and they hit us at midship, well midship is aft – the after funnel and between the funnel and the main [UNCLEAR] and the bomb penetrated the upper deck and burst on the armoured deck below and I think we had some casualties

28:30 and a couple killed at that time but the ship otherwise wasn't affected.

Could you hear and feel the bomb hit?

I don't recall that. No I don't think we did actually because there was no sort of, I think they were 250 pound bombs not terribly large, large enough of course but no I didn't, I don't think I recall feeling any effect of that.

29:00 **How long before the next wave of attacks and they were low level of attacks next weren't they?**

Well the next attacks, I think this is all pretty well documented on minutes and so on but the next attacks came in from torpedo carrying aircraft and they attacked the Prince of Wales and got some hits. Now I haven't got the

29:30 accurate data in my head at the moment but in that same attack there were –

30:03 **Okay so we've had the low level attacks, sorry high level attack.**

First high level attack and that was followed by a torpedo attack after which, which concentrated on the Prince of Wales and hit Prince of Wales and our captain managed to by high professionalism dodge the tracks of

30:30 some 19 torpedoes. I think that was in the first torpedo attack and so we came out of it unscathed and then later on and eventually there was another attack after that in which I think we might have been hit once. But then the final attack came at about 12.20 and eventually, no we hadn't been hit before with a torpedo, eventually at between 12.20 and 12.25 we were hit

31:00 by I think five torpedoes because the concentration was such that the captain just could not evade them and manoeuvre away from their tracks and so five torpedo hits and the dear old lady sealed her fate. The captain I think at 12.25 ordered abandon ship and as many people as possible got out in an orderly pretty tense sort of way. People got up ladders and out and then at

31:30 12.33 only eight minutes afterwards the ship sank. She rolled over and sank. A heavy listing to port while people were trying to get out didn't help the cause and so there's not much time for people to get out and you think of 1300 in the ship and I think many of the boiler room and engine room crew would have been killed by the torpedo hits would have opened

32:00 up the ship's side and they would have been destroyed by those torpedo hits.

Did you feel them from where you were?

Did I?

You must have felt the –

Oh you could feel the jar of the ship being hit yes. It wasn't a great shake but it was a good push.

Did you think that the ship was sinking when that happened?

32:30 Funnily enough you could feel the ship sinking. It was rather like standing in a boat, a small boat with the plug out and the water coming in. You know that you haven't got a stable platform, it's moving, you can feel it going down. Yes we could feel the ship, definitely there was a downward trend so to speak and so then we managed to evacuate the compartment, up

33:00 ladders and so on and I got up to a mess deck where what people describe as portholes in the ship's side were open, we call them scuttles but modern parlance is portholes I think, and one got out through the porthole and slid down the ship's side into the water and swam away.

So when you emerged out of, what could you see?

33:30 Well the only thing when I got out of the porthole the only thing I was really keen to see was where was the water level and how far down did I have to slide. You know you had a ship, probably she was over at about 30 degrees at the time, about that and so you had quite a long way to go down into the water but it wasn't too far I suppose. And how to get down there safely, you know just make sure that you were getting down, you skidded

34:00 down the ship's side. I was lucky I still had my shoes on so my feet weren't lacerated by any barnacles. So one got into the water and then swam away from the ship because of the one things you'd read about or hear about that when a ship goes down there's a sort of suction after it you know and many people are sucked down to a degree whereby they can't hold breath any longer and of course they would have been drowned. So

34:30 you managed to, you tended to swim away as quickly as you could as far as you thought necessary but not unduly tiring yourself because there we were in the South China Sea and you couldn't put your foot on the bottom. The sand was a long way down. And fortunately you looked, I looked and there was a destroyer which seemed to be miles away but it probably wasn't terribly far, it might have been half a mile I don't know. So one

35:00 swam determinedly towards the ship, towards the destroyer avoiding oil spill on the surface of the ocean. There was a lot of oil about. There were various bits of debris here and there, Carly floats part of the safety lifesaving equipment there were a few of those around with a lot of people aboard. Other people holding onto bits of debris and so on, all generally

35:30 endeavouring to make towards the destroyer. I went aboard the destroyer [HMS] Electra but the Australian destroyer Vampire was in the team and she picked up a number of people. I think she picked up a number from Repulse including our captain, Captain Tennant and our padre Canon

36:00 Bezant. So then you know those destroyers stayed in the area for some time picking up people and there were a couple small boats operating, motor boats would come off the ships, off Prince of Wales and I don't know whether there might have been one off Repulse. They were going around picking up people who were obviously incapable of making the ship, getting to the destroyer. It is often said that being picked up by a

36:30 destroyer is a great phrase that's used, yes we were sunk and the destroyer picked up survivors and everybody dismisses it. It was great and fine and they went on home. Well being picked up by a destroyer is not quite as easy as that. You swim to the side of the ship. There's probably oil about which is covering you. There are lines, rope lines down the side of the ship and you try to hang onto one of these and get hauled up on board which

37:00 means that it's got to have a loop in it so you can hang onto it or you put it under your shoulders somehow or you scramble up the side in a scrambling net which is a rope thing down the side of the ship or you go up a little ladder up the side of the ship vertically. The ship is moving in the swell. So all this makes it slightly difficult when you're in the water, you're not

37:30 feeling terribly good, actually to get yourself up on board. So being picked up by a destroyer isn't one of those clear cut things where you're lifted out of the water so to speak. I mean other people being picked up around the oceans in the war and suffered much more than we did. Some were in icy waters of the North Atlantic. It's not a good feeling.

Equally so getting off the ship doesn't sound like it was a very easy

38:00 **thing to do and how far down was it to get to the water?**

I can't remember now. I can't remember how far she was over actually.

Was the ship on fire?

No she wasn't no.

38:30 **Just tell me a bit more about what the scene was like on the ocean as you got off. Did you know where your friends were as well?**

No idea, no idea. You talked to various people in the water and when I say talk it wasn't exactly a long conversation but when people were moving towards the destroyer they were feeling good and they weren't feeling so

39:00 good. One of the main things of course was to avoid getting under oil slick and that is one of the dreadful things ingesting oil either into your lungs or into your belly. To a large degree if you do that then of course you can kill

39:30 yourself and it immobilises people if they have a little so the risk of not surviving increases so to speak.

However, I think fortunately the sea was calm. There was a bit of movement. So from the swimming point of view it was relatively easy and having been taught how to swim, I could swim, it

40:00 was a bonus. Fellows with life jackets who didn't swim of course had more difficulty. Psychologically they would wonder whether they were going to float and so on. But I think you get a picture or one gets a picture, I was trying to find in the reference, of the scene when you get aboard a destroyer what does the ocean look like. And it looks like as though you say

40:30 the ocean looks dirty because there's a lot of stuff floating around, bits and pieces, wood, Carly floats, people, people in groups hanging onto something that's keeping them afloat. Some in oil, some covered in oil, some terribly badly burnt in the water alongside the ship I remember and one chap virtually had flesh hanging off him he was so bad and how do you get that this big chap, I don't know who he was, how do you get him up and the

41:00 only way really is to put the rope under his arms and shoulders and haul him and he was really beyond I think feeling that although he must have been in a desperate degree of pain it was the only way to get him on board. I've no idea whether he survived or not but others were quite badly burned as well one way or another. One of the chaps on board was a Midshipman Banbridge. He had been wounded with shrapnel in the stomach and

41:30 unfortunately he subsequently died two days later in Singapore. He'd been on the upper deck exposed to the machine-gunning by the Japanese aircraft because they all machine-gunned the upper deck of both ships when they

41:47 flew over them.

Tape 5

00:26 **Okay Guy I was interested in that you were saying that some men couldn't swim. Did you actually have training for evacuating a sinking ship? Did you have a drill that was practised?**

Sort of yes and no. On the matter of swimming one of the basics at college, Naval College was swimming and fortunately some people were able to swim before they went there and some learnt to swim when they were there. But to us it has always been a prerequisite if you were going to

01:00 sea to be able to swim but it was some time actually before it became mandatory so to speak that if you go to sea you have to swim and there were a number of people, it wasn't part of the Royal Navy training at that time. We were lucky as cadets but I think that we also probably sent

01:30 sailors to sea in those early days who couldn't swim because it wasn't mandatory. In our navy it became so later. So yes you found people and I think they worked on the principle everybody will have a life jacket so they can float anyway. It's not quite as easy as that because if you're I think psychologically stressed and you're worrying about putting on your life

02:00 jacket to save your life it's not an easy business from where you are to getting into the water with your life jacket afloat. You know there are complications because sinking ships are not always upright and don't always go down quietly etc., etc., so it's not an easy situation. But we were lucky. We had been trained to swim and I could swim. It was a plus.

And in terms of actually any kind of drills, when you were doing

02:30 **training on the ship were there any actual drills for abandon ship?**

For the man overboard drills, I'm sorry abandon ship drills actually no not really but it was all expected to happen in an orderly fashion which it did on Repulse. Very orderly fashion moving quietly from where they were to get to the upper deck to get out of the ship and so on. I think it's possible that the speed which the old ship went down in just eight minutes from the first torpedo to the fifth torpedo attack and then abandon ship eight minutes

03:00 after that she sank some people might have been moving slower than they could have and didn't really actually get to the opening so to speak in time because of course you could imagine with the ship listing to port and therefore the only openings are going to be on the starboard side of the ship, the right hand side, or going to the upper deck. Well it's very

03:30 complicated. If you could think about trying to get out on a deck which is tilting and tilting and tilting and you can't climb up to get out as I did, I was lucky, and if you go up further then you're going through ladders and so on and you're coming into the superstructure rather than getting out of the ship and the more you go into the superstructure as she rolls the more

04:00 you are trapped. So between a rock and a hard place really. But there's no sort of set routine. People from the lower quarters and the turrets would have been brought up earlier on because they weren't shooting and you don't keep people down below if you don't have to have them down there. If we'd been

on a service action then all the magazine and shell rooms crew would have been down below but they weren't required so they would have been up somewhere.

And were there still Japanese planes coming overhead when you were actually getting off the ship?

04:30 Not that I recall. I wasn't actually looking up. I was tending to be looking down towards the water so to speak. I don't think so. I think maybe one or two might have flown over the ship as we sank. We sank at 12.33 and it was some 45 minutes later that the Prince of Wales sank. I think after we sank I think she had another attack so there would have been aircraft over

05:00 Prince of Wales but I personally don't recall seeing them. I was interested in survival.

What could you hear? I mean does the ship make a noise going down?

I don't recall really. I remember turning back to see her roll over and then slide stern first down into the ooze. I don't remember. I don't think, if I

05:30 had been close I'm sure there were noises internally in the ship. I'm not sure but I would think so. No I can't remember hearing anything.

Did you see what happened to the other Australians? Did you see Bob Davies go down?

I didn't no. Bob is recorded as going down. A number of people including the captain wrote about him staying at his Oerlikon gun, strapped into it

06:00 still firing as the ship, as he was submerged rather like Able Seaman Sheehan aboard the Armidale and he was mentioned in despatches for that courage and bravery. I personally didn't see him no. Because where I got out of the ship it was up forward and he was down, quite some distance down towards the Y turret, the third turret down in the main mast area. A

06:30 number of people obviously did see him because he was positively reported as taking that action.

And I read that Peter Gyllies did a swan dive off the ship.

Peter apparently did a swan dive off the air defence position up top. Peter loved diving. He was a good swimmer and he loved diving and so he did this thing off the top. I didn't see him do it because you see I got out the

07:00 starboard side and the ship was heeled to port like this. I was swimming away this side and Peter up here on the top would have dived into the port side, over the port side of the ship.

So you were picked up by the Electra. I mean can you describe to us what kind of scenes were on board as you are sort of hauled up onto the deck of the ship?

07:30 Lots of people milling about. The ship's crew of the Electra of course were doing their damnedest to get as many people out of the water as quickly as possible and the people they got out and coming on board were wet and covered in oil so the decks were slippery and oil covered. You had wounded people around and it was, it was a pretty untidy scene but there was a lot of help being given to a lot of people who needed help. I

08:00 think I was offered a cigarette when I got aboard but being a non smoker I said no thanks a drink of water or something. Yes I mean the ship's company of Electra couldn't do enough for our survivors. Herded them down below and got them cleaned up as quickly as possible and showers and I think they probably let off some clothes or something to wrap themselves in. Some people came aboard with virtually nothing. So they

08:30 were tremendous, absolutely tremendous and of course after searching around the area for quite a while, I'm not sure how long probably towards 12.30 1 o'clock or about three hours afterwards when Electra virtually had as many aboard as she could handle and there really weren't any more to pick up. I mean there were bodies floating around in the ocean sort of face

09:00 down and that sort of dreadful scene you know in oil and face down and they'd gone. So you couldn't pick up everything and then we headed back into Singapore. Electra and Vampire, I think Express had already gone, oh no wait a minute, I can't remember.

And you're 18. So this is really the first full on, you were saying before the war was coming closer with these sort of close shaves but I mean

09:30 **this is really full on action. I mean do you remember having any thoughts about that?**

What in relation to my age?

Just in terms of you know this was really it. You're really in the thick of it.

10:00 I don't think I did too much of an analysis after we had got back to Singapore. I think one would have to admit even hindsight that one would have been in some state of shock although of course we didn't think of it that way. We got back to Singapore just after midnight and we were landed. We had nothing

other than what we stood up in and we went into the barracks there and I think we were given a bit of a mattress and a

10:30 pillow and we probably showered and changed into something and just went to sleep because it had been a long day. And then got up the following morning and we went along to the clothing store so to speak. We were given a green suitcase, the standard green suitcase and two or three pairs of shorts and shirts and white shoes and stockings and maybe

11:00 we had a cap, I can't remember. By the time that had finished in the morning the message came through that we were to join the cruiser Exeter which was alongside the naval base and we were pushed off out of Singapore. That was the direction of our captain, Captain Tennant. And I've often said I think he probably saved many lives, many of our lives. Of course what I'm saying getting us out of Singapore not only the four

11:30 Australian survivors but all the RN [Royal Navy] midshipmen who survived from Repulse and the RN midshipmen who survived from Prince of Wales. We were all grouped together and we all went aboard Exeter and she sailed in the evening and we went out south of Singapore I think through Banka Strait, Sunder Strait and then across to Colombo. Some of the chaps,

12:00 some of the Royal Navy fellows stayed aboard Exeter and of course it subsequently sank in the Battle of the Java Sea. Some of them went to destroyers like well the Electra and the Express, stayed out there and some of them went to each of those ships and also to [HMS] Jupiter another one and possibly some other destroyers and they were sunk also of course in the Battle of the Java Sea, the Battle of Sunder Strait so they got a second dose.

12:30 **Just before we leave the Repulse we're going to talk a little bit about the fact that there was no air support and your perceptions of that at the time.**

Well we were all pretty unhappy at the time that there hadn't been any air support for us. I think our anticipation of the consequences of having no support was less than our worry when the event had happened because then we knew about it. We knew that won't have an aircraft carrier. I don't

13:00 think at the time we sailed that we actually knew at our level that there wouldn't be any fighter protection for the ships but we certainly knew when the action under way that there was nobody helping us. One of the problems about the whole event was that Admiral Phillips had his own sort of personal doctrine so to speak that he wasn't going to break radio silence. So when we had turned back from the sortie out towards the Japanese,

13:30 we'd been found out and were heading back they knew where we were but he didn't tell Singapore that we were heading back nor did he tell headquarters that we turned into Kuantan to have a look. So when we were sunk off Kuantan the first message that Singapore headquarters actually knew that things were going wrong was when Captain Tennant in Repulse at about 11.55 or something after about the second attack they signalled

14:00 enemy aircraft attack and gave our position. That was the first time that they knew about it and so these fellows didn't, that didn't get through to the airfields and so on till later. So hence they arrived out too late and that was part of the deal. Not having air power to cover ships at sea which are under the envelope of an enemy capability is not good. You can lose lots

14:30 of ships as the Mediterranean fleet found out in 1941 in the Greece and Crete campaign. The Germans had superiority in the air and the RN didn't and they lost a lot of ships, a lot of merchant ships and a lot of cruisers and destroyers. So air power at sea is one of those key factors for naval forces to have and if you haven't got it then you're very limited in what you can do. They can tell you to go and do something but if you don't have it the

15:00 consequences may be terrible you know you can lose ships and people and that what was we did there and that thought of the value of air power covering naval forces never left me throughout the rest of my career and hasn't left me in my retirement and I'm extremely worried now that Australia is in a situation and has been now since the carrier Melbourne

15:30 paid off in 1983 that we are in a position where we have to send ships out in harms way so to speak without proper air support and of course that's not the only role that naval air power does. It also covers the army when it's ashore and the army might feel very naked one of these days when it's on an op [operation] and it doesn't have something to cover them. The air force is a different strategic unit and it can't go and be mobile where the navy goes.

16:00 There's a long argument about it but air power at sea is something which I don't think this country can overlook any more.

We'll talk a bit more about that later on. Actually, the planes did arrive at the very end of the action didn't they?

They did rather yes. They arrived and flew around and then realised there was nothing they could do because all the enemy had gone home and so

16:30 they all flew back to base as well. In a way recent records indicate the Japanese left because all their

aircraft were running out of fuel. They had been on a long road down from Saigon area looking for us and then there were the attacks and then they had to get home again. Some apparently had to go up to Kota Baharu in North Malaya and refuel before they could get back across to Saigon.

17:00 **So you get back to Singapore, get re-kitted out. I mean how did you feel about, what was it like going back onto a ship having just been one that sunk? I mean did you feel confident doing it?**

17:30 Oh yes in Exeter yes. I think we were fine. We were comfortable. I don't suppose one can analyse one's feelings. I can't really remember but I don't think, I wasn't in a state of being scared going aboard Exeter to go back to Colombo.

What was the procedure? Was there a procedure? Did anyone come and talk to you about what had happened? Did the captain talk to you about what had happened because he was there?

18:00 I don't think he had time poor fellow. He had so many things to do and reports to write because he was the only captain who survived. Admiral Captain Leach went down with Prince of Wales so Captain Tennant was the senior surviving officer so he had to look to a number of things. I don't think he personally came and talked to the midshipmen. Snotties' nurse did. He came and talked to us and said this is what we're doing, sending

18:30 you back in Exeter and so that was the order and you then just went on and went where you were told to go.

And you had a few days off before you went to Revenge?

Yes we got back to Colombo and once again kindly people opened up their houses and spare rooms and accommodated us and we had four days survivors' leave and we weren't exactly pestered by counsellors or

19:00 anything like that in those days because nobody had heard of it. Four days survivors' leave and then we went across Ceylon as it was then called to Trincomalee on the day train journey and joined the battleship Revenge which I think was one year older than Repulse built in 1915 for service in the North Sea and North Atlantic and not for tropical service. And she was

19:30 actually acting as the guard ship for Trinco [Trincomalee] at that time and as a result we were moored around the, moored at the buoy in Trincomalee Harbour for some 7 weeks and then the ship never moved anywhere. So you can imagine that the, no air conditioning and you'd have to say insufficient ventilation and the ambient temperature in the ship was virtually the

20:00 ambient temperature outside you know and the whole thing was a totally uncomfortable situation, unattractive because I think we were more critical in those days but we didn't understand that the ship's company probably didn't feel any better than we did, not the sort of thing that anybody likes to do is sit in a tropical harbour without proper air conditioning or air

20:30 ventilation, doing nothing, going nowhere with no end in sight and we had come from Repulse which had been continuously moving since we joined in March and there we suddenly came to a halt. Everything stopped. We patrolled the harbour of Trincomalee at night with depth charges on the back of a work boat. I think if we had dropped any depth charges we

21:00 would have blown ourselves up as well as any submarine, midget submarines we might have been discouraging from entering the harbour. But it was something to do. We tried to get on with our training but I think our initial enthusiasm had waned somewhat which is a pity in hindsight. We went ashore and played hockey. We carried on with our training routine but I don't think we were, yes we had lost our enthusiasm

21:30 somehow which was probably part of shock or something but nevertheless we were there and that was it and there was no alternative so get on with it. We eventually left Trincomalee, this of course must be in February I suppose – towards the end of February '42 and went back and joined up

22:00 with other battleships in what was forming was the Eastern Fleet under Admiral Somerville and we tended to cruise around the Indian ocean fuelling at Adu Atoll and likewise unattractive places and not doing much and then eventually we moved back to being based at Mombasa in Kenya

22:30 in Kilindini, the harbour there. Once again I don't think we were madly enthusiastic. Somehow or other the feeling in the ship I think got to us after a while. I was asked if I would like to go back to my high angle computer in Revenge. I said no thanks very much I'd like to stop up, stay up top this time which I did. They were good. They let me up there but

23:00 there was no sort of get up and go in the ship. Everything was flat. I think in modern day analysis morale was rock bottom. There didn't seem to be anybody to inspire anybody in the matter of leadership and enthusiasm and getting a job. But the dear old ship was never really meant to cruise around the tropical oceans. So it was just damned uncomfortable and a

23:30 dreadful situation for all on board. Looking back on one's career I can say it's from mid December and I

think we left probably by the end of May early June to go back to England for training ashore. It was the most unhappy period I ever had in my 43 years but as it was only about five or six months that's not too bad I suppose.

24:00 **So it was quite a contrast to Repulse?**

Total, total contrast from the top right through. It was a total contrast which was a pity but that's the way things are you know. Not every football team is the same as the other.

Was that partly to do with the captain the way the ship was commanded? I mean did you notice a big difference in that?

24:30 Well he was a totally different chap from Tennant and I guess he wasn't the leader that Tennant was. He was promoted to vice admiral later I understand but he just wasn't a leader. He wasn't held in the same respect as Tennant was. On the other hand I have to say that the environment in which he had ship and conditions in which he was serving were much more difficult than Captain Tennant had in Repulse where he was out doing

25:00 things. So the captain of Revenge had a problem you know how to keep things going when nothing was happening.

And how do you do that do you think?

Looking back on that lot I'm not sure how you would have done it but I haven't had the experience since of inactivity and doing nothing in a

25:30 conflict situation. So it wasn't a happy time but we made the most of it. We were terribly lucky as I mentioned earlier when we were in Mombasa the Hodges were still there, the district commissioner and his wife and so when we came back on Revenge we had their house afternoon tea type thing as a retreat. So we went up there unashamedly in the afternoon to

26:00 just get out of this environment. You see there was no way you could sleep, slinging your hammock in a battleship where there isn't any air conditioning you're wrapping yourself in heat. So you spread your hammock on the steel deck on a mattress and you'd sleep on the steel deck. Nothing else. Tried to get on the upper deck of course and depending on the weather you might make the evening or get a little wet when the rain comes.

26:32 **Did men get sick? Were there any health problems on the ship?**

Oh yes, yes sure. I wasn't so conscious of the health problems in Revenge because I don't think I knew enough about what was going on in the ship's company. But certainly later when we come to Shropshire I'll talk about health matters there.

27:00 **Let's move on from the Revenge. When you finished in service there what was the next port of call for you?**

We then went back to England in a merchant ship. We went down from Mombasa to Durban and then we joined another ship and we went back to England. A number of people coming back from India sort of refugee

27:30 civilians decided to go home. We went back. I think we got back to, I can't remember now Southampton or somewhere but then of course we went ashore into Royal Navy establishments to do a range of courses in gunnery, anti-submarine, torpedoes, signalling and so on, communications and that lasted from, I should think it must have lasted from July through

28:00 'til just before Christmas, through to December '42.

Were you still a midshipman at this stage?

No I had reached the dizzy heights of being an acting sublieutenant. When we finished our midshipmen's exams in Mombasa in May/June we were then promoted to acting sublieutenant.

What did you have to do in the midshipman's exam? What did the midshipman's exam consist of?

28:30 Oh they ranged through a whole raft of subjects like gunnery and ship knowledge and seamanship and navigation and signals and so on, things that we had been developing in the ship knowledge and so on. There's a special midshipman's board, examination board and we went through that and you either get a first class pass or a second class pass. I think mine were all seconds but having that passed that and completed your midshipman's training you were then promoted to acting sublieutenant.

29:00 Held that for the six months right through until we finished that. Then after that in England I was told that I would be going to Shropshire in the middle of the year, what did I want to do in the meantime. So I said I would like to go to the destroyer and mainly because you have to get something a watch keeping certificate which says that you are capable of

29:30 keeping watch on the bridge at sea and certain things and so on. And so I reckoned that about five months would enable me to get one of those and so I went to a destroyer Vivian, HMS Vivian which was

very old, V & W class destroyer like Vampire group and we were based in the Rosyth Escort Force in Rosyth in the Firth of Forth and we operated between there and

30:00 Sheerness which is at the mouth of the Thames so to speak and we ran up and down the coastal convoys. There was quite a lot of coastal shipping going up and down and had to be protected from e-boats and from air attack and so on and that was our job. It was a fascinating five months because of course initially starting off in January the North Sea gets rough,

30:30 cold, very unattractive little bit of ocean and then of course going through to April/May you get a bit of spring sunshine and the world becomes a bit of an improvement. I did that for five months. It was interesting. Normally the convoys would come up in two lines of ships astern of us stretching over a matter of miles astern and you were required as the boss of the escort group to make sure that these ships peeled off and went into

31:00 the east coast ports of England where they should. Some of the old skippers didn't agree with being ordered around by the navy and when we told them they had to come on to Scarborough or Whitby or somewhere and the old fellow would say I'm going up the 'umber, that's the Humber River and no matter what you said you would have had to shoot him to stop him going into the Humber. That was it. Great people because there they were with their little coastal puffers going up and down wide open to

31:30 air attack if it had come across as it did occasionally and also open to e-boats if they were to come across. Theirs was less at that time but great seaman you know those fellows.

So what was your experience in the attacks?

I didn't have any really. I think we had one air attack in the early morning

32:00 but that didn't cause any damage or anything. So there were no E-boats [enemy boats] came out from the French coast so it was a relatively quiet time perhaps except for the weather which was variable to a degree.

And as a sublieutenant or acting, you were acting sublieutenant?

When I joined Vivian I was a sublieutenant yes.

32:30 **So how was your role different then? What sort of responsibilities did you have then?**

I was basically a watchkeeping officer on the bridge and I was keeping watch in rotation of one on, four hours on and eight hours off. That was basically my role in that ship and that was what I was there for. You familiarise yourself with everything else going on and I was there for that purpose and that's what I applied to. I was fortunate I was granted the

33:00 certificate before I left the ship so when I joined the cruiser Shropshire I became a watch keeping officer on the bridge at sea and that was really what I wanted.

The Shropshire, so this had been given to the Australian navy effectively by the Royal Navy is that right?

Yes it had. We lost the Canberra up at Sabo Island in August '42 and to

33:30 replace it Britain had agreed to sell or give us the Shropshire but we decided to keep the name because old sort of sea custom or superstition that changing the name of ships is not necessarily a good thing so we stuck to the cruiser the name Shropshire which I think the county of Shropshire were delighted because they all had an affiliation back in the home

34:00 counties, Norfolk, Dorsetshire and so on and it's interesting we feel the members of the ship's company, ex members now, always feel that Shropshire's part in Australian naval history from mid '43 to the end of '45 never really gets a mention because everyone sees the Shropshire, oh it must be RN, automatic. However there are many good sailors still living

34:30 around the country who would tell you otherwise.

Did it have an entirely Australian ship's company or was it still a mixture?

We had some Royal Navy fellows on board. Basically the few, not many but mainly Australian. We had the survivors from the Canberra. They were shipped across overseas and then other fellows were drafted to make up the total crew. I think we started off with probably about 900 on board

35:00 over there and we eventually ended up with over a thousand when we were operating up north. So we had quite an experienced crew basically. Some were new but some were hardened from battle having been sunk once on the Canberra and others had come from other jobs around and about, other ships, some were new to sea and so on. So we had a great group of

35:30 experience in the ship's company and that proved of so much value later on as we developed and trained and they just got better and better.

So this was actually the first time you had been on an Australian ship? How was that different?

I beg your pardon?

How was that different having more Australians?

Oh just different attitudes, different ways of doing things. You're moving

36:00 amongst people who are speaking the language the same way. There was an easier relationship I think. It's rather like, rather like, I'm trying to think of an analogy, it was just easier being aboard that's all. Not that the

36:30 other was difficult but it was just back to Oz. That was it.

Who were the officers you dealt with most on this ship?

Well our captain, first captain of Shropshire was Captain Collins, John Collins. He had been captain of the Sydney when she sank the Bartolomeo Colleni in the Mediterranean and achieved a great distinction and he was quite a character and of course being a watch keeper on the bridge you

37:00 saw the captain quite often and you know you talked to him and so on. Navigating Officer Gelattley? He was a very quiet retiring sort of cove [man], didn't say much but was an expert navigator. And the commander of the ship at the time was Commander David Harries who later became Admiral Harries, Rear Admiral Harries. He was a very shy retiring chap but a first class

37:30 brain, absolutely first class brain and a great bloke. He really always had the interest of the ship's company at heart although he never gave any indication that he did you know so people tend to look at him as though he was a stranger sometimes not required around but in actual fact he was full mottle and I served with him later in the Korean War and he was

38:00 marvellous as a captain. The other officers throughout the ship, well there were some of my chums aboard and some were taking passage back to Australia. When we got back to Fremantle and Commander Harries as he was then said Griffiths you're staying aboard Shropshire because you want to get off to a destroyer, it's much more fun you know. So that was that.

38:30 But our gunnery officer was one Lieutenant Commander Warwick Bracegirdle. Great character and he stayed with us right through almost to the end of the war. He stayed with us until I think after Lingayen Gulf in January '45 and he welded the gunnery team together very well and he had

39:00 some experts with him you know experienced chiefs and POs [Petty Officers] and so on. It was quite interesting. We escorted a convoy south from, after we did our trials and shakedown in Scapa Flow in the north of Scotland, a God forsaken place. And then we escorted a convoy down as far as Cape Town I think it was and stopped off and then across to Fremantle and Sydney. So

39:30 returning home we then had to do some maintenance before we were to go north and I think we went north in about November '43. But even during that time the ship was slowly welding itself together as a team and then we were deployed north, went up in November, November '43 to Milne Bay and

40:00 formed Task Force 74 with the crews of Australia which was the flagship for the RAN group, cruiser Australia and Shropshire, two destroyers [HMAS] Warramunga and [HMAS] Arunta and three American cruisers [USS] Boise, [USS] Phoenix and [USS] Nashville and American destroyers and we virtually operated as that task group, 74 right through, all the way through to the south west Pacific right up to the Philippines.

Tape 6

00:30 **So Guy we'll just go back a little bit. You were talking about the shelling of the aeroplanes and you would try and attempt to drop the shells beside the plane is the way you described it. I was wondering why beside and not on.**

01:00 Oh, for 'beside', read on, in, over, under, near, as close as possible to you know. When I say beside the aircraft I meant you know so that it was virtually in the aircraft. I mean ideally of course you wanted to hit every time but because the fuse on the shell exploded the shell you had a lethal area which wasn't just the size of the 4 inch shell you know it was larger so you could put a shell alongside an aircraft and still damage it with the

01:30 shrapnel from the shell without actually the shell hitting the aircraft. The shell didn't have to hit the aircraft to knock it down. So I used the word 'beside' quite loosely. You weren't always trying to put it alongside the aircraft, you were trying to get it as close to that aircraft and if it hit the aircraft and exploded so much the better.

02:08 **Can you just take us through the procedure of gunning, you know aiming your guns and firing a shell at an aircraft on the boat?**

Yes we'll just run through a three months gunnery course in a couple of

02:30 minutes. Firstly you're looking out from your ship to find out where the aircraft is coming, I'm going back to '41. You're scanning the sky with binoculars to see where the aircraft are coming from. So you sight a group of aircraft coming in with your binoculars on what was known as a lookout sighter or something. You then transmit that bearing and angle of sight on

03:00 that group of aircraft to a director at the top of the foremast, over the fighting top. An aircraft, a director then goes around and it looks for those aircraft and it locks on. You have a layer which is following them this way and a trainer following them this way and so they are then locked on that group of aircraft coming in to attack. While they're doing that the range taker starts taking ranges of the aircraft, how far away, optical range finder

03:30 or later of course with radar. Those, the elevation and the training and the range go down to that computer I was talking about, mechanical computer. Into that mechanical computer was also fed the ship's movement, the ship's course, true course from north and the speed and any alterations to course. And so you're getting a change of range, a change of bearing and a

04:00 change, that's not necessarily of height but of elevation. You put all this together, this is very brief, put it all together in this little box. From the little box you get out to the gun outside on deck a position to train the gun to followed pointers on a dial you know. You'll have your gun pointer and you have the pointer coming in from the computer. You line those two up. That means your guns are trained around in a certain way. The layer does

04:30 the same thing here, it lays the guns, lays the gun, elevates or depresses the gun to align this to. So you've got the gun laid and trained.

Is there a man involved –

There is a man – the elevation and the training number and the director so

05:00 there are two there. You've got a director officer who's in charge of this. You've got a range taker so that's at least three up there. Down in the computer section we had about eight I think it was and then you relay the two things, the training and the elevation by electrical system and lined up the pointers and that trained your gun in a certain direction and elevated a

05:30 certain way to angle above the horizontal. And the third thing you fed out to them into a machine was a fuse setting to wind a fuse on the shell so that when the gun had fired that shell after travelling the anticipated distance or your estimated distance to the aircraft would then explode. Right, so you had gun's crew in addition to the loading and the fusing and the provision of ammunition and so on.

So each one of those fuses would be set differently?

06:00 Each one is set differently yes. The old thing was into the machine and then into the breach of the gun.

I'm fascinated by this computer. Eight men in this room. How deep are they into the ship?

Oh it was round about, I think about three decks down, four decks down from the top deck, about three decks down from the main deck. That

06:30 sounds confusing but the top deck is the one which is up there and the main deck was the one which ran right through the ship and it was about three decks down below that.

The top deck is the one where you are exposed to the air?

It depends on the construction of the ship. And my computer room was down in the place called B space which was positioned

07:00 if I recall rightly just between the trunk of B turret and A turret down there.

And you were in charge of the computer room?

Yes.

And so how would the chain of command work within the computer room itself?

Well it was a case of people automatically had things to do and I was

07:30 relaying words from the director, the control officer up top through to the guns as necessary and saying you know when to open fire and so on. So chain of command from the director through me to the guns but I wasn't necessarily talking directly to the guns. I was talking to the director and then one of my numbers, one of these crew would be talking from the

08:00 computer room to the guns. But a lot of it was done by signals and so on. Sort of open fire and you press pushes and so on like that.

Give us some details there. Signals as in colour stops or –

Sound signals and also there were, I can't remember what we had actually,

08:30 it was a long time ago. If you pass the signal to open fire then it was the fellow with the director who pulled the trigger to fire the gun so you had to make sure that at all times the gun was firing it was actually on the aircraft. If they lost the aircraft for any reason or other then you would have to stop firing because your solution was no good. But it's a very old system and of course antiquated compared to what it is now. There was no radar, it

09:00 was all visual and it was slow and it didn't necessarily solve the problem that being the relative velocity problem of the ship moving and the aircraft moving. It didn't necessarily solve that as accurately as one wanted. Very old, old stuff. I mean it's all done on a chip these days.

09:30 **When you say sounds, there were different cues were there, different forms of sounds to instruct people?**

No. We used to on a surface armament, let me digress a minute. On the surface armament of the ship and their big computer when the solution was correct and everything was ready and the turrets were all ready and loaded

10:00 to fire then the, you'd press the fire gong and it would go 'ding ding' and that 'ding ding' sounded in the director and that meant to the director layer up there who was keeping his crosswire on the target when he was accurate on the target then he pressed his trigger. He knew that all his guns were ready just by that sound 'ding ding' and so on. So those were very simple

10:30 you know uncomplicated signals so to speak.

There is a charm to it almost.

Oh yes, it's almost sedate.

But obviously in the moment the energy would have been very intense.

Oh absolutely, absolutely especially on the people following a target, an air

11:00 target or a surface target requires a great focus, concentration to make sure that you're following it accurately. You see following an aircraft in the sky it's not just easy like picking up a pair of binoculars and doing that. In those days they had crosswire in their single binoculars and they had to centre the crosswire on the aircraft. So these two had to work in

11:30 coordination. So that was another source of error but of course when it was introduced it was a big advance going back to the 20s, 30s.

From the air to the sea, you talked about zigzagging torpedoes and initially the captain zigzagged away from eight. I'm intrigued as to

12:00 **how you would do that because obviously a torpedo would be travelling at a much greater speed than the ship itself.**

Well Captain Tennant is alleged to have dodged 19 on I think that second attack and what he did, I've got his report somewhere, he waited until he saw the aircraft drop their torpedo which was invariably at a range of about 2000 yards 2000 metres so to speak maybe 3 and when he saw them drop it

12:30 he then put his rudder over hard if they were coming in on a starboard bow he put his rudder over full rudder to starboard to steer, to parallel the tracks. Say the tracks were coming this way he'd turn around to comb the tracks as we used to say. There was a great deal of skill in judging the right moment and he was skilful. He did well. Likewise of course when

13:00 people were being dive bombed in the Mediterranean a captain of a destroyer would be sitting, perhaps sitting in a deckchair laying back on the bridge with his binoculars looking into the sky, waiting for the dive bomber coming down from aft you know watching until he saw the bomb released, starboard 35 and of course then the error would creep in

13:30 hopefully and the bomb would land where they had been or where they might have been. And that I mean were the days when they were fighting tooth and nail in the Mediterranean. That was Captain Howden in the Hobart was badly bombed out of Singapore after we had been sunk. He was up there in January I think, January '42. He was lying down on his bridge gazing at the sky watching these fellows, bomb released, starboard

14:00 35, port 35 and just to manoeuvre the ship out of that direct line that was estimated by the pilot at the time and he didn't get his ship damaged. I mean many survived that way.

And that's primarily instinct operating now I take it?

Oh yes but of course they're watching the bomb drop and when they could see the bomb leave the aircraft and then they would alter the course of the

14:30 ship so the bomb would miss.

You talked about Captain Tennant's report – the notion of a black box or a record for the ship.

Was there someone actually keeping a record of a battle in the course of a battle?

15:00 Yes you had a sort of an action diary which we will come to later in Shropshire mainly because it survived but there used to be a diary and invariably a midshipman on the bridge making a diary of all alterations of course and activities so to speak that occurred. I can't positively recall that we had one in Repulse. We could well have had one in Repulse but of course like everything else it went down with the ship. In Shropshire I

15:30 think the diary survived. It's in archives kept by Midshipman Francis.

Just on the sinking of the Repulse you described looking out once you

16:00 **got on board the Electra, looking out over the sea and seeing the dead bodies. Obviously you had to leave some of them but what is the policy? Is it considered an honourable seaman's death if he is left in the sea or do you attempt to collect as many of the bodies as you can?**

16:30 It's a fairly hypothetical question because in the days that I'm talking about there was a keenness to, I don't know what the policy was then, no idea but I would say there was a keenness to pick up all those living and I think the destroyer was actually full to dangerous stability problem and so therefore the more time you spent round picking up the dead people the more you were exposing your ship to possible submarine attack because of the

17:00 Japanese submarines more likely and so it was a case of getting aboard everybody who was living and get them back to Singapore. No I don't know what their policy was. You see I don't think there was anything hard and fast about it. I'm going back to Bismarck when she was sunk. Some 800 people you know ship's company, officers and sailors got out of the Bismarck into the water out of about 2000. The cruiser Dorsetshire went

17:30 within that group to pick up survivors. Now after they achieved I think about 150 on board Dorsetshire some lookout said periscope and brought an alarm that there might be a submarine in the vicinity. So the captain of the Dorsetshire just said full ahead both engines and left the other 650 in

18:00 the water. He would never have thought about it. I mean I'm sorry he might well have thought about it but there was nothing he could do. Von Müllenheim-Reschberg's book deals with this and he actually, the Dorsetshire captain said some words to the effect you know they are there but the ship is my responsibility and all aboard and so on. So it depends on the situation. I

18:30 mean if somebody has been sunk and somebody is picking some up you're obviously in or assume to be in a conflict area so if you have another threat to your ship you'll be pretty quick as you can to get moving and get out of it. So what the present day policy is I haven't a clue.

19:02 **You talk about once you get to Singapore Captain Tennant then decides that you must board another ship and get out of Singapore. Was he directly responsible for his crew in that regard in terms of determining where everyone would go? Does he have to seek advice**

19:30 **from more senior members within the navy or**

I would say at a rough guess that was Tennant's decision and that was that. I don't think he would have appealed to a local admiral to do that. He would have made a decision. As he said the midshipmen must leave here and get on with their training. That will be useful later on sort of thing. Obviously we couldn't continue training in Singapore and the means, we

20:00 were lucky I think that Exeter was alongside and due to sail. We were lucky that she left at that time. But if we had been left in Singapore sort of milling around doing odd things like driving somebody's motor car or something like that we could have ended up in a prisoner of war camp and done nothing and not really contributed to the Singapore problem.

20:30 Because I was asked the other day you know when did Singapore fall, what was the time when Singapore actually really was beyond hope and I said well I think not to put too fine a point on it the moment the Japanese landed at Kota Baharu on the morning of the 8th December Singapore had basically fallen because there wasn't the tactical forces on the ground or air support or naval support to combat the Japanese forces available to take the

21:00 peninsula. But in this instance I'm sure that it was Tennant's decision. Mind you I have no proof of that but that's the sort of chap he was.

Just jumping forward a little bit now to the Shropshire and we were talking before about you eventually end up in Sydney three years later.

21:30 **Did you know prior to that landing in Sydney, obviously you would have been in touch with your family to let them know you were okay, how much distance was there between, in time between the sinking of the Repulse and you making contact with your family?**

I can't recall whether we, I don't think we wrote letters in Singapore because the night and the day were too busy what was left of the night and

22:00 the day too busy getting kitted and moving around. I think we probably wrote our first letters to the family from Colombo when we got there and when they received them I wouldn't have a clue because there wasn't any sort of daily pickup of airmail, etc., so I'm not sure whether Mum had got my letter and I didn't really actually talk to her about it. But she would have been informed I'm told by other means that we had survived, that I

22:30 had survived. My mother and father would have been informed.

How regularly would you write home as a midshipmen?

Actually you tended to write home basically when the mail was going ashore so to speak and so sometimes it might be weekly, sometimes it

23:00 might be fortnightly or later on it might be an extension of that depending on where you were and what you hope you had of getting a mail away. I mean we called into somewhere like the Seychelles in Repulse well you wouldn't be able to drop off a letter in the Seychelles in those days and hope that it would get to Australia because there was no tourist resort in the Seychelles in those days and no aircraft flying around. Mail was always a

23:30 problem, always a problem and we ran into a lot of difficulty out in the south west Pacific although we were much closer to home, great difficulties. So it was I think what December '41 we got home in October '43 so very nearly two years after the sinking that I actually met up with my family again and that was three years from the time I had first left home in December '40.

24:00 **How was it?**

What to come back again? It was great. It was really good to see everybody again. I think you know they would have had their worrying moments during that time and I think they had some later but it was really

24:30 good to see them again. Father by this time had sold the vineyard because I think his health had gone and he was doing other things in a quiet fashion so I couldn't go back to the old winery and have a glass of red.

25:18 **Can you tell us what we have here?**

25:20 We have here a photograph of a portion of our term in the last couple of weeks of naval college at the end of 1940 just before graduated. We're out at the firing range at Flinders Naval Depot and we're acting up a bit and obviously we've finished the day's exercises and we're fully relaxed. I'll just point out the personalities. This is me here sitting here. This is Peter Gyllies who was with me in Repulse. Peter is the chap who dived off

26:00 the air defence position, did it with his swallow dive. This is Keith Thompson. Keith was wounded during our time in England at the end of '42 by a hit and run raider, German raider aircraft and he was invalided out of the service. Snoz Tatham, as we used to call him, he was lost at sea from the destroyer during the war. Bruce Dowling here is hiding behind

26:30 the elbow is still alive and kicking. He was badly wounded in the cruiser Australia in Leyte Gulf in October '44 and badly burned from a kamikaze and had to be invalidated out of the service. This chap here is our petty officer gunnery instructor from the Royal Navy at the time. This bloke here is Gregory Thrum. Greg stayed on in the service for a number of years

27:00 and then went out into the communications area with STC [Society of Technical Communications] and so. He's passed away. David Hamer is an absolutely brilliant fellow. He was in Australia at Leyte Gulf and Lingayen Gulf and did a courage duty there. He unfortunately passed away just before Christmas or just after Christmas I think it was this year 2002 and he went on and left the navy and went

27:30 into the Senate and as a politician was first class there. Now this chap over here with a cigarette undisguised is Maurice Maloney and he had a very active war as they all did but Maurice has since passed away. That's the little story of that one. It shows us as we were back in the days when we were still 17.

28:49 This photograph goes back to our last year at college and shows our hockey team. Of interest this is myself here, John Austin was the captain and he was of course in Repulse with me as was Bruce Dowling and Bruce Dowling is here. So those three of us were in Repulse.

29:30 This is a photograph of Repulse heading into some rather rough North Atlantic weather. I think it was probably taken in about '38/'39 before I joined in '40. She was due to take the king and queen across to Canada and was ordered such but that didn't transpire and here she is at sea but I can't claim to have been on board at the time.

30:14 This is a photograph of Repulse actually taken back in the 1930s and it shows her two forward turrets which the other when she was enveloped in spray in the ocean. This is A turret and B turret and Y turret is down here on the quarterdeck and the midshipmen's quarters were down in this area

30:30 right down in the aft end here. I was talking earlier about the high angle control position which my computer was positioned down in this part of the ship down below here. The director I was talking about is positioned up here in the air defence position or the lookout is up there and the director to look out for enemy aircraft and so on and control the 4-inch guns which are positioned two on either side here and on the other side.

31:00 The 15 inch control is also one of these here and the big 15 inch range taker is positioned across here and the bridge of the ship is in this area here. It's not necessarily a very good photograph to show you the detail of it but I'll try and find a better one.

31:55 This is a photograph of the ship's company assembled on board HMS Repulse and we are in Durban Harbour in South Africa on I think it was our first arrival there with the convoy and on our way, eventually on our way to the East and this is General Smuts who was the president of South Africa at the time, who paid us a visit and inspected the ship's company and I'm sure that he would have just addressed us and here's Captain Tennant raising three cheers from the ship's company for the general.

32:58 This is a shot of General Smuts escorted by Captain Tennant inspecting one of the groups of sailors aboard Repulse when on his visit to Durban. This is probably Y turret on the quarterdeck and this is a group of officers, this will be the officer in charge of this group of seamen here and other officers escorting the captain's group going around the ship with the general. Sorry these splotches on the photograph are just from bad

33:30 housekeeping.

And just tell us about the uniforms.

The uniform they are wearing of course is semi tropical uniform because it was warm down there. It's not the normal working dress for sailors on board at the time but certainly cooler than having the blue uniform.

Is it a wooden deck?

Yes it's a teak deck yes.

34:30 This photograph shows the visit of King George VI to HMAS Shropshire in Scapa Flow on the 12th August 1943. The ship had left Chatham Dockyard, we had finished fitting out and maintaining for the turnover, we had commissioned her with the Australian crew and we had gone up to Scapa Flow to trial and working up and so. Just before we were to depart Scapa we had a very surprise and very pleasant visit from His Majesty and

35:00 this shows HM [His Majesty] King George VI and our Captain John Collins here and my only small claim to fame is I happened to be the officer of the watch, this sublieutenant standing here on the left. This is our bosun's pipe, piping party to welcome, ceremonial piping party to welcome people on board.

Would they play a tune?

35:30 [whistle] – you know, that sort of thing. I don't have a bosun's pipe here. But he's just walked up the side you know up the gangway which was here, up the gangway and the platform just walking on board.

What were your impressions of the King?

Oh very favourable. I mean of course because he was a monarch held in high regard in those days. Stepped aboard as admiral of the fleet also.

Who is he meeting?

He's meeting our captain, Captain John Collins here standing forward and shaking him by the hand.

36:40 This is a photograph of Shropshire in Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines in January, early January 1945. This shows a shot of her having just fired a broadside ashore at enemy positions prior to the landing force going in and we did that for a few days. That was our duty.

Who would have taken the photo?

37:07 It must have been taken from a ship nearby I think. It wasn't taken on the Australia, as I recall Australia was always out here somewhere on our starboard bow. It could have been a destroyer.

And those are the guns going off it?

That's the 8-inch. We had 8-inch guns.

38:10 This is a shot of HMAS Australia who was, which was working in the support force in Lingayen Gulf in January 1945 and this is after she had received five hits from kamikaze bombers and the dear old lady as you see she's got a crumpled funnel here, the foremost funnel and hit there. What you can't see of course is that there are two, 4-inch twin 4-inch gun screws on this side or guns on this side which were wiped out from a kamikaze bomber on that side and the same on the other side of the ship they were

38:49 also wiped out and then she received a hit I think above the water line somewhere around about here

and also down here on the port side. So the aircraft didn't quite get into the ship although it did dent her a little and create a hole. So she looked a bit of a wreck I must say at that stage of the game but tremendous courage from people on board. They are 8-inch armament the two turrets here and two turrets forward. They were still and the control position here they were still firing and providing gunfire support even though she had really run out anti-aircraft defence. The

39:30 remaining anti-aircraft defence would be 4-inch armament and this was probably just before she was despatched to leave the force and go back for repairs.

Did you see any of those planes hit?

39:48 Yes I think I did because I was here in an air defence position in Shropshire and whilst I was on the port side I think when the attack would have started I would have seen at least one or two of those go in. I seem to recall the one on the 4-inch gun deck. We call it a 4-inch gun deck because those are the AA [anti-aircraft] guns, that's where they were, two on the port side and two on the starboard.

40:25 This is a photograph of me taken I think towards the end of 1945 as a lieutenant. I would have finished work in Shropshire. I was awarded DSC, Distinguished Service Cross in Lingayen Gulf operation and it's taken in Sydney so I haven't got a date accurately so it must be late '45 I would think before I went across to the UK. I would have been aged about 22 or something.

41:22 This is a photograph taken many years later in fact in the 90s, 1990s. This chap here on the left is Father John Roach and he was the Roman Catholic padre aboard Shropshire. A marvellous chap who did a great deal to keep the morale of the ship up in the south west Pacific.

Who's with him?

Who's with him? Myself here in the middle and Vince Hyland who is the

41:51 president of the Canberra Shropshire Association.

Tape 7

00:23 **Okay Guy just tell me a bit about the Shropshire and how it differed from the Australia.**

When we commissioned in Chatham in April 1943 we had been fitted with more radar sets than Australia. We had also control units so that we could separately control each of our 8-inch turrets and they were set to fire a

01:00 barrage against aircraft, aircraft attack and a barrage means that you fire a shell at a certain distance obviously ahead of the aircraft coming in. We could fire at a barrage range of 6,000 yards or 3,000 yards and that gave us quite a bit of flexibility and we felt later on that that contributed a great degree to the deterrent effect we had on Japanese aircraft attacking us

01:30 much later in 1944 and '45. We had the same basic anti aircraft armament with a twin 4-inch, four twin 4-inch mountings as Australia. We initially had Oerlikon guns and then we both had to change to Bofors 40 millimetre Bofors gun but that wasn't done until 1944 when we were

02:00 into operations in the south west Pacific.

Why were they changed?

Well the Oerlikon gun being 20mm was really it was rather like throwing peas in the sky against determined air craft attacks. The range wasn't sufficient and the hitting power wasn't sufficient so we managed to get a number, I think about a dozen single barrelled Bofors 40 millimetre

02:30 Bofors guns and that enhanced our ability quite a lot.

And what about the radar because that was quite important wasn't it?

Yes our radar sets I think were basically the same. We would have been slightly more modern than Australia but each of these individual control units for the 8-inch turrets had its own little radar set to enable them to estimate when the aircraft was approaching for barrage range and so on.

03:00 The sighting was done visually but our anti aircraft radar was quite good at that time. Of course it looks archaic many number of years later but it served a good purpose in those days and helped a great deal.

You went on the Shropshire back to Australia and then headed out to Leyte Gulf?

03:30 We first went to Milne Bay and that was in November 1943. We went up there together with the cruiser Australia which was the flagship and the two destroyers Warramunga and Arunta and whilst we were in Milne Bay we were joined with three American cruisers Phoenix, the Boise and the Nashville. They had fifteen 6-inch guns, modern fire control, very impressive to watch when they started shooting and four or five American

04:00 destroyers and we formed Task Force 74 and basically we stayed together as a task force right through until the end of the war. So we got to know the American chaps aboard and it was all very interesting.

So tell me how, this was a bit of a shift for you because you had been working with the Royal Navy up to this point, how was it different working with the US Navy?

04:30 The manoeuvring at sea and the tactical formations were different. The Americans had a circular screening method where you formed in circles so to speak with the major units in the centre and they did this in the big carrier forces of course, put their carriers in the centre and the screening cruisers, battleships, cruisers and destroyers around the carriers to counter either surface or submarine from the destroyers point of view chasing

05:00 submarines or from the air attack point of view they had to fly through the barrage and the gunnery barrage etc. put up by all those surface ships protecting in their third and fifth fleet protecting their carriers or protecting any major unit that they wanted and you used it for, circular screens for anything that you were convoying.

So what were you initially doing around Milne Bay?

05:30 Well in Milne Bay we were continuing to exercise and improve our efficiency and then in December '43 the first American landing in New Britain at Cape Gloucester and together with the American cruisers and Australia we went up to bombard the shore positions and the landing area to keep the heads, the enemy heads down while the amphibious landing

06:00 was carried out. All these landings were for troops going into a beach were all amphibious landings, all went in on landing craft. There were no paratroops or anything like that. So they were all over the beach and very impressive to watch.

So just talk me through what would be happening for a bombardment. Just tell me what happened on the ship.

Well you'd be given a selection of targets which from aerial photography

06:30 and so on was assessed as being gun positions or enemy positions and so various ships were allocated various targets and you could either be tasked to shoot at those targets before the landing occurred or to shoot at them during the landing and then subsequently when the troops got ashore they could call in the supporting fire from the ships wherever they felt they

07:00 wanted it providing of course it was within range of our guns but that was generally okay.

What was the range of the guns?

Of Shropshire's guns 8-inch it would go out to about 30,000 yards about 15 miles or more. I think in actual fact we opened at in the surface battle at Surigao Strait I think we opened at 17 that would be 34,000 yards.

So what was your role? What would you do on a sort of minute to minute basis during a bombardment?

07:30 Well me personally I think in the early days until about from end '43 through till middle of '45, sorry middle of '44 I was in one of the turrets, one of the 8-inch turrets as turret officer and during a bombardment you really weren't required to do very much other than just watch that your turret's

08:00 crew were operating but of course in each of the turrets you had a very experienced chief petty officer or petty officer who was really in control of the turret's crew but you were their turret officer in case a turret had to operate independently because a control system had gone. You would then train your turret around onto a target and take what we call local control. But in the situations we were in that didn't happen.

08:30 **So the turrets were getting information from the control room below which is what you were talking about before?**

Yes that's right. There was an 8-inch computer so to speak and the turrets were getting their training and their elevation and the type of shell they had to load into the gun whether it was high explosive or armour piercing. For bombardment purposes we were generally always using high explosive which exploded basically on contact.

Can you tell me a bit about how that worked with getting the explosive into the gun, how the guns worked?

09:00 Well each turret is a sort of a stalk. It sits on a hollow stalk which extends right down below to the magazine and to a shell room and you would have hoists from the magazine and the shell room which bring up the shell and the cordite into the turret and in the turret itself you have the loading system which loads the shell into the gun with a big rammer, rams the shell

09:30 into the gun and then follows that with the cordite behind it in those days. And then you closed the breach and settle the turret where it should be. The turret would always be trained where it should be

but the elevation could have been altered so it had got back to loading angle and once it's loaded then the gun would automatically go and follow the point for

10:00 elevation. Of course the key in any action is to make sure that you reloaded as rapidly as possible so that you were ready for the next round and depending on what the call for fire was.

How quickly could you reload?

Well it was about every 30 seconds.

So it was pretty busy?

Fairly busy yes.

What does it sound like, what happens when the gun goes off?

10:30 Oh you get a sort of a big punch of noise in the turret. It's much noisier outside than inside and you see the gun recoil into the turret and then run out again.

And just describe to me, you were saying there were lots of landing craft. Can you just sort of describe to me what would happen with the troops landing?

Well you'd have your bombardment force lined up along the shore

11:00 bombarding, still bombarding before the troops go in and then the landing ships, the big landing ships which carry you know a few thousand troops on board would come up and they would either anchor or take away off their ship and then they would put the troops into landing craft and they would then assemble and they would go into the beach in waves, in lines of

11:30 landing craft. Depending on the opposition they expected in Leyte Gulf I think it was we first saw the rocket ships go in ahead of the actual landing craft to soften up the whole beach area with a multitude of rockets, very impressive all these things going off and a whole total coverage. Strictly a heads down for anybody on the beach or if they had a head left. You know there was a hell of a concentration of fire in the beach area before

12:00 everybody went in. Then you'd have to stop it to allow the troops to land but they would go in in waves of x number of landing craft to certain beaches and they wouldn't all land in the same spot of course. You'd have two or three areas separated by either hundreds of yards or half a mile or a mile or a mile or two or something like that. I keep talking in the old distances, etc., but that's what it was in those days.

12:30 **I'm fascinated by rocket ships. That sounds, when you say to soften up the beach what was happening there?**

Well the rockets, not unlike the army things you saw if you've seen movies of the Russians fighting on the Russian front. They had these

13:00 incredible rocket machines and you saw them spewing rockets out. The Americans had these and they were positioned in launches on some of their specific landing ships and so they would just automatically fire these things and then reload if they had to but generally speaking I think it was probably a one shot business because by the time they had all sent their rockets in they timed it before the fellows hit the beach.

13:30 **How much opposition was there on the beach? Let's talk about Leyte Gulf since that was the biggest sort of action.**

I don't think there was much opposition at Leyte Gulf. It wasn't until they got in a little bit that they got some opposition. Either the Japanese didn't want to be on the beach because they were more exposed and let them get inland a little so that they could be better camouflaged against the landing.

14:00 I don't think, I personally didn't see any actual response to the fellows actually on the beach being under fire. You've got to remember we were probably about four miles off or something like that so it wasn't, you weren't sort of on a ringside seat.

It was a huge fleet at Leyte Gulf. Can you just describe what that was like, how many ships were there and what that looked like?

14:30 Well when the whole force went to sea from Hollandia to go to Leyte Gulf the whole sea that you had in your horizon so to speak just appeared to be covered with ships and some, I think it was estimated at some 700 ships went across. That includes all the support craft, all the landing ships and tank landing craft and navy ships, combatant ships from battleships to,

15:00 carriers weren't in the main force they were operating separately because they need room to manoeuvre but you had battleships and cruisers and destroyers and all your supply ships you know to support the landing and by the time – [telephone]

15:30 **Okay, Guy, you were going to tell us a bit more about what it was like in the turrets.**

A turret was a very uncomfortable place to be in the tropics because it's virtually a steel box, an

armoured steel box sitting up above the deck and it houses two 8-inch guns and it's got the loading mechanism to load the shell and the cordite into the gun and you have a turret crew of probably a dozen

16:00 or more in this gun house area. You have basically you also have a range finder and a range taker and a position for the turret officer. A position for the captain of the turret who was the petty officer or chief petty officer and all in all it's hot. It's as humid inside as it is out. It's darn uncomfortable to be there and the longer you were there the more uncomfortable it is but when you were doing a job of work of course that was normal, that was it

16:30 but it was you know you always felt, you were drenched in perspiration there's no doubt about that. You were hot, totally hot all the time. And then of course when you were firing you would get cordite fumes. The cordite fumes would come back into the turret which are not necessarily you know perfumed for pleasantness. So reasonably uncomfortable sort of

17:00 place to be. The rest of the turret's crew of course were down below. You had maintainers waiting to, if there was a breakdown to go into the turret to look after the hoists but you had a crew down below in the shell room and a crew in the magazine and the cordite magazine and it was just as about as hot down there. So they were equally uncomfortable. And there was no air conditioning. There was only compartment I think in the ship which was air conditioned and that had the radar, the air warning radar warning of

17:30 enemy aircraft and that was a fairly hot radar set so to speak from its capability but it was also hot in temperature and it had to be kept cool and so that was a tiny little compartment up forward under the bridge which was air conditioned and I seem to recall it was the only air conditioned place on the ship. So it was hot everywhere and it was hot in the turret.

18:00 **What sort of communications would be going on amongst the people in a turret and with the other crews?**

Well basically once you start the drill there really wasn't much communication because it was an automatic cycle of drill and this is where the turret captain who sat in a position where he could see his left gun and his right gun operating and if he saw something going wrong then he

18:30 would shout about it and correct the drill and so on. But the turret layer elevating the guns and the turret trainer they were connected with headsets, sound-powered telephones and connected through to the control position in the ship, the computer area and the orders were passed quietly to sort of open fire and the firing was actually conducted from the computer room

19:00 not actually in the turret, sorry the firing was conducted from the director up top when he was laying his cross wires for his telescopes on wherever the target was. So all you had to do was to load the turrets and make a turret ready switch or a gun ready switch and you had a row of lights in the computer room which showed you when all the guns were ready for firing

19:30 and then of course you had them all ready for firing and away you would go and then shoot the broadside.

So who would actually like fire the gun? This was the director on the top?

The director layer up top was the man who actually fired it yes.

And how did he fire it?

Well with a little pistol grip, pistol grip and a trigger.

How many men were in all those other crews, in the magazine?

20:00 Long time ago. I think there probably would have been about, in the transmitting station which was the term for what we refer to now as a computer room I would think in our 8-inch TS [transmitting station] there must have been about a crew of about 16 probably.

So what would have been roughly the total number of men to fire one of these –

20:30 I really have forgotten the exact numbers. I mean if you put all the crews together to fire the 8 inch armament well you had a director crew of about 4 or 5 in the director and you had the TS crew of about shall we say 16 or so and then you had these groups in the top of the turrets and the crews at

21:00 the bottom. Oh off the top of my head I can't really have a crack at it at the moment about 40 by 4, 160 oh at least a couple of hundred I would think.

And how many men on the ship altogether?

We had, when we were up there operating we had over 1200 on board.

21:30 I've rather forgotten the exact number of an 8 inch turret crew. It was a long time ago.

What was the atmosphere like on board for Leyte Gulf? How did you all feel about being part of all of this?

Well we'd had about half a dozen bombardment tasks before then and this

22:00 was going to be the first big landing in the Philippines so it was very important and the size of the force that we were taking there indicated the size of the operation and we were keyed up. We got a briefing from the captain and from the gunnery officer and the gunnery officer used the expression, he gathered all the turrets crews and all the guns crews on the upper deck one day and gave us a briefing as to what we would be doing at

22:30 Leyte and he said we were going into Tiger country where the enemy is not going to like it so everybody's got to be on their toes. Well his forecast was absolutely correct. We went into tiger country and the enemy didn't like it. So the ship's company well morale was high. We knew we could do a good job and that was the feeling on the ship you know you name the

23:00 task we'll get on with it and they were a great team they really were.

This was all Australian men at this point?

We might have one or two Royal Navy fellows on board. We had a lieutenant commander, a most interesting chap but he was transferred to the destroyer Warramunga because the captain, the Australian captain went down sick. Lieutenant Commander John Alliston had been in command of a Royal Navy destroyer in the Mediterranean and he was doing exchange

23:30 service with the RAN in Shropshire so when the CO [Commanding Officer] of the destroyers billet fell vacant it was very expedient to transfer him across to the Warramunga for which of course he was delighted.

Who was your captain on the Shropshire? What was he like?

The first captain was John Collins. He of course was famous from Sydney/Bartolomeo Colleoni fame and the second captain was Captain Harry

24:00 Showers and he left us in Morotai I think it was which was the operation before we went to Leyte and Captain Godfrey Nicholls, Royal Navy joined us and he stayed with us right until the end of the war. So he saw, he was in command during our major actions really the two landings in the Philippines Lingayen, Leyte first then Lingayen two amphibious

24:30 landings and when we had the surface to surface battle against the Japanese force of Surigao Strait.

And what was he like as a captain?

Wonderful fellow. Wonderful man. Absolutely marvellous. Full competency. Obviously he had full confidence in his crew and this was exhibited in various ways and he had, he had confidence in the ship's

25:00 company and what we could do and sort of let us get on with it without any unnecessary interference, none at all. No the ship's company loved him they really did. And he featured of course after the war the ship had a Canberra Shropshire Association which still exists now in 2002, very strong one around the country and Godfrey Nicholls is always held in high

25:30 regard. Everybody remembers him.

Who were the other commanding officers that you were dealing with? Like on a day to day basis who did you deal with most?

Well it wasn't a case of most I suppose or least. It depended on what your duties were. I was a watchkeeping officer on the bridge when we were at

26:00 sea and then I was also the officer on the forecastle, the foc's'le as we call it and looking after the anchors and cables. So entering a harbour one would be up there dealing with your crew on the foc's'le. Most of the foc's'le crew of course were out of A turret up forward and you'd be dealing with what was going on in your ship allocation. It was called a part of ship. I had the

26:30 foc's'le part of ship. You had to look after it and maintain it and so on. You'd have your crew of people to do that. So were on four hours up on the bridge watchkeeping and then you were four hours, eight hours off generally but if you went to action stations in the middle of all that forget the rest go back to duty.

What happened when the ship went to action stations? What sort of things had to be done?

27:00 Well all the crew would close up at their duty places, duty posts whether they were guns crew or lookouts, damage control parties down below, medical teams down below, supply party, ammunition supply for the 40 millimetre guns and so on, ammunition supply for the 4 inch and so on. Everybody, all had their allocated duties. And they would all, but when

27:30 you would say close up they go to their various positions in which they were then required to exercise their duties. Damage control parties were spread throughout the ship. Unfortunately all they had to do was to sit and wait for something to happen and then make good the repair if the ship was damaged. So

they had a lot of waiting time, uncomfortable waiting time because when you closed up at action stations you had to put on, you were

28:00 dressed in long trousers and long sleeved shirts. You put on what you called anti flash gear so that if there was a burst of a shell or a bomb or something and there was an explosion of flame, etc., you weren't sort of roasted. So if you put on anti-flash gloves and your anti flash helmet which allowed you to peer out through here by the time you had all that on you were feeling even hotter than you were without it. And whilst you

28:30 know when one was on the upper deck and I was lucky most of the time in the latter part of the war where I was in the air defence position so if you're doing 10 knots at least you had a 10 knot wind over the top even if there was nothing going on and there was no wind blowing. But I always used to worry about how the fellows down in the boiler room, they always reckoned that the average temperature down there in Fahrenheit was 120

29:00 plus. 120 to 140 and of course they were sweating down there and couldn't necessarily stay down there for four hours eating salt tablets by the handful because if you didn't your whole energy left you. You know you were run down if you don't keep up the salt intake, sodium and had

29:30 lots of water. So they had a very tough time down there. Tough at all times but even tougher when the ship was closed up to action station and so anybody below decks was even more uncomfortable than those above.

What was it made of, the anti flash gear?

It was a cloth, a cotton cloth soaked in flash preventative non burning material so it was easy to slip on over your top but darned uncomfortable to wear. I hated it.

30:00 **Did you ever experience, I mean did it ever come in useful?**

No fortunately no. I didn't no. Quite lucky.

And just talking about the number of men involved for some of these operations, how interchangeable were people? I mean if you lost men could people take over each other's roles?

Oh yes. In a guns crew for instance if you had two or three people

30:30 knocked out by shrapnel or something like that then everybody could do basically everybody else's duty. That was part of the training. Admittedly some who were left in certain positions who achieve an expertise that not everybody has of course but it's quite surprising when the chips are down when you have to stand in for somebody else you get on with it because in a guns crew you know you load the gun you aim it and you fire it and

31:00 people were cross trained to quite some degree.

Leyte Gulf was really the first time that the kamikaze attacks happened. Can you describe the first time that happened to the Shropshire, what that was like?

Yes we actually got there on the 20th October I think it was '44 and that's when we started bombarding, softening up for the landing process and we

31:30 might have been there a couple of days before, anyway about the 20th. The first air raids came in on the afternoon of the 20th but they weren't kamikaze. One of the US cruisers, the Honolulu I think it was, was hit by a torpedo and the aircraft flew right through and finally got to the Honolulu. It was the first morning, early morning on the 21st just after 6

32:00 o'clock in the morning when an aircraft came in and it was we felt slightly damaged by our anti aircraft fire but it flew on and eventually hit the bridge of the Australia. It was felt it was by design and not by accident that he did it although he was damaged beforehand but he hit the bridge or the bridge superstructure above it which contained the AA control tower and the 8 inch control tower and the air defence position equivalent to what

32:30 I was in Shropshire and the bridge just a deck or two down below and the whole of that was enveloped in flame because of the fuel tanks. The bomb didn't burst apparently but the fuel tanks exploded and sort of burnt everybody around. It killed the captain and the navigating officer. It wounded Commodore Collins who was aboard the Australia flying his flag. It burnt his flag lieutenant, Lieutenant Wells and killed a number of

33:00 people and wounded a number of others. That was really I think the first kamikaze to hit the Leyte Gulf group. Then there were other attacks later on.

And did you see that from the Shropshire?

I saw the aftermath of it. I was on the port side of Shropshire and this happened on our starboard side if I recall. I don't think I actually saw the ship hit by the aircraft.

Can you recall what the reaction was like on board when this had happened?

33:30 Well of course only a few people saw it actually happen. It was, I think we all referred to the gunnery officer's words of being in Tiger country and we were there and nobody like the kamikaze. We got to like them less as the op went on and less at Lingayen. But I think it brought a new dimension

34:00 somehow or other. A man flying an aircraft into your ship was different to somebody who has dropped a bomb which you felt may or may not have hit the ship. You felt in a way there's more certainty with the guidance of a pilot that the aircraft being then the bomb so to speak plus its bomb is

34:30 more likely to hit the ship. So you were under some determination to stop it. Yes it was, I think it was, it was a worrying aspect of the developments of the war at that time.

What was sort of the perception of the Japanese pilots that they would do such a thing? I mean how did the Australians kind of –

I don't know that we thought too much about the psychology of the whole

35:00 thing at the time. It's just that that's what they were going to do and that's what they would do. We didn't question whether they were going to heaven afterwards or anything like that but it was just the way they were employing their force and that's what they decided to do. I think other people and I'm talking about at my level it's possible that other people had more intelligence about why they were forming the kamikaze cult and why

35:30 they had formed it. They had formed it from a position of adversity of course that they were beginning to lose and this was seen as some from their point of view as a positive means of discouraging any further move towards Japan. Well it had quite an effect and later on after the Philippines

36:00 and at a landing in Okinawa the American fleet, nobody knew of it at the time until much later, the American fleet suffered bad losses from kamikazes. There was quite a number of them. There was no thought of withdrawal I don't think but the losses were mounting quite high. So yes it changed one's sort of attitude. It made us feel all the more determined to

36:30 shoot aircraft out of the sky so you could almost say it tended to focus the mind.

Tell me a bit about how the sort of gunnery crew responded to, you know how would you fight fire on these planes? How was that different? Just talk me through that a little bit.

Well your whole air defence crew so to speak starting with the lookouts

37:00 who were looking out to sight where the aircraft was coming from and then directing the directors to pick up an aircraft in their sights and so take over control of the 4-inch for long range firing. The 8-inch would be told you know where the aircraft were coming in and all these positions had the 8-inch turret directors barrage directors as we called them had officers in

37:30 charge pointing out where the aircraft was and they took control and they had free hand to go and shoot at that aircraft. You can't have somebody saying from a central position stop start no fire or don't fire. When you come into air attack like that you have to decentralise it to get the maximum effect but at the same time people have to be told where the attack is coming from so you provide them with information ideally a

38:00 sighting or a certain bearing and angle of sight which means how far it is above the horizon, 20 degrees, 30 degrees or whatever. A bearing on the port side of the ship or a bearing on the starboard side of the ship and you would point it out and then they would look for it and open fire. I mean we had 8 pounded pompom guns, 8 barrelled pompoms. Tremendous machine because they punched out a lot of shells very quickly. Port and starboard.

38:30 And in one aircraft attack nobody could tell Leading Seaman Cazaly exactly where the thing was but he spotted this aircraft and he opened fire straight away and blew it out of the sky. It was heading directly for the ship. He was given a Distinguished Service Medal for that and he deserved it. Great gun captain on the pompom. And other people you

39:00 know shooting an 8-inch at an aircraft or both barrels of an 8-inch at an aircraft barrage might not necessarily hit the aircraft but it certainly deterred them from coming on into the ship. It deterred them more than we realised I think because Tokyo Rose – the radio announcer who was always sinking ships that hadn't been sunk – accused one Australian ship of flame throwers or something which of course is the larger explosion of the 8-inch gun firing appeared to some of their pilots so we got some notoriety on Tokyo Rose's program. I'm not sure we needed it but it showed there was

39:47 some effect.

Tape 8

00:25 **Before we leave the kamikaze planes, I have lots of questions. Would several planes come over at one time?**

Oh yes, yes. The first thing would be that you would get a warning of a group of enemy aircraft approaching 30 miles away or something like that and if there were carrier aircraft in the vicinity then the air control ship

01:00 would vector the patrolling combat air patrol it was called to intercept that group of enemy planes and hopefully of course if they would shoot them all down or discourage them from going on to attack the force. If on the other hand some of them got through then the force had to take care of them when they arrived and you could have one or two groups coming in, enemy aircraft groups coming in and they could split up, one group of 30

01:30 can split up into smaller groups and come in from different areas, different bearings so to speak around the force and so you had to be alert everywhere and a 360 degree lookout and especially you had to be very careful about the aircraft that always tried to come out of the sun. It's very difficult to sight an aircraft when you're getting close to the sun to be able

02:00 to, you can't look into the sun of course either with the naked eye or with binoculars because you can damage your eyesight. So you had to look around the sun which was not necessarily easy but that was an attacking sector for aircraft to come in out of the sun. So yes you had to be alert all around you everywhere at all times.

That must have been quite tiring. How long would these attacks go on for do you think?

02:30 Oh you could be in action station for hours virtually a whole day and in fact there's a figure in the book on Shropshire, I forget, in the first week, in

03:00 the first week we were closed up at action stations some 140 something hours out of a total of 168. That's your week's hours and we've closed up 140 of those so that's day and night closing up and the second week was slightly less but on average we were 74% of the time in the first two weeks of the Leyte Gulf operation we were closed up at action stations. Now that

03:30 meant that you didn't get down to shower and shave and you had to make the most of opportunities for those dire necessities. It meant that you were fed in a not exactly what you would call a room service type thing but you were given food at your action station which meant that somebody had to carry this around and you had an action messing group of people who had

04:00 to keep on feeding people because you've got to eat you know. Man cannot live by bread alone but you've got to eat sometimes so to speak. That was, yes it gets tiring.

And no chance to sleep obviously?

No, no not really. Because you can't, when you're at action stations certainly in daylight you're looking out, you're keyed up. If you're still at

04:30 action stations at night and maybe you dose for two or three minutes if there's an opportunity. But if you've got aircraft flying around overhead as we did occasionally then you certainly weren't asleep.

So all the men were involved all at the same time, you weren't able to sort of rotate? Would you get a break at any time?

05:00 Not when you were at action stations no. When the immediate threat lessened you would go to what you call second degree of readiness which means that you remain actually at your action station but people can relax. Well that sounds good but many places where people would go to action stations there was nowhere for them to relax except sit down and in some

05:30 places not really that too much. So yes it was very tiring, very tiring and in a modern word there was a certain amount of stress. You know these enemy aircraft buzzing around and the likelihood of attack so when people tell me they are stressed at school sometimes I tend to relate stress to other matters sometimes.

And I mean how did you cope with that? You just had to.

06:00 Well you've just got to get on with it. There's no saying I can't cope. I think there were times certainly, not at Leyte Gulf but there were a couple of times in Lingayen Gulf when the intensity of the air attack was increasing and the intensity of the damage of ships around us was

06:30 increasing and our dear friendly Australia next door to us in Lingayen Gulf was eventually hit five times by kamikazes plus a lot killed and wounded some of the chaps felt that you know it really wasn't the best place to be. I remember one young chap who was a key member of my team up in the air defence position we were up there one night and his teeth were chattering.

07:00 It was a cool tropic night but there were enemy aircraft around and it had probably been a bad day and he said I don't think I can do this much more and I then proceeded to have a yarn to him and tell him that I couldn't really do without him because he was my key communication number to all the outlying posts which he was. I said you hang on in there because

07:30 you're a very important man in the group and he did that bless his heart and never said another word you know the fright, it gave him a different thought that he wasn't just there exposed for nothing, he was there as a key man. It probably helped him a bit.

You've talked on the Shropshire video really about teamwork and how essential everyone was to everyone else. Can you just say a bit about that, how it sort of welded everyone together being in that sort of situation.

08:00 Well from the things you achieve it's rather like a football team in a way, slightly more complicated and complex team than a football team but even a football team has a team spirit and certainly incidents weld it together. Same thing happens with a ship and when you achieve good exercise results on trials and exercises that helps weld a team together because they

08:30 say well we are out here to do that sort of job and we can do it and so all the bombardment roles that we had leading through to Leyte Gulf we were called upon and people said our fire was effective and the guns operated and it was a growing confidence which helped to weld the team together. And then I think after Leyte Gulf of course Leyte Gulf consisted of not

09:00 only the landing but the Battle of Surigao Strait in which we were the only Australian cruiser there because the Australia had gone back for repairs and one of the Australian destroyers Warramunga took her back to Manus and so Arunta and ourselves were the only Australian ships in this very large American force of I forget now about four or five battleships and about ten cruisers and about fifty destroyers or something, forty destroyers.

09:30 So we participated in that. The guns worked and our shells appeared to go in the right direction. We felt we hit the Japanese battleship as other people did as well.

Just talk me through that actually from the beginning of what happened there.

What the Battle of Surigao Strait?

Yes just take me through.

25th October. Well we all assembled in the southern port, portion of Leyte

10:00 Gulf during the night and the access into the Gulf was from Surigao Strait which is right at the southern end so the ships who came into the Gulf had to come in virtually at a line ahead, one after the other, one leading the other and that's where the Japanese came in. But as we had the freedom of the Gulf we spread, the admiral spread the forces across the Gulf. There's the famous old thing called crossing the T. It goes back to Nelson and so

10:30 on but crossing the T. So the concentrated fire of this line of ships can go in on this single line of ships approaching them. So we crossed the T in Surigao Strait and it was about 3 o'clock in the morning when, before that at about 2 o'clock onwards the Japanese force coming up through the strait

11:00 were attacked by PT [Patrol Torpedo] boats and destroyers with torpedoes and so on and our ships opened fire. The cruisers and battleships opened fire I think at about just before 3 o'clock and it was really a most incredible sight because you had this line of ships all shooting in the one direction virtually to a focal point and they were firing tracer ammunition and so you could see all this

11:30 stuff hose-piping towards the lead ship of the Japanese force. We opened fire just a little later when it came within our range, our radar range and we fired full flash cordite. The other thing was that all American ships fired what we call flashless cordite. There was no great sheet of flame out of the muzzles of the gun. When we fired we were firing full flash cordite

12:00 because we didn't have the flashless. So needless to say if you weren't, when the firing gong went ting ting and you'd close your eyes automatically and they'd go bang and then you'd open them because if you had your eyes open during that broadside you were blinded, you couldn't see anything. So that was one thing you had to do when I was up in the

12:30 control position. So we fired and because we had full flash cordite we were one target the Japanese reckoned they could see so we did get some shells over the top of us but it didn't last very long because the weight of fire from all ships concentrating was just too much and the battleship was finally pounded into submission but I think we fired for about, what about 12 minutes I think it was and got away 32 broadsides. Now that was quite

13:00 good going at that time. But you see we came away from Surigao Strait but the Japanese one or two ships only retired the rest were sunk. That was a victory. That was the last great service battle, surface battle of World War II. In fact probably it will be the last big surface battle of all time because modern weapons change all that now. And so it welded the ship together. Why? Because we were the only Australian cruiser. Acquitted

13:30 ourselves. It was fine. You see it's a good feeling. But we didn't feel so good later that morning when we were through from, because the Japanese had another huge force east of Leyte Gulf just outside the Gulf which was what they called the Battle of Samar and they had two huge battleships out there. We

didn't know it at the time, the Musashi and the Yamato and they were discouraged from coming into Leyte Gulf by a small force

14:00 of baby carriers outside attacking them with fire, with aircraft and absolutely heroic actions by American destroyers and eventually Kurita the admiral turned his ship north and went back north to San Bernadino. But we were a bit worried because we were very low on ammunition having been bombarding from the 20th, 1, 2, 3 about three or four days and

14:30 not much left to shoot at this force outside. So we fortunately didn't have to but it would have been a very unhappy, very tricky time but that was the value of air power and some of the baby carriers of course suffered damage but they were tremendous in fighting off this Japanese force. So all these

15:00 things you know all keep on welding the team together.

So just going back a bit to Surigao Strait, did you see the Yamashiro sink?

I didn't personally see her sink because I think she sank in the dark you know still darkness when she sank but I certainly saw because I had binoculars, certainly saw the shells falling, explosions around the ship and

15:30 so on and other ships down there which were engaged by destroyers and cruisers either side and the old battleships, American battleships that were there as well.

This was early in the morning when this was happening?

Yeah 3 o'clock in the morning we were shooting yes.

So it was dark?

It was dark, oh yes pitch dark except illuminated by a lot of ships shooting.

So I mean that must have been quite an impressive

Oh it was an unforgettable sight that particular event yeah, unforgettable.

16:00 **After that sort of intense activity I mean what does the crew do? I mean what sort of happens on the ship and how do you relax after all of that? What's it like just after a battle or an attack?**

Well we were all at action stations having been there most of the night.

16:30 We relaxed I think, probably had breakfast which was good and then we went back to Leyte Gulf to cover the landing and I think probably, I can't recall now but probably the air attacks went on afterwards. So when you say relaxing it's all relative.

I mean when the sun eventually came up were you still there? Could you see –

When daylight occurred we were still in the southern portion of the Gulf yes and I remember seeing one Japanese destroyer being sunk by a couple

17:00 of American cruisers. He was still there for some reason or other that he hadn't gone home quickly enough and he was just sunk. There's no doubt about that. Yes you could see a couple of bits of wreckage here and there in the distance because we were quite some way away.

17:30 **What happens next in terms – there's a difference between the type of ammunition you had for surface combat and for bombardment, is that right?**

Yes that's right.

So would the ship be sort of loaded up with one or the other depending on what you thought was going to happen or how did that work?

Oh yes that's right. Yes you would always endeavour to keep a balance but we certainly had less armour piercing shells on board than we did high

18:00 explosives. HE, as they call it. Mainly because HE was used for bombardment purposes and armour piercing was for the surface to surface. So all our broadsides against the Japanese in the Surigao Strait would all have been armour piercing shell to get it into the ship as far as possible before it explodes. Then I imagine that the next day or two after it, the

18:30 official record will show but we probably ammunitioned ship as soon as possible because we were a bit low on ammunition.

So what's the actual difference between the shells? What's the difference between armour piercing and high explosive?

The basic thing is in the fuse and the fuse of the shell which the armour piercing shell allows it to penetrate further into a ship before it explodes. A high explosive shell will, over simplification but bursts on impact.

19:00 **How big are these shells?**

8 inch, 8 inch round about 250 pounds.

Heavy.

I think it was 250 or something like that.

You're part of this fleet of American ships, what was the sort of

19:30 **command structure? Who was the Shropshire taking orders from and how did that work in terms of being part of the US fleet?**

Well the command of the Seventh Fleet was if I recall was under a top American admiral, Admiral Kincaid I think and then he had Admiral Oldendorf who was in charge of the battleships I think but the whole of the

20:00 structure was that the commander of the Seventh Fleet allocated the task groups, the task forces underneath him, task forces or task groups into certain jobs. It was quite easy to work under. You know you'd get an

20:30 order and you'd get on with. There was no difficulty. There's no complication to it. It works very well or it worked past tense very well.

Before Lingayen Gulf did you go ashore or did you go back to –

After Leyte Gulf when that was finished we returned back to Manus and

21:00 we stayed there until the end of December I think. I forget when we got back now. We stayed there, I think we would have been in harbour for a few weeks, three or four. Then we went back and assembled at Leyte Gulf and then we went from Leyte Gulf round through Surigao Strait which was

21:30 nicely quiet and around to the western side of Mindanao Island and up the western side of the Philippines up to Lingayen Gulf which is in sort of the north west corner of the island of Luzon and we went up there as a bombardment force with the amphibious force following us about four days behind us. So we had a break in Seeadler Harbour as it was then

22:00 in the Admiralty Islands between these two operations. That's when we got a bit cheesed off actually. Mail had always been a problem, getting mail to the ships up there. Never seemed to reach us and we never got the letter mail we always seemed to get the second class parcel mail and the

22:30 Red Cross packages for our food, chocolate or something, before the mail came in. I don't know what happened to it but it was just one of those things. It was never seemed to be organised. I don't know whether the American ships had the same problem but we certainly did. And the other thing I think that we really got uptight about was food, the quality of the food. It would have to be described as uninteresting, boring. It was mostly tinned, dehydrated

23:00 vegetables, dehydrated egg powder for scrambled eggs, dehydrated potatoes and fresh vegetables were something that we really didn't have because we didn't have the reasonable cool rooms on board to have a good supply of fresh vegetables for any period of time. On the other hand when we got back to harbour like Seeadler we expected it would be rather nice now we were in harbour to have fresh vegetables because this diet was

23:30 having an effect on the health of the ship's company. They were getting boils and prickly heat through the heat but the whole of one's system was not exactly on top line with this food. I can remember, it's recorded in the book, when we got back to Seeadler Harbour Captain Nicholls was quite

24:00 worried about the health and the state of the food and so on and he sent a message saying that he had hoped that when we got back to Seeadler Harbour after a long no vegetable period that there would be fresh vegetables available and he said it was disappointing that there were only enough for three meals or something of fresh vegetables when we got there. Something went wrong with the whole victualling organisation.

24:30 Nobody seemed to appreciate the effect that an improvement of the food would have had on the actual efficiency of the ship's company and it wouldn't have only applied to us of course. It would have applied to the Australia, Warramunga, Arunta and any of the other small ships that were up there. So that really wasn't a very happy side of life. Food and mail

25:00 and of course the tropical heat which you could never get away from. That was part of the game you know.

Did people get sort of many tropical diseases or were there problems with any of that type of thing as well?

Nothing like malaria or anything like that because fortunately we were out on the water and the mosquitos don't fly over water. They don't like it or something. But if you went ashore you would have to take your, smother yourself in various lotions and so on. I don't think we ever had anybody went

down with malaria, no.

25:30 **Did you get to go ashore much at that time?**

Only in Seeadler Harbour, went a couple of times. But we'd go ashore, the Americans set themselves up a recreation base and sort of softball field and a bar and so on at one of the islands and we used to go ashore there and relax in the afternoon and swim. You had to be terribly careful swimming because if you cut yourself on coral, that meant that that wasn't going to

26:00 heal very quickly and so in the whole environment so swimming wasn't necessarily easy although you had lots of lovely beautiful looking water around you just had to be terribly careful.

And did any of the sailors go a bit mad on shore after being cooped up on the ship?

No I don't think so. I don't think so. There wasn't too much opportunity to do that you know. There wasn't opportunity to drink to excess. If they

26:30 had the opportunity to have a few beers they certainly did but nobody went raving crazy no.

Was there much there apart from the naval sort of base?

Well the base at Manus was huge. The American base at Manus was a huge storage logistic depot for supporting this huge landing and previous landings that were going on. Hollandia in north New Guinea was also a

27:00 big base after they took it. Well the both the bases were built after Manus was taken in April '43 I think and Hollandia a couple of months later. Then they had to build those up, sorry April '44 for Manus. They had to get that in order so it could support the fleets which came in although most of the fleet support was seaborne, tankers refuelling, store ships for storing and so

27:30 on but nevertheless there were airstrips on Manus as well, bomber airstrips. As soon as they got these bases they always set up airstrips because they could then get a little further towards the enemy fortifications of the Philippines or other islands, Truk and so on, in the south west Pacific.

Could you go and see films and things like that?

We had films on board. Sometimes they tended to be shown more than

28:00 once because you just couldn't exchange them and we always, our film exchange wasn't exactly the best but it helped but if you could get, we used to go across, when I say we some of my friends in the gun room, we'd go across to the cruiser Nashville and see their films which were always much more up to date than ours were.

What kind of films did you see?

Oh the normal Hollywood stuff.

28:30 **And newsreels too? Did they have newsreels on the ship?**

I don't recall seeing newsreels, maybe there were.

Did you get much sort of news of what was happening in other parts of the war apart from where you were?

It's interesting looking back on news clips that one sees in various places.

29:00 I have a feeling that the people in Australia knew more about the war in the Pacific than we did up there. They had discussion on what the Third Fleet was doing in the mid Pacific and the carrier forces attacking the Japanese. They knew about us because it was being reported in an overall picture but not something we actually got to know about too much on board. So I always felt that they were better informed here than we were up there

29:30 although we certainly knew that we at Leyte and what we were doing the following day resisting air attack. They would get that covered in a broad brush but they were informed where we were although we couldn't write home and say where we were.

Were your letters censored?

Yes, yes.

I didn't ask you about MacArthur. What was the sort of perception of MacArthur on your ship?

30:00 Oh I don't think we had too much of a perception about General Doug. He was determined to go back to the Philippines and we were helping him get there but the differences between US command in the Pacific between Nimitz in Hawaii and MacArthur in the south west Pacific and what they wanted to do certainly didn't filter down to my level or to the local level so

30:30 to speak. Top people might well have understood it, I'm sure they did and were informed but there was no sort of satellite telephone hook-up those days you know everything was by radio and there was a

limited amount of time you could spend on the Morse keys in those days otherwise you'd clutter up the circuit and nobody could send any signals at all. So there

31:00 was a limited amount of information coming through but that was part of the game.

Tell me about using Morse. That was how communications were, using the Morse signals.

The Morse code.

Yes so that was how communication.

That was how radio messages were sent yes.

The American sailors, what were they like compared to Australians?

31:30 **Did you find them very different when you must have interacted with them?**

Didn't really meet them much. In harbour was the only place really or you would see them on board their ships if you had to do a transfer and you went alongside at sea or something like that or one of their ships could

32:00 come along to transfer mail it was available. No I don't think we had any, I got to know them later on. Of course the forces they had at their disposal in the Pacific were incredible and everything they had up there was more modern and had a greater capability than we did. They had 8 inch cruisers up there modern 8-inch cruisers. Big ships that were very capable. Good

32:30 range. Better gunnery control than we had. They had better anti aircraft and so they always had better equipment basically so we certainly envied them that I think.

You didn't get to have a look around an American ship at all?

Didn't really no. I got aboard Nashville a few times in harbour and had a look around and so on but you didn't delve into each and every one of them.

Did they have better food and conditions do you think? A lot of people

33:00 **have mentioned that the Americans always had everything rather nice.**

Well their ships were air conditioned for a start. I mean 20/20 hindsight says it would have been much better if we had had air conditioning but of course we didn't in those days and there was nothing you could do about it. You only began to make your comparison when we went aboard on Nashville for dinner in their wardroom or something. You sit in a nice air

33:30 conditioned wardroom it really was bliss and go back to our hot box. So yeah it was, it was very interesting going aboard their ships albeit not many but one or two. But you know we saw them fighting. We envied them

34:00 their anti aircraft armament in their destroyers. Their destroyers had a high angle, low angle gun with a dual purpose turret 5-inch guns instead of the 4-inch or 4 7's as our destroyer had and our 4 7's in the destroyers were not high angle guns and you begin to think well why didn't we have them but we had British guns and that was it. Our 4-inch guns were much lighter

34:30 than their 5-inch and their fire control systems were more accurate. Their output was higher. So yes we envied them their armaments and the huge number of ships they had and so on all much more modern than what we had although Warramunga and Arunta the two destroyers operating with us were quite recent, quite recently built in Australia. So yeah there was a basic difference.

35:00 **I think I read that the Americans were quite prepared to offer some new guns to the Australia but there was too much red tape for it to happen.**

Well we got 40 millimetre Bofors for Shropshire but we couldn't have, I don't think we could have re-gunned Shropshire with 8-inch guns. It wasn't on.

Let's go on to Lingayen Gulf now. So tell me about the preparations for that and what happened in the lead up to that.

35:30 Well we were in Seeadler Harbour and we were heading for a new operation. We went through Palau I think for refuelling and then on to Leyte Gulf and in Leyte Gulf we assembled what we called the bombardment force, the battleships and cruisers and destroyers to go up and soften up the landing area of Lingayen for about four days I think it was before the landing. The ships came along with the amphibious landing

36:00 capability. And we sailed out of Leyte and as I said through Surigao which was nicely quiet and then up the western side of the Philippines and things began to happen fairly soon, by that I mean enemy air attacks and I think day one, day two about day three out of Lingayen [plane noise – pause]

37:03 **So yes things started to hot up.**

Yes and the air attacks began and the small carrier Ommaney Bay was sunk astern of us and on that first day of air attacks Australia was hit for the first time and had lots of people killed and wounded. And so we then moved on up to Lingayen Gulf and things started to hot up and within that

37:30 next period of time of about two or three days maybe up until the day of the landing when we were landing ships were coming in and we were still firing ashore and so on Australia eventually was hit five times and she was only a matter of what you would say our next door ship about a thousand yards away and we ended up by being unscathed and she had taken five hits.

38:00 **Now this is from planes?**

From planes yes, from planes from kamikazes and we were very lucky. Some have dubbed us the lucky ship. We say well yes you need a bit of luck in everything but we also feel that it was because we had a good air defence which I've been talking about and the use of these 8-inch turrets

38:30 and so on. But we were saved by the sloop the [HMAS] Gascoyne astern of us one day. She was up there on a survey, you see there was a total of 13 Australian ships up there at the time and Gascoyne bless her heart spotted an aircraft attacking us, heading towards Shropshire and managed to blow it out of the sky and we reckon you know saved our life because we apparently hadn't seen that one. So everybody was cooperating with

39:00 everybody else and there were lots of air attacks and lots of activity in the sky. We had friendly fighters in the middle of it all. One or two of them were hit by friendly fire but that couldn't be helped. But it was a warm time it really was a very busy time and that's when the real pressures came on the ship. More so than at Leyte much more so than Leyte. Very tense period in Lingayen Gulf but eventually the landing happened and carrier aircraft and so on managed to establish air superiority over Japanese aircraft and we got the right balance back after a while.

Tape 9

00:23 **Just take me through what happened after Lingayen Gulf.**

We stayed in the Lingayen Gulf area as I recall about four or five weeks I think and then we went down to Manila area and down to Corregidor for the American landing on Corregidor. We bombarded the fortifications at Corregidor and witnessed the air assault, the paratroop assault on Corregidor on top and that was basically the end of our, that would have

01:00 been in February '45 and that finished our operations in the Philippines after which we returned to Sydney for a break and then we went back up again, that would have taken us there somewhere around about I think probably May '45 and these times can be checked of course. We went to

01:30 the harbour at Tawitawi in the southern Philippines and then formed up. Once again there was a support force for the landing at Labuan and Balikpapan when the Australians went in on each of those landings. So for the first time we supported a full scale amphibious landing at Balikpapan having been there for you know a softening up period beforehand and to watch the boys go in and their tank landing craft and so

02:00 on. That was in July, July '45. And after assisting with the fall of Labuan and the landing at Balikpapan we went up to Subic Bay and we were in Subic Bay in August when we got word that the first bomb had been dropped and then the second one of course and then the Japanese

02:30 capitulation. We were in Subic at that time.

Can you remember what was the sort of atmosphere on the boat, on the ship?

Well it was incredible. It was almost an unbelievable event the fact that nobody is going to shoot tomorrow you know. Nobody was going to shoot at us and going to sea there was no worry about the next time we went to

03:00 sea. It was all over and it took some getting used to in actual fact. I remember when I personally went up to my air defence position and sat there for a while thinking about, I'm not sure what now but wondering about it all where we'd been and probably I was wondering where one was going from there. You know what happens next. But yes it was an

03:30 incredible feeling of relief because I think we'd all had enough by that time and of course we weren't necessarily you know on our ship there were other ships in other fleets certainly in the US fleet which had been through much more than we had but we felt that we'd had our share and that was the way it was. So after Subic Bay of course we ended up in Tokyo with

04:00 the whole of the fleet movement up there to witness the signing of the surrender.

Just describe that for us. What was that like, all the ships close together?

Well it was the most incredible armada of ships and incredible armada of aircraft which flew over Tokyo Bay in the morning of the surrender. It really was absolutely mind boggling and as far as you could see in Tokyo Bay there were ships, ships, ships, warships of all sorts and of course at

04:30 that stage the British Pacific fleet was up there as well having been, operating in conjunction with the Americans at Okinawa and so on and so it was a great gathering. You know it was an absolutely huge gathering of ships. Ships of all the allied nations were there. I remember going across one morning because there was an Indian sloop I think it was or

05:00 destroyer there and one of the lieutenants on board had been a midshipman with me in Repulse and he left Repulse before she was sunk, I don't mean at the time but I mean he was drafted out of the ship beforehand but it was good to see him again. It was really quite, quite an event and the whole scene and I remember I managed to get an opportunity to go up to Tokyo somehow. I went ashore at Yokosuka, had a look around there and saw

05:30 the masses of Japanese mini-submarines and so on which were all berthed there and fortunately hadn't been cast loose against us and I went up to Tokyo and I remember taking a tram ride out just for no reason other than to see where it went to, to the terminus and came back again. And just to see these miles almost of devastation from the fire bombing of Tokyo and

06:00 so on. Incredible. And then soon, very shortly after that after the signing it must have only been relatively a few days, a week at the outside I think I was posted back to Australia and I took passage in the Royal Navy destroyer Wakeful I think it was, HMS Wakeful down to Sydney. And the most interesting part of that voyage was that the war correspondent George

06:30 Johnson, the great writer of books, who wrote My Brother Jack and so on, he was on board so he was a fascinating chap to have in a wardroom to talk to and the experiences he had had ashore in New Guinea. And of course we didn't know much about the shore in New Guinea side of life and what it was like for our fellows there. So I took passage back to Sydney. Had

07:00 some leave and then I was posted to go to back to UK to specialise in gunnery and all executive officers specialised with the long training courses in navigation or communications or gunnery or torpedoes and so on. And I was chosen for gunnery and was delighted to be selected and so I went back and arrived back and I went back in the Sterling Castle which was sheer luxury you know it was absolutely incredible. I had a

07:30 comfortable cabin, shared cabin, went back with a chum and he also went back for the gunnery course and arrived back in England just before Christmas '45.

And just before you carry on with that – I was intrigued that you were in Tokyo straight after the war and what was the response of the Japanese towards the people? What was that like?

08:00 Well where I was and I what saw there was no sort of people throwing anything or doing anything. I don't think one assessed, one didn't really take much notice in actual fact. The war was over and they were finished and that was that at that time. If we were in a state of shock from the fact of the war finishing they must have been in an increased state of shock in

08:30 the Tokyo area because they had been subjected to all manner of bombing for quite some time and so it didn't really, I personally didn't really see too many of them at that time no. I don't really have much recollection of that very brief time in Tokyo Bay.

What would be your most vivid impressions of Tokyo?

Of Tokyo?

Yes just at the time.

09:00 Well Tokyo was wrecked. It was really a mess. You know there was not much standing around.

What was your response to the fact that atom bombs had been dropped? Do you remember what you –

We were delighted. Anything to bring this thing to a stop. Not knowing the consequences of having to land, not really understanding the consequences of continuing the war back possibly in the Japanese

09:30 homeland where I think people rightly assessed we could have lost tens of thousands of people. So if that brought the thing to a close we were delighted, anything to stop this mess.

And were there big sort of celebrations on board the ship? Did you have a big party to celebrate the end of the war?

Yes we did in a way. We in the wardroom officers were lucky because we had a beer. We had a stock of beer on board and so the ship's company

10:00 had some beer as well. We weren't the only people but we did throw a wardroom party on the quarterdeck of Shropshire and we invited 20 officers from each American cruiser and 10 officers from each destroyer in the harbour and that of course mounted up and I think we ended up with about 400

people on board. So we had the beer iced and so on and so the party went on and it was interesting at some stage in the party somebody

10:30 spotted two people dressed in a lieutenant's uniform who we hadn't really recognised as Australian officers before and so it transpired that these were two stokers from down below who had gone into one of the engineering lieutenant's cabins and taken a shirt and some shoulder pads and put it on and thought they'd come down and join the party. So they brought before

11:00 the commander the following day I think it was or the day after for being in an improper place or some likely problem and I remember that the commander said to them did you enjoy the party. Oh yes sir we did. He said good. He said the party cost each wardroom officer 35 shillings so

11:30 you will pay your share. Fined 35 shillings each and that was it which I thought was great judgment at the time.

We'd better move on. So you go to England to the specialist gunnery course and you're there for a couple of years. What were you doing there? What was different?

I was actually on the gunnery course at the Royal Naval College in

12:00 Greenwich from January till March '46 and then after some leave we went down to Portsmouth to the Royal Naval Gunnery School at Portsmouth known as HMS Excellent and we spent a year there until March '47 completing this gunnery specialisation course. On graduation from that I was allocated exchange service with the Royal Navy for two years and I

12:30 was offered to go out to the Persian Gulf as it was then in a small minesweeping squadron really without any guns which I had just been trained in. It had small pop guns and so on but having served in the tropics for quite the most of World War II, the thought of going to the heat of the Persian

13:00 Gulf in non air conditioned ships really didn't attract me at all and so I said, the alternative was to go to the Royal Naval Gunnery School at Devonport in the west country and so I opted to go down there and I had two very, very delightful years in the west country. That was good fun. It was probably the time we got to get back some balance into our lives

13:30 because coming out of the war I think at the end of '45 straight into fairly concentrated study for this gunnery course there was nobody counselling one to say how do you feel so you just got on with life and that was the way it was. I don't know what we would have done if we'd had counsellors. But I think to then relax in the west country, relatively relax

14:00 and carry out balanced duties and got a lot of sport and the west country environment of England of course is renowned. Lovely places Devon and Cornwall. You know it was a great two years it really was. Then I came back to Australia in '49 when the aircraft carrier Sydney came out for the first time. She had finished building. She had done her trials etc in England with the air group the 20th carrier air group the first carrier air

14:30 group we had and she loaded up with stores and aircraft and so on to bring to Australia and I came back on passage. Just saved the government money to travel grey funnel and came back and it was the first time of course I had been home really although one dropped in during that period '43 to '45 I didn't really move around the country much. So when I came

15:00 back in '49 it was the first time that one had sort of started to say I wonder what is this Australia place is all about because having left at the end of '40, I can't say I was away the whole time but on the other hand the opportunity to look around the country, to see it and to sort of find out what was happening elsewhere other than just on your ship when you came in during the war was another phase of one's life. It was quite interesting really and

15:30 I can remember actually walking ashore in Jervis Bay when the ship was unloading, the carrier was loading its aircraft, offloading its aircraft at Albatross, the airbase at Nowra, Fleet Air Arm headquarters taking a walk around the road leading to Nowra and looking over Jervis Bay and saying to myself you know this place is quite attractive isn't it. You know I had

16:00 lost the feel of the country and its beauty or had forgotten a little bit about it so to speak.

How long were you in Australia before you went to Korea?

Well when I came back I went ashore to the gunnery school here in Flinders Naval Depot until January 1950. Then I took over the duty of

16:30 gunnery officer HMAS Sydney the aircraft carrier in January '50 and stayed there until March '52. During that period the ship came back to England or went back to England to pick up the 21st carrier air group so we had two air groups at home and then in 1951 we deployed to the Korean War and I think it was about August, July/August '51 and we operated up there and

17:00 got back in March '52.

So did you expect to be serving again so quickly, to see action again so quickly?

Well I don't suppose I did but the Korean War occurred and one was sent up there. It was a case of get on with the job. That was it. United Nations effort at that time and you know you had all many nations up there

17:30 operating. I don't suppose one had thought about it but at least you had some experience of conflict behind you albeit it was different operating an aircraft carrier offshore to supporting landings or what we had been doing before. But it was fascinating operating out of the carrier with the aircraft supporting the ground troops and interdicting the enemy supply lines down to the fighting area and so on.

This was obviously the first time you had been on an aircraft carrier.

18:00 Yes it was.

How was it different from the other ships that you had been on?

Well in an aircraft carrier your main armament is aircraft and a very secondary armament is the, you see we had only had some 40 millimetre anti-aircraft guns in Sydney so it was a totally different job really. There

18:30 was no main armament of 8-inch and that sort of thing to look after and one's gunnery was focused on getting the maximum support to the aircraft on the flight deck by that you mean ammunition and bombs and rockets which they were using you know to drop and fire ashore. So it was a fascinating role. It gave one an insight into the value of seaborne air power.

19:00 Something of course which I am to realise many years before from being sunk in Repulse when we didn't have any air either from shore or from sea. So it was good to be able to see this actually in action and how it operated and learn about the whole business of air power at sea. Well perhaps not the whole business but our capability such as we did we our relatively

19:30 small 20,000 ton aircraft carrier. But the pilots demonstrated great courage and professionalism up there they really did. They flew some record number of sorties and day ops and so on in various places. We lost some. We had lots of aircraft damage from small arms fire and so on but it was a very interesting period and also one thing that one experienced, I'd been on

20:00 sort of the end, tail end of the typhoon in the Philippines in Leyte Gulf in October 44 but we were in Sasebo ammunitioning and a warning of a typhoon came through and we sailed at about three in the afternoon which in a way was a bit late to get sufficiently far offshore to get away to give you sea room to manoeuvre in as far as you can in a typhoon. Anyway it

20:30 was about late in the afternoon and it was whipping up and we were out of course at sea and we spent a most uncomfortable night at sea with huge waves in relatively restricted waters and we lost, I think we lost some aircraft over the side. Some sort of damaged themselves and crumpled wings and things because when a ship rolls it puts forces on the wheels,

21:00 the oleo legs taking the wheels of an aircraft. They are built for sort of fore and aft landing and taking off pressures. You waggle them from side to side eventually they will sort of like a leg break you know and once they broke of course the lashings on them on the flight deck would go slack and they'd move and bang and eventually the lashings would part and because

21:30 this was going on all night certainly until about four in the morning and we lost, I think we had about seven aircraft damaged or lost over the side. So we looked a bit of a wreck when we got back into Sasebo Harbour the following afternoon. It went over during the night but it was a very uncomfortable evening I must say.

Just tell me a bit about the sort of operations you were doing there and

22:00 **how the planes were used, just a little bit about that in more detail.**

Well first of all you put up a combat air patrol to protect your own carrier and force against enemy aircraft which could have come down from up north but it didn't fortunately. We were interdicting their supply lines ashore on roads and tracks or wherever railings. By interdicting I mean

22:30 bombing bridges, blowing up tracks, trains if you saw them or one thing we interdicted was a thing, ox carts. They had lots of ox carts in North Korea and you never really knew what the North Koreans were using them for, transferring ammunition and so on. You never knew quite whether you were hitting a good farmer's ox cart loaded with vegetables or whether it was loaded with ammunition. However, you couldn't chance it so you

23:00 interdicted all this. So there was the combat air patrol, there was the interdiction of the enemy supply lines and there was the ground support for the troops at the front and we actually supported the Australian team up there ashore. But of course we wintered over. We got up there in late autumn and winter hits there, it comes down out of Siberia with a hell of a

23:30 front and then you've got winter. It's like sunny as it is today outside and 5 o'clock in the afternoon or 3 in the afternoon the front will come through and tonight you have winter and that's it. It happens quickly. So we then had aircraft the flight deck some photographs of a ship operating, well actually the

aircraft there and snow on the flight deck and so on it was

24:00 bitterly cold and we always seem to manage to or did in the past tense in those days manage to deploy our ships to extremes of climate without really ensuring that they're actually clothed to combat the cold weather and so there was some, some of our flight deck crews were less than well

24:30 covered I think for some of the operations. But it was interesting. Typhoon and the winter. I think we were all quite glad to get back to Sydney in March '52.

There were two types of planes you had on the carrier?

We had Fireflies and Sea Furies. The Sea Fury was the fighter aircraft. It was an absolutely first class aircraft and the Firefly was a little slower but

25:00 also did a great job up there. They were both very good at that time.

Korea it was a war, it's sort of been called the forgotten war. What was your kind of perception of that?

Well actually at the time of course it was a war. I came back and I went back to the gunnery school and then complained because I felt I still hadn't

25:30 had, I had a long time ashore in England, I wanted more sea time. So in November '52 I went back to Korea and joined the destroyer [HMAS] Anzac as the gunnery officer in this modern destroyer Anzac and we remained deployed in Korea until the armistice in June '53. After that we came home. The Korean War has been dubbed the forgotten war in the years since mostly I

26:00 think probably from about the 70s onwards mainly because from a veteran's point of view people knew about World War I veterans and everybody knew about World War I and people seemed to know about World War II and then of course in the late 60s and 70s we had the

26:30 Vietnam War and everybody knew about the Vietnam War and they would talk about those three and people never seemed to refer to the fact that we actually had a lot of people operating in Korea in the Korean War 1950 to '53. It was never spoken of, never referred to. It almost seems that we'd never been there and so it was forgotten, it was overlooked. You know it

27:00 was out of focus in our history and in our talk about veterans, in our recall of military history nobody ever seems to refer to the Korean War. So hence the title forgotten because they just left it out and I think also it was left out because it wasn't perhaps, it certainly wasn't as controversial in our participation in the Korean War as participation was in the Vietnam War.

27:30 So Vietnam discussions completely overshadowed it. I think that's roughly why it happened that way.

And how do you think the Korean War was important in the development of the RAN [Royal Australian Navy], of the navy? I mean do you think it had a significance?

I think, I think you know to, we acquired our first aircraft carrier in 1948.

28:00 '49 it came out to Australia. 1950 it was operating locally and went back to get the 21st carrier air group and just about three years after we had acquired it we had an aircraft carrier the only one we've had employed in conflict off Korea and so suddenly we had our aircraft carrier in proper

28:30 use, one of its basic roles. That I think was an eye opener for the navy to see what the carrier can do, how useful it is and the value it is in supporting troops ashore and also how valuable it is in interdicting the enemy facing those troops. So I think it was a great learning period for us at that time. Destroyers carried out the same duties. Our cruisers didn't go up there so

29:00 we just had the destroyers and the frigates and a carrier up there in Korea.

Because of course we were talking the other day and hadn't really said about in the aftermath of the Second World War what the impact was on the navy because there was this realisation of the importance of air power.

You see as a result of World War II we you know it was decided during

29:30 World War II that we really should form our own Fleet Air Arm and fortunately the decisions were made and the carrier Sydney was finished and we followed it on with the carrier [HMAS] Melbourne in the early 50s mid 50s and the objective was to have two aircraft carriers. So people learnt in World War II of the value of air power at sea and the Sydney was the first

30:00 demonstration of our recognition of the need for air power at sea and then Melbourne followed that up in the mid 50s.

Had you considered flying at one point?

I think at some stage when we were off Lingayen or somewhere I remember looking, well I'd been conscious of air power of course in those

30:30 days and yes I had a hankering at one stage to join the Fleet Air Arm or to go flying but I talked to our executive officer who at that stage was Commander George Oldham, great character and we talked it over and he had been an observer in the Fleet Air Arm, I think he had served in the Royal Navy for a while but he is RAN and he said, “Oh no, Griffiths – he said I

31:00 wouldn’t advise that.” He said, “I think you’ve been selected for gunnery and you stick to that, that’s a good thing to do.” So I didn’t go flying.

And didn’t regret it?

I didn’t regret it no, didn’t regret it. To me the most important thing was having a carrier in the navy. Whether I was actually flying or not was

31:30 another matter but of course I’m talking 1944/45 when I had a desire to go flying. Little did I, I didn’t realise then of course that we were going to get an aircraft carrier but I was delighted when we did.

And after the war the links with the US navy were much stronger than with the Royal Navy, is that right?

Yes it certainly did after the war because we operated with the Americans

32:00 and the British ships in Korea and then in the mid 50s the Southeast Asian Treaty Organisation was established and also the Far East Strategic Reserve was established and we deployed ships to the Far East Strategic Reserve and those came under the command of the Royal Navy admiral in Singapore and under SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation] exercise we used to go up every year for

32:30 exercises and that again brought us into contact with American ships, American staff and so on. So there was, after World War II we operated with the Americans in Korea and then in the peacetime exercises and from SEATO exercises we eventually went on to operate in Pearl Harbour with them and then in the 60s we were getting the three new guided missile

33:00 destroyers built in the [United] States and so we worked up in the States, that brought more contact. American designed ships which we were delighted to get because they had enormous capability and so on. So yes there were lots of links and then operating in Vietnam with the Americans and the whole trend was getting closer and then of course in the early 70s I think it was '71 or '72 the British withdrew its forces from the Singapore area and

33:30 the Far East so they left us where we were with our American friends across the other side of the Pacific.

Let’s talk about Vietnam and the Hobart. You took command of the Hobart. So tell me about that. What was that like?

The story of Hobart sort of began when she was building in Bay City

34:00 Michigan in the US. We bought these ships which people have rather forgotten. American didn’t give them to us. We bought them. Hobart cost 42 million dollars US. It seemed an enormous sum at the time and I was always very conscious of damaging 42 million dollars worth of ship or the possibility of damaging it. So built in Bay City Michigan. We went down the St Lawrence Seaway at the end of the year just before it closed because

34:30 it was icing up. It gets jolly cold up there. Down to Boston, Boston navy yard, commissioned there on the 18th December '65. Did some trials outside Boston which we had to – kept the decks clear of snow because blizzards seemed to come through about every three days. Eventually got down to Norfolk Virginia, more trials. Down to Jacksonville Florida, more trials. Through the Panama, up the west coast to San Diego. California weather, the sun shines and it doesn’t rain much and so we were back in

35:00 climatic conditions we understood. And so we spent from March to about August off the west coast of the States doing trials, shake down etc and eventually got home on the 1st September '66 and the first port of call was Hobart City, very appropriate and a big welcome there, granted the Freedom of Entry of the City and so on. Up for some leave. We carried out

35:30 an exercise off the New South Wales coast I think it was in November '66. A British force had come down, a Royal Navy force had come down from Singapore. Aircraft carrier Victorious and their bigger frigates than us which had also been a contender for us to buy when we were acquiring the DDGs [Destroyers] as they were called, the Hobart, Perth and Brisbane. The more we saw of the British frigates the more we were happy with having bought the

36:00 Americans. We were much more flexible, much more capable. And so we had a very successful exercise off the coast here in '66. Christmas leave and then of course came the word that Australia was going to send a destroyer to participate in the Vietnam War. We were selected. We completed trials fairly hurriedly off the coast. The only contact with

36:30 Vietnam at that time was President Ky and his very attractive lady wife came down and they were being escorted around Sydney Harbour by Premier Askin and Mrs Askin and they came aboard and I showed them around the ship, the bridge and so on. I didn’t meet him when we got to Vietnam. And so we set off. First departure was an interesting day. It was the day we hoisted the new Australian white ensign.

Prior to that all

37:00 Australian ships had flown the Royal Navy white ensign which had the union flag in the top left and the St George's, red cross of St George. Now as you know we've got ours with the Southern Cross and so on, very appropriate and Hobart was the first ship to take it into a combat area. So anyway we sailed in March and got up to Subic Bay and then did some

37:30 exercises, familiarisation exercises, checked our organisation and then went off the Vietnam coast in April and there two or three basic roles there. You could be a carrier escort, carrier screen operating in the Tonkin Gulf. You could do naval gunfire support firings which were supporting US troops ashore or Vietnamese troops ashore or indeed the Republic of Korea

38:00 had troops down there as well and we supported them a couple of times with naval gunfire support. The next operation was to go north of the demilitarised zone on the North Vietnamese coast as it was then and interdict the supply lines down the coast. Local waterborne logistic craft and they would come down in small vessels to Hanoi from Haiphong

38:30 Harbour and supply the Viet Cong further down the coast. So we would interdict those and interdict truck convoys on roads just inland from the coast. Most of our firings on the north side were done with aircraft spotters to make sure there was no damage to villages, just looking for the military targets. We did fire occasionally when there wasn't any aircraft spotter but

39:00 that was done when the truck convoy was well removed from villages and so on. And so we spent quite some time there from March to September doing that.

This is the first time you've captained this ship?

I was the captain of the ship. It was my second command. I had commanded the frigate Parramatta in 1961 to '63.

But not in action?

Not in action, no.

39:30 **Just tell me a bit about the pressures of being captain of a ship because you're on duty 24 hours a day really. I mean you're responsible for the whole ship. Just tell me a bit about your responsibilities and the**

39:40 **pressures involved.**

Tape 10

00:25 **So we'll just pick up Guy on the question on the Hobart and you're the captain of the Hobart.**

The question was about the stresses on a captain. What I'd like to do is just to give you a bit of background of the team aboard Hobart. Many that went across to the States the mechanical engineering, the propulsion system team and the weapons team and so on and electrical engineers and so on all went across about a year before commissioning, at least a year

01:00 some more and they went on pre-commissioning training courses in the States and at various establishments and the interesting thing was that they were coming out of those training establishments having passed out top of their class in almost every field that they went into. So that was good news. It showed that there was a great professionalism base, base of professionalism in the RAN which could be adapted because this ship was

01:30 basically a quantum jump ahead of what we had in the navy at that time and from the weapon system point of view more modern systems, the gun system and the missile system and also the propulsion system was completely different to what we'd had. So the fact that our chaps could undertake the training and come out top of the courses showed there was quite a firm basis there. So anyway the team came over. We

02:00 commissioned. We got onto our trials and it all began to come together. Of course I knew the heads of departments, the executive officer, the supply officer, the marine engineer had been with me in Parramatta and my electrical engineer I had known for years and he was a brilliant fellow. And so we began with a great top team of heads of departments, a good bunch of officers all keyed up and everybody was mad keen the Hobart

02:30 would operate 150% from day one which of course you can't do but there was great determination from anybody that the job would be done well. And with this feeling certainly in the officer's group and the chief petty officers and petty officers it brought all the sailors together and right throughout our trials period off San Diego and our missile firings off Los

03:00 Angeles to the west there it all went well and the results we obtained from going through the fleet

training group were high. Our missile firings were all accurate and all kills, four missile finds. So everything went well and so we left the States and came home here with a confident feeling in the capability of the ship and what she could do and we felt I think when I say we that's all of us felt confident that she would acquit herself if called

03:30 upon. The next thing was this exercise Swordhilt off the New South Wales coast where we ran rings around our other ships, the Royal Navy ships which we were quite happy about. It showed, it confirmed our assessment of the capability of the ship and of course the capability of the ship is also the capability of the people operating all the equipment. So we came out of that. We were very happy. Then of course being sent up to Vietnam it was

04:00 the only foreign destroyer on station with the United States fleet. Immediately it instils in the ship's company we'll show them how to do it approach. That never stopped. Almost everything we did was competitive. It's the way the fellows felt about it. It was competitive.

04:30 And it was a case of replenishing at sea, it was done expediently every time and slotted in. Everything was operating as well as it could possibly, I mean at optimum level. And so when we come to the pressures on the captain under those circumstances I was very confident in the capability of

05:00 my ship's company. I was confident in what the ship could do and the more we operated in Vietnam the more we convinced ourselves that we could do it well. It is not boasting or anything like that. It's a case of a warm feeling of confidence and that stuck with us right throughout. So yes there were stresses on the captain, for instance when the shore targets or

05:30 shore guns shot at the ship about ten times. You don't sort of hang around and wait for something to hit you, you avoid it. That's a tense period but the rest of the time when we were shooting, when we were carrying out our assigned tasks I was confident that the shells would fall in the right place because the team was good and the equipment was first class. So I never

06:00 had any worry about that. So I was probably, if I had been anxious every time would we actually put it in the right place it would have been quite stressful but I wasn't anxious about it. I was confident that it would happen and I can remember just as an example which perhaps doesn't mean much to people sort of listening to this but we were at sea one day and we were called onto a target, we had a spotting aircraft, we were at sea

06:30 and because it was what we called a hot area with shore batteries we came in, we approached the target at 25 knots which is a fairly rapid speed for shooting at short targets but that's what we could do and so I turned the ship at maximum range about 20,000 yards at 25 knots and opened fire on the turn which almost normally you like to settle but I thought no we'll

07:00 open fire on the turn and we straddled for those first shots at 20,000 yards. Now you can't get better than that. And so stress on the captain, yes you're always worried about how your ship looks and how the fellows will operate and so on but you've got this great base of confidence at least I was lucky to have it and so you kept long hours. I always reckoned I worked

07:30 probably, I was awake at least 20 to 22 hours a day it seemed but you catnap for five and ten minutes and you go a long time that way. It was good to get back into port, back into Subic. It wasn't the most, there was nothing resort-like about Subic Bay and there was nothing resort-like about the only outlet for ship's company in Olangapo next door, it was a

08:00 dreadful place, but anyway we weathered through all that. So stresses on a captain not perhaps as much as people would expect it to be, not from my point of view.

I'm interested in how as a captain and this applies to the Hobart but probably even more so to the Melbourne when you take on the

08:30 **responsibility of the Melbourne given that it's a significantly larger ship. How many on the Hobart?**

I had just over 330. I think I had 334.

And on the Melbourne?

The Melbourne with the squadrons on board we had just over 1300 on board.

How do you maintain your authority which obviously you must have as the captain of the ship and at the same time develop a rapport with the sailors?

09:00 Well it's a case of, in both ships I had, let's take Hobart heads of departments. I don't go and ask the supply officer has he got enough food for eating next week. I don't actually ask the executive officer if he's got

09:30 the ship's routine upper deck maintenance and so on in hand. I expect him to do that because an experienced man, it's only if something goes wrong I will talk to him about it but basically they're all responsible people and you let them get on with their jobs and that goes right down through, right down through to your able seamen in actual fact doing some particular job. If he had been trained to do it and he can do it you don't say Smith make

10:00 sure you do so and so and so and so because Smith will say, draw breath you know why tell me that because I know how to do it. Chief petty officers, warrant officers are very experienced people. You don't sort of go and query them. You let them get on with their job. They gain confidence and so it seeps through. If you interfere unnecessarily you're

10:30 sort of nagging and picking and nagging that doesn't put anybody right at all and so you, your authority is there by virtue of your position and your rank. You don't need to be nasty or something or picky to establish that authority. I don't think Captain Nicholls in Shropshire raised his voice almost the whole time he was aboard when I was there with him for just

11:00 about a year but everybody respected his authority. They knew he was there. He didn't have to sort of nitpick around the place to show that he knew a great deal about what was going on. You don't have to do that. You can observe and if you spot something you don't bawl somebody out for doing the wrong thing at the wrong time in front of people junior to him

11:30 unless it's a total emergency but you handle it in some other way but you get the person along afterwards and say let's go back through it and see where we go wrong and what happened and why sort of business. So there are various ways. Many, many years ago in some conversation somebody said to me of course you fellows in the navy have got it made when you're at sea, you can keep your control by Naval Discipline Act which enables

12:00 you to completely control everybody all the time and I said well that might be so but if one has to resort to the terms of the Naval Discipline Act to establish your management control and operation of the ship you've lost, you've lost the bubble. It's not that way. It doesn't happen that way at all.

12:30 **That's clear in terms of the sense of authority, what about in terms of companionship and just connecting with the crew?**

Well it's interesting. Life changed considerably from my early days at sea in the 40s and World War II when I first went to sea I would say that

13:00 captains were reasonable authoritarian really in their role, management was very hierarchical and so on and there wasn't much as I could see it from a very junior boy's point of view there wasn't much contact so to speak and also around the ship you didn't see your captain very much except when he

13:30 was moving between his cabin in the harbour and the bridge at sea and I watched this in the aircraft carrier Sydney and later on and when I got my first command I decided that really the only way of meeting the ship's company because they were in various places throughout the ship when I was on the bridge or something is to take a walk and I'd follow that in each

14:00 ship, Parramatta, Hobart in Vietnam and Melbourne later on and in Hobart although you know one was pretty busy moving from A to B there always seemed to be half an hour or an hour to spare between ops somewhere and the next time we were going to shoot well one could say to the officer of the watch I'm just taking a walk around forward or taking a walk around and I'll be down in the engine room or the boiler room or something and I would go down and you would talk to the blokes and they would always

14:30 say, "How are things going?" And so you would tell them how things were going. "Have you got any problems down here?" "No, she's going right," and so on. I used to go down the boiler room 1 and 2 and then go in the engine room and you would hit the bottom plate at the bottom of the ladder next to the automatic control combustion system control console where the petty

15:00 officer was sitting watching his gauges for the boilers and he'd sort of say good morning sir would you like a cup of coffee. Well the temperature of about 110 or something you didn't really need a cup of coffee but I had one because I enjoyed being there and talking. I always had a funny feeling that if he didn't offer me a cup of coffee something was wrong. I don't know whether it was like that or not but it was tremendous walking around and seeing where people were. I don't think they minded me sort of, I

15:30 wasn't sort of prying or anything. It was just a sort of a walk round, good day and how are things going in your area. And I enjoyed doing that and I almost every day at sea one would go somewhere. Ops perhaps a day or two one might miss out for a certain reason but even Melbourne carrier was a bit more complicated as you get further away from the bridge because there's a lot of it to walk around. Nevertheless one could do

16:00 sections of the ship and say good day here and there. I enjoyed it. I think it sort of, the face of captain was known to the ship's company and I think that was important.

I was intrigued when you talked about second degree of readiness after you had been in battle and my first thought was what would you talk about and this kind of carries over into what you're talking about here

16:30 **as well, do you talk to them about their family life or their hobbies or do you talk to them about their work only? Given that a ship is such a contained community I wonder if in your every day conversations if you actually talk about things beyond the ship or is only ever about what's going on on the ship itself?**

17:00 Well from the CO's point of view and in the olden days from an officer's point of view you had to be careful about asking personal questions as they were regarded in those days. There was a sensitivity involved as to whether you were prying into a man's private life or whether you were dealing with it purely on a service basis. I think it's changed, probably changed totally now. I remember I think it was one chap, maybe it might

17:30 have been in Sydney one of the carriers, can't quite remember. I met a fellow way down the bowels of the ship in the most impossible place to work and there he was working away and I climbed down this space because I hadn't been down there for years so to speak and saw him in this thing and said, "How are things going?" And he said, "Oh not too bad, sir." I said, "Bloody uncomfortable down here, isn't it?" He said, "Certainly is," and so on,

18:00 and I stopped there and chatted about nothing so to speak for a while and eventually I said "How are things going with you?" and he said "I've got a bit of a problem at home." I gave him an opening and he said "I've got a bit of a problem," and home so and so and so and so and I said "Oh we'll get a signal off and find out what's happened." You know I think it was a birth of a child or something. So he sent a signal off and got one back a few hours later. I mean that was good contact. I enjoyed being able to help him but

18:30 if I hadn't walked down that space he could well have been worried and he mightn't have, he might not have approached somebody. So what do you talk about? Things of common interest of course. In an operational area you can talk about what you're operating around and how the equipment is going and they would ask me questions about Vietnam. Are we doing any good up here and I always used to say well it's my assessment it's very

19:00 difficult to say how much good you're doing. I tend to look at it what would it be like if we weren't here at all if all the ships weren't doing this thing how would the conflict be going. So you do things, you do talk about things, some probably light hearted. I remember one day my chief boiler room, chief stoker Alf Skinner came up to the bridge and I invited people to

19:30 come up to the bridge. I said when things are not shooting, drop up, see us up here, we can't necessarily give you all the details come see where we are and we'll point out this that and the other. So people did come up and Alf came up one day. He looked out just after we had arrived off the coast. He said, "Where's the war, Sir?" He's an old sailor from way back having been through a bit. I said "It's out there, Alf, don't worry about it, don't knock it," you know

20:00 and I think the following day we were shot at you know. So next time he came up, I said, "Is that all right Alf?"

It's interesting to hear this because Vietnam was a very complex war and I think by 1971 the majority of the Australian population didn't agree with the fact that we were there. How do you particularly as a captain

20:30 **reconcile that and inspire your troops or your sailors in this instance to go into battle?**

Well you see I was there in '67 and the anti-Vietnam feeling hadn't really developed too much by that time and I took the line that, it never really arose saying all about the unrest at home and nobody ever came to me and

21:00 said what the hell are we doing up here because we had a task to do which translated into a contribution to our side of the war and it was really for higher authority to work out whether or not we should be there. Because we were told to get on with the job you can't really do anything else other than get on with the job. And with the spirit and feeling I had in the ship's

21:30 company to do a good job we were going to do a good job. So I really didn't have to have a long discussion on the pros and cons of being in the Vietnam War. That never occurred although I must say when we came back we didn't exactly get headline cover as people do now from various places. I was required to interview the media but probably to say as little as possible without being branded a dumdum you know. So anyway it was

22:00 handled on return okay. But I didn't have the situation of having to explain why destroyer Hobart was in the Vietnam War.

So the media interviewed you to ask you about what you had done?

What we had done yes. I explained the sort of operations we'd been on and what we'd done in general terms yes.

22:30 **Were they supportive of your actions?**

Nobody as I recall on a crowded bridge with TV [television] cameras and radio mikes all over place nobody confronted me about the involvement so to speak. We were talking about the ship's operations and that's where it stayed.

23:00 **Just to go back a bit, you talked about Surigao Strait battle as being one of the most spectacular sights you'd ever seen. Could you just describe for us in a little more detail what**

it looked like in the middle of the war, in the middle of the battle?

I think of course the sight of tracer ammunition going anywhere whether it

23:30 was a machine-gun or whatever gun it's fired from is somehow, requires draws your attention you know. When in Surigao Strait as I explained we had these cruisers and battleships and destroyers across the T and you had all these ships open fire at the same time and you had all this stuff

24:00 hose-piping in to this concentration. It was really a truly fascinating sight. I doubt very much if many people have seen a sight like that as we did and of course all the other ships were seeing exactly the same thing.

What colour is the tracer?

Oh I think they're all sort of blue, blue to white if I recall something like that. They weren't red or purple or anything.

24:30 **And the bigger the shell, the broader the trace?**

I don't think so, no. Everything looked to be about the same size. I think a tracer is a tracer and that's it. It's very difficult sort of on a flat screen almost without a diagram to show the line up of the ships and how they

25:00 would have been shooting into this focal point. Of course you had these American cruisers, the 6-inch cruisers and the 8-inch cruisers fairly rapid fire. I mean I forget how many cruisers we had, four battleships, about eight cruisers and a number of destroyers so there quite a number of barrels all shooting so it was, the sky was illuminated so to speak with a lot of tracer.

And was that continuous? Was it like that for hours on end?

25:30 Oh no, no. The whole thing really was over in about what 15, 20 minutes and then there were certain actions after it but the major one sort of, you see we were only firing for about 12 minutes I think in Shropshire and the other cruisers maybe 1 or 2 minutes before us and I think the cease fire was

26:00 just after that, just off 4.09 I think it was. 3.56 to 4.09 or something like in the morning and cease fire was ordered and everybody stopped shooting.

Did you then go to look for survivors?

We didn't, not the Shropshire, not in the cruiser force. The destroyers went in to search for survivors but no Japanese wanted to be picked up.

26:30 **Why is that?**

Well that's their culture you see. You shouldn't be taken prisoner of war. You must die. That of course is one of the things we didn't understand in the days when our troops were taken in Singapore some 15,000 of them taken in Singapore you were less than a human being if you were taken

27:00 prisoner according to the Japanese culture. So they treated them less than a human being and we know the stories about all that.

You were talking about that terrific story about that young bloke who was under your command and he said I don't think I can do this any more and you were able to talk him back into it. Was there ever

27:30 **anyone who cracked under the pressure? It's such extraordinary pressure that you must be under.**

I don't think we had anybody in Shropshire. I don't recall that there was anybody in sick bay who was sort of lashed to the bed or anything like that. Never happened. I remember one young officer came up to me one day and said, he said "We're not going to get out of this." I said, "Of course we are,

28:00 the hell with this. Of course we're going to get out of this." I don't know why I was so confident mind you but there didn't seem to be much else to say. I certainly wasn't going to agree with him. He was up in my air defence position, came up to say good day and he said I don't think we're going to get out of this and we certainly are you know that was my response of course we are and he went away and he didn't forget. He wrote about it in his memoirs later on. But no I don't think we had

28:30 anybody. I think everybody was too busy to crack up.

The other thing I wanted to ask you about, I asked you what the colour of the tracer was, what was the sound like, the actual noise?

Of shells going over? Oh they roar across the top. You can hear them. As long as you can hear them they're not going to hit you but of course the sound from that, I was actually inside a control position and so you could

29:00 really hear the thump thump thump of the guns along the line of ships so to speak and our own

broadsides going off. Your shell, you don't hear your shell going away.

Does it make a loud explosive sound as you fire it?

Oh there was quite a crack bang you know. A sharp crack from a 4-inch

29:30 gun and a more rounded crack so to speak from an 8-inch and less, a boom type thing from the 15-inch. It was interesting in Repulse when we were there I remember we did a firing exercise firing at Scapa Flow when we were exercising and working up after a dockyard and they fired a 15-inch and you could actually see the 15-inch shell go away.

Would you have ear muffs?

30:00 In those days unfortunately ear muffs were something that hadn't quite been invented and so it was sort of cottonwool in the ears and I remember that was the first thing we were told, put some cottonwool in your ears when the guns fire but of course the thing was in an air defence position in Shropshire and later on an open bridge in Anzac and so on in Korea you

30:30 can't, you couldn't really communicate with cottonwool in your ears and so it never went in and so hence I've now got a couple of hearing aids. It's part of the problem. Now of course people have got better communication systems and ear muffs and things you can talk with and so on so totally different.

31:00 **I've read in a number of history books that World War II was the point in time in which naval superiority was shifted to air superiority. The air force became the dominant force as far as warfare was concerned. I'm interested to know would you agree with that and basically what are your thoughts about that idea?**

31:30 I think this is an age old argument or theory which has been proved totally wrong in its concept. No one arm of services can take over the duties of another. I don't think that's happened in the past although people might claim that it has and I doubt that it will happen in the future and in fact

32:00 right now the Australian Defence Force in 2002 are committed to their joint operations. Now in World War II there were various air actions. You see there was a great claim that the thousand bomber raids over Europe brought Germany to its knees. It wasn't the thousand bomber raids that

32:30 stopped Germany it was the troops on the ground that stopped Germany. In the Pacific war it would have never been possible to take the advances in the south and central Pacific without carrier borne aircraft. They were key naval weapon all the way along right through to Okinawa and Tokyo albeit there were bombers certainly attacking the homeland of Japan

33:00 and so on and shore based stuff but it was the carrier borne aircraft which led the push which allowed the amphibious landing to follow. So that was the key part of it. Naval air in the Pacific and land based air in the Pacific worked in conjunction with each other. In fact of course it was the naval

33:30 force for instance that when we got to the Admiralty Islands one of the first things opened up was Mokarang airstrip and Liberators were taking off there only a few it almost seemed like days but probably a week or two after the strip had been laid down the Liberators were coming through and they were taking off and bombarding the bases and truck and so on to the north. But Admiralty Island wasn't taken by air bombing from land based

34:00 air it was taken by naval forces and amphibious landing. So people when they're looking to the future and making loud claims about what this service can do and what that service can do have got to be awfully careful and people normally make comments about, and they still make them, about you don't need naval air power at sea because the air force can

34:30 cover the navy when it's operating. They don't read history and they don't translate the lessons of history into the modern scene and so World War II I think brought home to everybody the value of naval air power and the need to coordinate the efforts of three services and you know we now

35:00 get into discussions of what I think about Australian forces which is not really quite what we're talking about.

I don't know about that. I'd be interested to hear at this point in the history of Australian defence forces.

Well you see for what 30 years now there's been a claim in Australia that the navy didn't need its air power and that the navy would operate within

35:30 range or that the air force could cover the navy at sea. Well it's absolute nonsense. It was claimed in the Royal Navy the same way the Royal Air Force claimed that the Royal Navy could be covered by shore based aircraft, absolute balderdash. They proved them wrong in an exercise over there specially conducted. The navy in the UK is still planning on building aircraft carriers for naval cover at sea and shore support to the

36:00 army where they haven't yet got land based air cover. All these things are likely to happen to us. East Timor was very close I would think. So I see a need for air power at sea and that's more than

helicopters that they've got at the moment. Nobody talks about fixed wing aircraft because apparently

36:30 it's almost politically incorrect to talk about it so I don't think anybody really discusses the problem properly. It costs money but somebody will have to bite the bullet one day and do something about it because otherwise we will send naval ships in harm's way into a high risk area where the risk is wrong. The army here used to have a mobility and an amphibious

37:00 capability once upon a time. Fortunately now I think they're thinking of moving that way with mobility, ships at sea, taking passage and so on. That's good. Our army is a highly trained professional force there's no doubt about that but they do need this ability to get around and aircraft can't drop them out of the sky all the time nor can it always land on

37:30 aircraft, on airfields at the destination and nor can fixed wing, shore based aircraft always be positioned at airfields in somebody else's country. The carrier offshore positions itself in the ocean and is independent. So we just have to be careful that we keep our balance right, that the capabilities, the weapons systems of each enhance the weapon systems of the other and not

38:00 sort of we can do it all you don't need that type thing.

Do you think if we were to find ourselves in another world war that there would be, or another large scale war shall we say, that there would be the support from the Australian community in terms of finding the troops, finding the sailors, finding the air force personnel?

38:30 I'm afraid, Patrick, that's a bit of a hypothetical question, because it's impossible to see what the circumstances would be in a limited or large scale or world war for the future and so depending on those situations and depending on the attitude of the population and how they saw the need for Australia to participate. I don't think I could really answer.

39:00 **I suppose I'm interested in how you read the attitude of the population at this point in time in terms of their commitment to the defence forces.**

I think, I think the population is committed at the present time to the defence force. I think they will, if the coming budget does increase defence spending I think the population will agree with that because they

39:30 realise that the navy for instance has run ragged on the additional tasks that's been taken with coastal security and overseas peacekeeping and the Afghanistan affair. The army is also a bit thin on the ground and to keep up any reasonable force so we're not in the stage where we can suddenly send 10,000 highly trained army people to fight in a certain place. I don't

40:00 think we can do it at the moment. So I think that population realises that these unforeseen circumstances can arise. The military fellow has been expecting unforeseen circumstances to arise the whole of his life because that's the way it is. You train, you train you don't know quite what's going to happen and then suddenly out of the blue something occurs and so

40:30 you've got to be ready and readiness, there's various strategies and one of them is a strategy of deterrents and a strategy of deterrents works on the principle that you need reasonable forces to be able to counter the actions of the opposition in whatever shape to such a degree that he decides that conflict is the least attractive of his options. So you don't get into a

41:00 shooting war and the whole insurance policy of an ADF [Australian Defence Force] is to deter to the other person from starting to shoot. Once you start the shooting you've lost the bubble and you've got a completely different ball game. If you can deter the other person by virtue of having sound highly professional balanced forces, if you can deter the shooting business and stop it then that's, outweighs any cost that you're paying in a premium of that insurance policy, it really does and the moment you start shooting the cost

41:46 goes up exponentially and you lose sight of it.

Tape 11

00:24 **Guy tell us a little bit about your involvement with the aftermath of Cyclone Tracy.**

Well I was in command of the aircraft carrier Melbourne from mid '73 to – when was it? – mid '75. End of '73 to mid '75 and on Christmas Day '74 one heard the news of the cyclone in Darwin and I must say we were just sitting on our patio in Canberra at the time, a nice summer's day,

01:00 Christmas Day and I just had a feeling that things would start to move and sure enough I think within half an hour I got a call from the Chief of Staff and said, "Guy, we've got a bit of a problem, I think. If you can get up here as soon as you can." So I caught an aircraft and got there and that was Christmas afternoon and 24 hours later we sailed from Sydney and we had about I think 80% of the ship's company being recalled. They were all on

01:30 leave all over the country and there were some incredible tales of assistance that were given to members of the ship's company by police cars in remote areas running them into train stations and somebody up the north coast stopped the Brisbane Limited or whatever it was at some little siding to let this fellow get aboard. Marvellous tales of country assistance of getting people back on board. So we sailed in the afternoon of Boxing

02:00 Day and we got up to Darwin a week later. We stopped at Townsville to collect some people and some stores and got to Darwin and it was shattering I must say to enter Darwin Harbour and firstly to realise that all the trees on the western side of the entrance to the harbour were basically stripped. Everything had been stripped. It was quite astonishing. You

02:30 couldn't see there was any bark but there were certainly no leaves on anything around anywhere. And then of course you began to focus on housing and so on ashore through binoculars and you could see some of the damage on the north side where all the tops of the houses had been removed. So anyway we anchored and I had taken up 15 helicopters. Very quick work by the team at Nowra. They had taken all the anti

03:00 submarine equipment of these helicopters and left the compartment there for either transporting stores or people. So I had taken 15 helicopters up. I forget when I landed those on board. It must have been late in the afternoon of Boxing Day I think. It was a tremendous effort by, or did they come up, doesn't matter. Took them up and so Admiral Wells was the flag officer on board. He was my boss. He had a meeting ashore. I think General Stretton had left the day before we arrived so he had a meeting

03:30 with the local people to find out what assistance they needed. But we weren't the only naval ship up there. I think the tanker Supply there and destroyer Hobart maybe Perth and others. We were allocated, they needed assistance in restoring power to various places and emptying out freezers

04:00 which had all packed up because the power had gone off and all the food was bad and had to be taken out and dumped and buried and so on. So I sent ashore shipwrights and all my engineering team so to speak wherever they could work ashore they went ashore. We used to send those in by groups in helicopters to various places. We had a sort of workforce with a

04:30 number of people in groups of ten and I went ashore one day and we concentrated actually up in the north Nightcliffe area, north of Darwin to try and clean up some of the mess around the houses because if you realise, it's difficult sorry to realise that when a person was in a house and it was demolished all their trinkets and everything that were in the house were

05:00 swept away and blown away over the adjacent property or their property and their lawns and so on. Everything that a person would have had. And so there was this stuff lying around because nobody had touched it and nobody would pick it up and there was timber everywhere and glass all over the place. So we sent in work parties to try and clean up some of this and worked down a street and put all this stuff together and collect all the valuables and record them and transfer them into the central area for

05:30 storing and that sort of thing. It was a big operation and we used to land I think about 400 people a day to work around the city. So this went on for quite some time. It was interesting. One day I went ashore with my wardroom team, I thought I had to see what was going on so I went ashore in a pair of overalls just like everybody else and did a working day. It was

06:00 hot and uncomfortable but we were out at a hotel out in the northern side of Darwin, it had been wrecked and there was stuff strewn all over the place in the courtyard and so we were cleaning up beams and bits of roofing tiles and all that sort of thing, getting the junk out of the way so that somebody could walk around this place. One of the boys said to me you'd better not go down to the room down there sir and of course naturally one had to go

06:30 and see what was going on. It was the bar. It was full, at least 8 or 10 Darwinians, they were all enjoying a morning jug of beer and we were outside slaving away cleaning up their hotel. So anyway we just got on with the job. There was no altercation and nothing to be said. I imagine that many of those folk were in quite a state of shock even a week later

07:00 because many of them, rows and rows of houses, I flew over some of the suburbs in a helicopter, got one of the choppers to take me out you would just see red platforms of jarrah flooring. That was all that was left on the top of the house was the red jarrah floor. Very attractive wood but no house around it. There was terrible destruction.

How long did it take to clean up?

07:30 Oh we had to leave. We left, we got there when was it about 2nd January I think and I think we left two weeks later because we had a schedule to meet. We had a big international naval exercise at Pearl Harbour coming up so we had to go back and pick up aircraft and do flying training and get the squadrons on board and prepare the ship to go across the Pacific to Pearl Harbour. So we couldn't stay any longer. Other naval ships stayed

08:00 up there quite some time landing groups of workers. But it was a very interesting time. It was an interesting reaction. And as luck would have it just prior to Christmas before we stopped running we

had been through a disaster relief, a disaster relief exercise, how to set up the ship and control

08:30 our operation in a situation just like Tracy. But we had carried out one of these things in Jervis Bay landing people by boat, etc., etc., etc., communications, getting it all squared away and running the ship just normal from the ops room as a wartime organisation and lo and behold Tracy turns up so we just put the thing together and we went up there and away we went.

Be careful of what you plan I guess.

That's right, that's right. It was the most interesting thing you know and

09:00 quite rewarding for the ship's company because they were helping a lot of people and a tremendous number of people were disadvantaged in the cyclone.

The other interesting thing and I wonder if this is related to your talking about your relationship with your sailors on the Hobart and Melbourne, everyone we speaks to talks about the Australian forces as

09:30 **having a much more egalitarian sense of their being together. You know that the ranks can always talk to each other easily. I'm just wondering if you recognised this shift in comparison with say your experience on the Repulse and obviously time changes things as much as anything else but even the World War I guy we spoke to talked about Australians being different even back then in 1915. And were**

10:00 **you aware on the Repulse of being part of a British ship and do you think that then formed how you then ran your ships as a result?**

I think as I outlined earlier we were very aware of being aboard Repulse and part of the big ship's company and there were only five Australians on board. Of course we were pretty proud to be in a battle cruiser with the

10:30 Royal Navy in the battle cruiser squadron and we were very proud to be at sea in the ship and of course being our first ship you tended to think well all ships operate like this. This is the way it is and you accepted it at the mature age of 18 and a midshipman you're really not arguing the toss as to whether it's right or wrong or whether something is better than others.

11:00 You get on with it because that's the way life was. You then see an evolution taking place evolving, changes evolving over a period of time and there's no doubt about it in the 43 years that I was in the service right from college, beginning of college to the end quite considerable changes in the service and there have been considerable changes since I left in 1980.

11:30 But I like to believe that the professionalism now if anything is probably better than the professionalism we had in the earlier days. It's no good looking back and saying well the navy isn't what it used to be when I was a boy, it was an old sailor's expression the navy isn't what it used to be when I was a boy and the only answer to that is thank God it isn't you know. It's got to change with the times. It's got to get up there and move.

12:00 Modern weapon systems. Modern tactics. Modern problems. Social and international problems all change and they're more complex now than they were before and a much more sharper reaction to handling them and the defence force has to got to fit into all this. Got to be trained to handle that situation not just firing the guns or the missiles but handle the situation in which you are present to be able to do that if required but endeavour to

12:30 avoid it at all costs and handle the local situation such as I think our boys are doing. I mean I think they do it well. I mean, look at the army in East Timor. I mean they handled that magnificently I think. Somebody shot at them they gave them a lesson, don't do that again or you'll get hurt but basically they won the population over by their manner of addressing the problem and that's what they do well. And sailors were ashore in Dili as

13:00 well. People forget that and sailors get together and also help in that manner and they're good at that too, very good.

13:21 This is a photograph of my term at college. We joined on the 28th January 1937. There are 17 of us in the photograph. I'm third from the left in the back row just up here and our term officer Lieutenant Commander Wright is there in the centre and we went on, 17 were chosen that year out of some 480 applicants around the nation. We were aged 13 in that photograph.

13:55 (PAUSE)

14:38 This photograph was taken in 1939 when we were just progressed a couple of years in our training so it would have been at the end of '39 so we were approaching what, let me think, 15, 16, 16 years of age and I am just here in the second row just there.

15:03 I could point out if you like the other fellows who were with me in Repulse. There was John Austin, Bob Davies who was lost, he went down with the ship and mentioned in despatches, Bruce Dowling, myself and then we come to Peter Gyllies here on the left front row, he was also with us. We formed the five

aboard.

15:53 This photograph was taken in December. I think it was about 13 December 1940 just after our graduation parade at Flinders Naval Depot out of the Royal Australian Naval College and a group of us out of the term, not everybody, talking to Commander Lowden-Shand was the commander of the college. He was on the right. Once again, myself here in the centre, Peter Gyllies in Repulse is this one here second from the right and John Austin on the right. Just the three of us out of the five in Repulse.

16:54 This is a shot of Repulse at anchor in Scapa Flow I think probably before we joined and it shows the after end of the ship under this teak quarterdeck. This is Y turret here with the two barrels obviously under maintenance. The hills of Scapa Flow are in the background. Just to point out that it was under this area of the ship here, this after end of the area coming down to the rear of the ship that midshipmen lived under here right at the stern of the ship. We had our midshipmen's, the gun room, the training room and our sort of chest flap extended down there where we slung our hammocks and kept all our personal gear and so on.

17:55 This is a shot of Repulse showing a canvas swimming bath temporarily erected on deck. Obviously we were on our way south in one of our convoys probably to South Africa and the pool, I can just remember the way he stands this is Peter Gyllies here in the white trunks. I think this is John Austin over in the corner over here and I think I'm down sitting over in the corner here. I'm not sure who the others might be but we certainly took advantage of a cooling down. That's salt water yes straight out of the ocean. Fill it up from the ship's fire main.

18:45 This shot was taken aboard HMAS Vampire after it picked up survivors from Repulse and pictured in the photograph here we have Captain William Tennant with his jacket off. He's got a wound on the forehead up here somewhere. They're sitting on the depth charges right on the stern sheets of the destroyer and the chap on his left is Canon Bezant, the Protestant padre on board, who strangely enough seems to have ended up with his wristwatch on and also his glasses intact, which we often wonder how it was managed but presumably they fitted snugly and he didn't get them washed away.

19:40 This is a photo of the destroyer Hobart taken alongside in Boston navy yard in Massachusetts and it shows the commissioning ceremony on the December 18th 1965. It looks a nice clear morning but in actual fact it was slightly overcast and the temperature was 34 degrees Fahrenheit. It was very cold and you will notice that we're all just in normal uniform here and here and we didn't have any warm duffle coats, etc., to put on so we decided to bear a grin and bear it while the commissioning ceremony took place. Small VIP [Very Important Person] group up here and I addressed the ship's company here and there was of course a handover. A group, small group of friends and relatives here because some of the chaps had their wives and families over and some other visitors across this side. After this the ship's company moved on board and we lived on board.

This was the same company that went to Vietnam?

The majority of them yes. There was a slight change when we got back to Sydney but generally speaking that was the group.

21:08 This shot is taken when the ship is alongside the naval base, the US naval base at Norfolk Virginia. We were told when we were in Boston being subjected to blizzards that when we got to Norfolk it was south of the normal snow line. Well it wasn't. We had some blizzards and in this piece of Chesapeake Bay here on the right it had been covered with ice when we were there as well so it shows there was very cold weather with that northerly wind blowing made it even colder.

21:55 This shot is taken in January '67 when the ship was alongside at Garden Island. President Ky, the President of Vietnam and his wife visited Australia on an official visit and I was asked to show them around the ship which I did. We are seen here on the bridge and just in the background here is Premier Askin who was you know the host to President Ky when he was in Sydney.

22:48 This is a shot taken I think about 2 or 3 days after we arrived in Subic Bay. On the left of the photograph is Vice Admiral John Hyland who was the commander of the United States Seventh Fleet. He had flown down from his base in Japan via Guam to Subic actually especially to welcome us to his fleet. Lieutenant Rob Walls who later went on to be Vice Admiral Rob Walls and behind me is my first lieutenant Ian James.

23:27 This is a shot of a family reunion on the gangway on our return from Vietnam after six months deployment showing our son – also named Guy – on the left, and daughter Erica in the middle, and my wife Carla coming up the gangway with the kids. It was a great day to be home.

24:16 After the ship returned from Vietnam in September '67 I left her and then at the end of '67 I was posted to Kuala Lumpur as the naval adviser to the chief of naval staff of the Malaysian navy and whilst I was up there it was until 1st May 1968 that I received a signal from the Australian Naval Board which reads the Governor General under this authority from Her Majesty has approved the award of the Distinguished Service Order to Commodore G R Griffiths DSC, RAN for devotion to duty in the presence of the enemy as Captain of HMAS Hobart on operational service in Vietnam waters. The Naval Board congratulates Commodore Griffiths. I was Commodore rank.

25:14 This shot shows Admiral Baumberger who I think at the time was Vice Admiral, he was the deputy chief of the US Pacific Fleet. This shot is in Sydney and he's just presented the ship with the United States

Naval unit citation for meritorious service in Vietnam and I had flown down from Kuala Lumpur where we all paraded in the Domain and he presented this citation to me in the middle there. This shot shows Admiral Baumberger speaking prior to the actual presentation in the Domain and also in the picture we have Rear Admiral John Crabb who was known as Rear Admiral Buster Crabb better known. Great fellow. He was in command of the fleet at the time and on the right of the picture is Senator John Gorton who I think in '67 was still, no he wasn't Minister for the navy but he had been in the acquisition of the ships earlier in the 60s.

27:00 This is a photograph of HMAS Melbourne. I think at this time we were off Pearl Harbour and just a general shot of the ship with some of her aircraft on deck. A4 Sky Hawks jet fighters ground support aircraft forward, S-2 Grumman tracker aircraft here amid ships, with the helo [helicopter] right aft. That was the squadrons that the carrier had on board at that time.

28:00 This is a shot in Darwin when the ship had gone up as part of the disaster relief operation when the navy helped Darwin. It was taken out probably in the Nightcliffe area showing the devastation of the houses in the background. On the left of the photograph here is Rear Admiral David Wells who was fleet commander at the time and just showing two members of the ship's company of Melbourne who were working in clearing up the demolished houses. We realised that when the typhoon had demolished these houses of course everybody's personal bits and pieces were strewn over the ground and work parties cleaned this up, took the valuables, accounted for them and locked them away and they eventually went back to sort of lost and found area in Darwin and many people got their valuables back.

29:06 This is a helicopter shot which perhaps shows a little more of the devastation and if one flew over many areas of Darwin they were like this. The houses and their goods spread all over the yards and plots around them. In one area – in one suburb – if you flew over the houses, all you saw were patches of red wood, red flooring, jarrah flooring. The whole of the top of the house had been removed. It was the only thing that was standing

29:50 left.

INTERVIEW ENDS