

Australians at War Film Archive

Hugh Molyneux - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

- 00:53 **Hugh, thanks so much for your time. Can you begin by sharing with me just an overview of your life, where you were born**
- 01:00 **to where you are now for about 10 minutes?**
- I was born at Coburg in Melbourne. Well, actually I was born at the [Royal] Women's Hospital, which is at Carlton. Everybody was born there, don't have any memories whatsoever of that. My first recollections of my early days were as a youngster living in Brunswick in Melbourne, went to school there at North Brunswick State
- 01:30 School, West Brunswick Central School for Boys, Coburg High School. War started. I remember that day, funnily enough. I can remember big headlines on the paper and I can remember my brother having me on the bar of his bike riding around reading these things. It didn't affect us a great deal.
- 02:00 I do recall on one occasion being at an aunt's place in Brunswick and all of a sudden hearing noises, and looking up, and seeing an aircraft flying over with anti-aircraft guns firing at it. I recall another time being on a train and going through...I think it was North Melbourne Station and there was a factory of some sort. It might have been a granary
- 02:30 or something like that, with an aircraft poking out through the roof that had crashed into it. That's about my memories of the war in Melbourne. My mother died when I was about nearly 13 and we moved up to Gippsland to a place called Brandy Creek, which is somewhere between
- 03:00 Warragul and Drouin. I went to Warragul High School. I got my intermediate certificate, which was a fair old thing in those days. So that was at the end of 1944, went back to school the following year to do leaving certificate, didn't like it much.
- 03:30 I had done bookkeeping at school, so I went around all of the local banks to get a job, refused at every one of them because it looked as if the war was going to finish in the next few months and they'd have to keep the jobs for the blokes coming back from the war. So that was the end of my bookkeeping career. I got a job at the local timber and hardware merchants, funeral
- 04:00 directors and undertakers. I was a shop assistant in the hardware section. It's still there too, J A McGilton Proprietary Limited. I stayed there until I was about 17 and a half. A mate of mine and I, we got the urge to join the navy.
- 04:30 His urge faded out and mine kept going, so I finished up...at that time you could join the navy for two years but by the time we procrastinated for a while and got old enough to join, they'd suddenly put it up to 12, 12 years' engagement. So I decided that I would. I wanted to be a pilot. They were just starting the Fleet Air Arm and
- 05:00 they said that because I'd had a bit of low blood pressure, they said you can't come in as that but you can come in and change over, one of those famous things that they use when you're joining the services. So I joined the navy as a naval airman, actually 56 years ago less about eight minutes. A rather strange thing happened
- 05:30 there. I had a letter asking me to report to HMAS Lonsdale at nine o'clock on Friday the 5th of February 1948. So I left my job at Warragul, caught the train down to Melbourne and there I was. I walked in and they said, "What do you want son?" I said, "Well, I'm here to join the navy." They said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, I had to come in here at nine o'clock." They said, "No, No!
- 06:00 You've the wrong day. Come back Monday." I said, "Well I can't very well do that because I've come down from the country. I can't get back there and back down here by Monday etcetera, etcetera." This was my first run-in with officialdom in the navy really. They said, "Well you've got it wrong." I said, "Well I haven't got it wrong. I've got a letter and here it says Friday the 5th,

- 06:30 nine o'clock." I didn't know it at the time but this bloke was a petty officer, so he disappeared and he came back with a lieutenant. They read the letter and read the letter over again as though they thought it was going to change. They decided that they'd made a mistake and so they wrote me out a leave pass. They gave me a little blue bag about so long to put my things in and sent me away for the weekend, so my first 72 hours
- 07:00 in the navy I was on leave. I went back on Monday morning and there were people who had come from everywhere, Western Australia, Queensland, everywhere. We were all sworn in, on a train down to Cerberus. That didn't last very long. We were only at Cerberus for three or four months and we were put onto a troop ship, HMAS
- 07:30 Kanimbla. We all went over to England to do our training over there. At that stage the Fleet Air Arm was just starting. The naval air station at Nowra wasn't commissioned until October I think it was, that year, so we went over to the UK and we trained over there for several months, 20 odd months I think it was. I came back to here and

08:00 how deeply do you want me to go into this lot?

Just over the top and we'll come back in more detail.

- OK, well I came back to Albatross and all fired with enthusiasm. I'd done all of this training etcetera and I was given a pretty important job working in the dining hall washing dishes, and
- 08:30 cleaning tables, and all of that sort of thing for a while. Then I started working on storage aircraft. Back in those days the government could afford to buy a lot of aircraft at a time. Believe it or not the Sea Furies and Fire Flies that were the current aircraft, doesn't seem much now but I just read recently that they cost 80,000
- 09:00 pounds each, 160,000 dollars you know? Anyway, these stored aircraft were cocooned. They had a sort of a plasticky rubbery covering all over them and I was looking after all of those. I went off, did a couple more courses at Nowra, next thing I was posted to
- 09:30 816 Squadron, which was all very run of the mill and all of that sort of thing. I went down to Melbourne, got married, came back and found that 816 Squadron, which I was just about to join, was going to go off to Korea any time. So before we embarked I was transferred from there to a Sea Fury Squadron,
- 10:00 still went to Korea on board HMAS Sydney and spent several months us there on a frontline squadron, 805 Squadron. I came back again. What was next? I think in the scheme of there, the coronation trip to the UK for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II came up and
- 10:30 I was by this time, I was on a Fire Fly Squadron, and a couple of months before we were due to go, I was posted off to another Sea Fury Squadron, which was forming up for yet another trip up to Korea. So I didn't go on the coronation trip. I stayed behind here. We formed up 850 Squadron, which was mostly Australian maintainers but it had a
- 11:00 Royal Navy crew and we did various training around Nowra, went on board HMAS Vengeance, up off the Queensland coast training up there, back again. Then after the Sydney came back, away we went off to Korea again. While we were up there the second time the peace or whatever, the ceasefire
- 11:30 took place, so we came back again. That was about '54. '55 we were returning the Vengeance to the UK, so I was posted over to UK and a very uneventful trip on the Vengeance because we spent our time cleaning the ship up ready to give back to the Royal Navy.
- 12:00 When we got to the UK, we went to a Royal Navy air station at Yeovilton in Somerset, which I did know because I'd been there before for a few weeks, for courses. We formed a Sea Venom Squadron using Royal Navy aircraft because the Australian ones were still being built at
- 12:30 the De Havilland Aircraft Company and we trained there for several months. Eventually our aircraft were transported on board the HMAS Melbourne and we joined the ship, and came back to Australia on board the Melbourne. From there I stayed on the squadron for a little while, was posted off to do training, back to Albatross, back to a squadron, and
- 13:00 spent quite a bit of time. You were either on a squadron or training or something like that. I was eventually posted to do a mechanician's course, aircraft mechanician's course, which is besides doing airframes and engines, you do fitting and turning, machining, aircraft repairs, all that sort of thing.
- 13:30 I did the mechanician's course, which lasted...I'm not too sure of the time now. I think it was about 18 months or so that lasted. I was posted to an engine repair section and spent a year or so doing nothing else but pulling engines apart, and putting new bits on them. From there I went to a Quality Control Section. I stayed there
- 14:00 a couple of years and in fact I was posted back to a squadron to go back to sea, and my posting was held up, so I stayed there, eventually went to sea, and when the squadron came back to Nowra, I was pulled off the squadron, back into the Quality Control Section. By this stage we must be up to about 1964 I think. I

- 14:30 was sent over to the UK to be commissioned. I went to the Royal Naval College at Greenwich for a few weeks. From there I went down to Devon to the Royal Naval Engineering College at Manordene, was there for several months, back up round the
- 15:00 Solent area to a naval air station there and I was with an aircraft maintenance and development unit, which had a bit of a mixed bunch. The officer in charge was Royal Navy. There was another lieutenant commander, Canadian navy, a lieutenant commander United States Navy and an acting sub-lieutenant Royal Australian Navy, so I was pretty low down in
- 15:30 the pecking order there, as you can well imagine. A bit of time there, back to Australia and I moved into the Royal Australian Naval Aircraft Maintenance Development Unit, and also the RANMEB, the Royal Australian Naval Maintenance Examination Board. I stayed there for some time and eventually I was promoted to
- 16:00 lieutenant, and was posted to HMAS Melbourne in about 1966, '67, as the ship's air engineer officer, so I had quite a good time on there as the engineer. Back to Albatross again to a tracker and decoder squadron. I was the engineer on that for quite some time.
- 16:30 I was posted then to Sydney as the Superintendent of Aircraft Maintenance and Repair, mostly paperwork and all of that sort of thing, which I don't particularly like but somebody's got to do it I guess. I think I then went back to the squadron again and we started doing
- 17:00 a lot of flyaways. There were problems over off Western Australia in so far as I think the customs had heard that there was a yacht on its way from Indonesia with suspected drugs etcetera. So we were given a couple of days or less
- 17:30 than a couple of days notice, to get three aircraft ready and we flew them over to Broome in Western Australia. We operated out of the Broome Airport looking for this yacht and under pretty hard conditions. We were living in the local motel, eating lobster and all that sort of thing every day. They didn't find the suspected drug runners but they did find lots and lots
- 18:00 of illegal Indonesian fishing boats, which were coming over within Australian waters fishing for mainly trochus shell. So after we finished that, we came back again and I went off with the squadron commander and the
- 18:30 senior pilot, and we went down all of the places from Darwin almost down to Perth looking at all the airfields to see where we could take our aircraft, and how we could operate them from there, could we get fuel, was there a hospital etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. It finished up that the most suitable place was Broome because there was an oil mining recreation
- 19:00 camp there. We found we could get accommodation there, not a bad airfield. We could get the fuel we needed there, so it finished up that we started operating out of Broome. Three aircraft being supported by one of our HS 748 aircraft every couple of weeks. So I spent a bit of time there going backwards and forth. I came back.
- 19:30 I was in Sydney again working and I decided that I'd had enough, so I had done 29 years by that stage. I gave the navy away. About 18 months later I thought, "Oh it's pretty quiet sitting around the house." So I volunteered to do four years in the Emergency Reserve.
- 20:00 They were going to give me a job in Air Stores Control, which I had worked in before and quite enjoyed it, and about a week before I was due to go back, they suddenly said, "We've got a bit of trouble with our trackers, power problems, engine problems." I thought, "Oh well, yeah.
- 20:30 Your problem is your spark plugs." They said, "Oh no, no. We've checked all this." I said, "I still think it's the spark plugs." And they said, "Would you like to do it?" I said, "Yeah! Great!" The only thing they forgot to tell me was that the aircraft were in Darwin, not out here in Nowra. Of course I lived in Nowra, so up to Darwin and I used to stay up there five or six weeks and then somebody else would go up and relieve me. It finished up after
- 21:00 about three or four months having all of these troubles, I convinced them that our troubles right through had been the spark plugs. We changed to a different brand etcetera and no more problems. From there I was back at Nowra for a while and I was posted to Canberra to a
- 21:30 Fleet Air Arm Evaluation Team. At that time they were thinking of buying new helicopters, which were the...one of the contenders was the Sea Hawk, which we've now had for several years. There were a couple of other contenders. There was the English Lynx and the French Dauphin, and so we looked into those for several
- 22:00 months. Right in the middle of this big exercise that we were doing the government decided that they were going to get rid of fixed wing aircraft in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy], get rid of the aircraft carriers etcetera, etcetera. So I was seconded to a team known as the Hatchet Men to say what are we going to do with all these people that we've got.
- 22:30 It was decided in the end that those that wanted a discharge or those that wanted a transfer to the air

force or to the army, Submarine Service was pretty attractive, all of this sort of thing, we would give them the option. So I probably used a bad word when I said we would give them the option because you give somebody the option if they want to knock it back, they can,

- 23:00 whereas they didn't really have a great deal of choice. It wasn't a very nice job because you're playing around with a lot of people's futures and things like that. However I did it and I then went back to the helicopter evaluation team. They chose the
- 23:30 Sea Hawk, which has now sort of been overtaken by the Carmen Seasprite, which funnily enough was offered to us right at that time and I think they might have been the same aircraft that were being offered to us right back then as were being offered to us to be bought now. However, I then came back to Nowra as the Staff Officer of Engineering and was still sort of working with
- 24:00 this team in Canberra that was looking to see what everybody was doing but because I was the Staff Officer of Engineering I had a lot of contacts and things here, and I did that until my time ran out. I'd rejoined for four years and just to go back a little bit, at the end of the four year period when I thought, "Now what will I do? What will I do", the government announced
- 24:30 that they were buying an aircraft carrier from the Royal Navy, the HMS Invincible, straight through deck and all that sort of thing. I thought, "That's absolutely marvellous!" So I went straight over, signed on for another four years and about a fortnight later the Falklands War started, and they said, "You're not going to get that carrier." So there I was, so that took me through. I did the other four years. I'd run out of time and they'd ask me, "Can
- 25:00 you do another three months? We don't have anybody to replace you." I'd say, "Fair enough!" I'd do the other three months and just as that was coming up, something else would happen. "Can you do another six weeks?" Then in the end, I think it must have been about 1988 or something, early '88 when I finished my time and got out. I haven't had any contact...well I haven't had much contact with the navy. I went back
- 25:30 after several months I was asked if I'd go back for six weeks and do a small task into looking at what to do with old Iroquois helicopters. I did it, didn't enjoy it and I guess it was probably because I didn't get on with the boss.
- 26:00 I was an engineer. He was aircrew and in the end I finished the job and said, "Well don't call me. I'll call you" and I haven't bothered to ring back, too old now of course. So there you go! That's vaguely it.

You roughly finished up about 1988, '89?

Yeah about '88. I saw a piece of paper the other day

- 26:30 that was asking me to do a bit of extra time and I think it was over the Christmas period '87 to '88, so I think I finished in the first quarter I'd say of '88.

Excellent. An excellent overview as well. I'd like to now take you back to the very beginning and your first memories. What are your first memories of your growing up days when you were a child?

My first memories?

- 27:00 Lived in Brunswick. We moved there, I think I was about four or something like that. Once of my first memories strangely enough, I'm not dyslexic but I wrote my name on the outside of the house and I spelt it "H-U-G-H" and I can still see it in front of me funnily enough. First memories of school,
- 27:30 North Brunswick, corner of Albion Street and I think it was Pearson Street in Brunswick. The number of the school was 3585. You remember all of these stupid things don't you?

Let me ask, did you get in trouble for writing your name on the house?

Don't remember, I don't remember. My first recollections of

- 28:00 school were not sitting at a desk or anything like that but sitting cross legged in the class having stories read to us and of course back in those days, you probably had 40, 45 kids in the class, not like today. The teachers managed to control us all I guess! So I went to that school for
- 28:30 about six years. You know, I did the sort of Grade 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. They then opened us another school, which had been rebuilt or refurbished a couple of mile away, the West Brunswick School and it was renamed The West Brunswick Central School for Boys. I did two years there.
- 29:00 That was Forms 1 and 2. The strange thing about it was that this school is the one my mother had gone to when she was a child prior to World War I. Well, at the very start of the First World War my mother had gone to that school.

Did she at all reflect how the school had changed?

No, not really. From there I went to Coburg High School

- 29:30 and I had done about a year and a half there when my mother died, and we moved up to Brandy Creek near Warragul, and finished my schooling up there but nothing outstanding at school. I remember at the North Brunswick School, I decided I wanted to join the school band once and
- 30:00 so I went down there, and this bloke looked at my mouth as though he was looking at a horse. He said, "Righto you can play the euphonium." That's one of those things you carry on the side, not a great big one and he said, "Here you are. Play a couple of notes." Well I sat there with that thing and I blew, and did everything, and I couldn't even get a sound out of it then all of a sudden a bit of a blurt came, and he said, "Righto, now
- 30:30 here's some stuff. Take it home and learn all of these notes." So I went back the next week and if I had the piece of paper in front of me that told me which fingers to use I could blow some of these notes but he thought that when I went back I was going to be able to play all of the scales and all this, and he wasn't very pleased, and I wasn't very pleased, so I gave him the euphonium back, and that finished me! But apart from that
- 31:00 I didn't play a great deal of sport at school, only what we had to, pretty uneventful really.

Did you ever get up to pranks and boyhood sort of stuff with friends?

Well, we used to do things in those days that the kids of today can't even visualise. For instance we used to

- 31:30 play out in the street at night. We'd race home to hear "Dad and Dave" on the radio at seven o'clock and when that finished, out again in the summer when it was quite light. No television of course. I've often said about how if we were out on our bikes and it got dark,
- 32:00 we'd very sneakily ride home in the dark but if we saw anybody coming in any direction, you'd get off the bike and push it because it might be a policeman. He'd give you a belt over the ear if they caught you riding a bike at night without a light on it and of that sort of thing. We used to have lots of paper chases and that around the area. You couldn't do that now with pollution and that but we used to save newspapers and chop them up,
- 32:30 tear them up into little pieces, and put it into a bag made of a sugar bag, and tie it over your neck. One lot would go off leaving a paper trail and you'd give them so long, and you'd have to catch them. The street in front of our house wasn't small but it didn't have the traffic that you have now. There weren't many cars around. We used to play Tip Cat a lot
- 33:00 out there. Do you know what Tip Cat is? Right! You get a broom handle, you get a piece off it about so long and with a knife or your father's chisel, or plane if you can get hold of it, you sharpen the two ends just like as though it has been in a massive pencil sharpener. Then you get another stick about so long and this thing sits there and you hit the end of it, and because it's tapered it bounces
- 33:30 up in the air, then you belt it. Everybody used to say it was a dangerous sort of a game, so you hit that and wherever it was, you used to say, "Well I'll give you so many steps to get to it." If you could get there in that many steps, you got the score and if you couldn't, I got the score but it was supposed to be dangerous. People didn't like it just because they reckoned you could hit people in the eye with it. We used to play a lot of
- 34:00 football out in the street but of course a football in those days was a newspaper folded in, rolled up, two pieces of string and it gave you a football about that round, about so long, hard if it hit you in the face but nobody had a football, not a real one anyway! But no, we didn't do much. When I was at the Coburg
- 34:30 High School there wasn't much time to do anything. I used to travel from Glenroy. I had to catch a train in and down to the Glenbervie Station. I had to then walk up a hill to catch a bus, about a half a mile walk and the hill, they used to say that it was the steepest road hill in Victoria. It was one in four, and that is steep, carrying a load of books, on the bus over to the
- 35:00 school at Coburg. I do remember the air raid shelters in the park next to the Coburg High School because that would have been 1943 and during 1944, the early part of 1944, we had an air raid shelter in our backyard in Brunswick.

Can you describe to me the interior of both of the shelters?

- 35:30 Yeah, the interior of ours...well it was a big hole and probably ten or twelve foot long, about six foot wide. It didn't have anything on the floor, so in the wet weather it was a bit damp. It had a metal roof covered with dirt
- 36:00 and stuff. I think we had a couple of seats in there but we never ever went in there. We might have gone in to play or do something like that but we never of course used it as an air raid shelter. I do remember that right through the very centre of it, it had a pipe because right where my father and brothers decided to build this thing, they didn't realise there was a water pipe running up to the backyard, so we had an air raid shelter with a pipe running through the centre of it. The other ones in the
- 36:30 park at Coburg High, they were probably about six foot deep but they were only about two foot wide, maybe three foot wide from what I can remember, with a wooden frame. I think they were kept locked. I

don't ever remember going down in them, just remember that they were there. Another thing I can remember from that

37:00 school, the classroom that I was in was upstairs, so I only had to turn my head like that and I was looking at the wall of Pentridge, which was the prison on the other side of the road. It has closed now, closed three or four years ago as a prison but that's a pretty notorious jail or it was many years ago in Melbourne. That's my school days. School was school.

The air raid shelters, was there practice or drill?

37:30 I've got a vague idea of it now that we did use to go out but we didn't go down in the shelters. We used to go and muster outside. The only other practice I can remember is for a while I worked on Saturdays and mornings before school on a baker's cart helping to deliver bread and I remember that we used to have a big rope halter

38:00 sitting in the front of the cart that we had to put on the horse, and tie it to an electric light pole if there was a warning but we never ever had a warning.

Tape 2

00:44 **You mentioned earlier that on your bikes at night you walked them if you saw someone coming because it could be a policeman, was there an occasion that a policeman caught you riding at night?**

No, never but you knew

01:00 what would happen if a policeman caught you and it wasn't that he'd say, "Oh you're a naughty boy." It would have been a belt over the ear or a kick up the backside.

You also mentioned "Dad and Dave". What was the attraction about that radio program?

Well I think it was one of those things that had a cliff hanger every night and of course

01:30 there probably weren't many radio stations around in those days. We only had one radio in our house and it was a big thing about three foot high and two foot wide, and two foot deep, and all of that. It was very topical. You know when the Melbourne Cup was on, Dad always had a horse that he'd trained, Sox I think it was called, used to run in the Melbourne Cup, things like that. It was things that we could relate

02:00 to. There was another one I think was on about six thirty called "Martin's Corner" but I don't remember. I remember the name but I don't remember much about the actual serial but everybody knew Dad and Dave. One of their movies was on just in this last week, terrible it was!

You father, what did he do for work during those years?

During those years? My father was a

02:30 maintenance engineer at a foundry in Coburg. Do you want me to go back to his early days?

That would be great.

Right. My...well I'll have to go back a tiny bit further. My grandfather came out to Australia and brought his eldest son with him. They looked around and they were up in the gold area, Walhalla in Victoria working for a while, and then

03:00 my grandmother and my father, and the rest of the children came out from England. They all came from St Helens in Lancashire. They came out...I've never chased it up exactly but about 1911, 1912. They lived or they bought land down at Frankston and they eventually moved from there

03:30 to Coburg. When the war started they had a dairy farm and if anybody ever saw this who'd come from O'Heas Road, they wouldn't believe that there was a dairy farm in O'Heas Road in Coburg. It's like saying there used to be one in Pitt Street you know? War started. My grandfather went over to France and my father's

04:00 eldest brother went to France. He was killed in 1917 in France, no name grave. My father went to France and it was...I've got a copy of my father's service certificates. He joined the army three days after his 17th birthday and put his age up. From what I can gather from his papers and they don't tell you a great deal but he was in

04:30 France, and it was discovered that he was under the age for being overseas, so he was transferred to a bicycle corps. Then he was eventually sent back to Australia but he did about 400 and something days overseas in the First World War. So my grandfather and my father served in World War I. My uncle died there. A couple of my grandfather's brothers served there.

- 05:00 One of them died there. Then my grandfather was invalided out of the army from France with rheumatism. I gather it must have been from the wet and cold, and everything in the trenches. So I guess he was one of the first people who got onto a pension back in those
- 05:30 days. The Second World War, both my brothers served. My eldest brother, who died about four years ago now, he served in New Guinea with the air force. He was a sergeant fitter armourer. My other brother, who now lives down in Melbourne, he trained to be a pilot and, much to his disgust I think, the war sort of finished
- 06:00 before he got into doing a great deal. He had his wings and was flying. Then of course I joined the navy, so I guess you could say that...I don't know whether you'd say a military sort of family but I think that the Molyneux side of things, we've done our share I guess.

Absolutely! Just with your grandfather and his two

- 06:30 **sons, did they serve together in the same regiment?**

No they didn't. No, my father was a sapper, an engineer. My grandfather, I think it was with the 46th Battalion and David that died was with a different battalion. Of course you hear lots of stories,

- 07:00 like a cousin of mine down in Melbourne said to me, "Oh, Pop was in the frontline when they came and told him that David had died." I said to him, "I'm not too sure about that." He said, "Well, yes he was. He told me." And I said, "Well, that's funny. I've got his papers and according to his papers, when I look where he was at that date he was

- 07:30 at a military hospital in the South of England." But I guess lots of these little things change in people's memory, slips and things.

Given that your father when he joined was only just over 17, did your grandfather know that he had enlisted?

Not at the time because he was already in France. His father was in France.

- 08:00 In fact it says that on my father's papers, "Next of kin, father. Serving in France." And that his mother was his next of kin. Also amongst there is a photocopy of a little approval sheet for a son to sign to serve overseas but even though I wasn't around then, the signature looks suspiciously like my father's writing.

- 08:30 **Did your father ever talk much about his service in World War I?**

No, refused to talk about it in any shape or form.

And your grandfather?

No. World War I must have been a horrifying thing I think.

Do you think your father was scarred by that period he was serving?

- 09:00 Well, I don't know. He lost his brother and I can't remember which arm it was on now but he had a tattoo and it was a big cross, and he had "In memory of my dear brother." I don't know, don't know.
- 09:30 He never ever mentioned him, well not in the way that he was worried about it or anything like that. We were all aware of him because his name was David and my eldest brother was called David, and there were more Davids that came through the family, so obviously
- 10:00 he was always thought of a lot I think but no, I don't think so.

Given your family's association, particularly with World War I, how important

- 10:30 **was Anzac Day before World War II during those years?**

Before World War II, I can remember, going back to that state school at North Brunswick, so I would have probably been eight or nine, that sort of period, wearing my Dad's medals on Anzac Day to school. I remember we had services

- 11:00 but I don't remember much about them. I remember that there was a boy in my class at school who used to maintain that his father was killed in the First World War. He'd have been my age, so he'd have been born in about 1930 and he used to tell us all that his Dad had been killed in the First World War.

Mathematically that doesn't quite work out!

It doesn't quite work out, yeah! Still we used to

- 11:30 be very proud, wear our Dad's medals and all of those things. I was going to say I don't remember doing much at school apart from having a thing but I seem to recall going into the city with my father. That's a bit vague though, probably for an Anzac Day March. Mind you, the Shrine of Remembrance, you know the Shrine in Melbourne?

12:00 I can vaguely see that in front of me, so I probably did go to those with him.

I know you said earlier that your father didn't really talk much about the war but do you think he was proud of his service in World War I?

I don't know to be honest. To be honest I don't know.

12:30 He would never mention it and if you asked him he'd sort of say, "Oh, you don't want to know" or "I don't remember" or "No, that's it." I think you'll find that...well there aren't too many of them around to ask but I think even back in those days you would have found that was the case with almost all of them.

13:00 **After World War I when he returned home, what did he do for work?**

As I said, he worked in a foundry. He was pretty active. Both he and my mother were in the Brunswick Returned Soldiers or well back in those days it was Returned Sailor's, Soldier's and Airmen's Imperial League

13:30 of Australia. They were pretty active in that. I don't think it exists in Brunswick any more because at the period that I'm talking about there were probably only two fruit shops down the street that weren't run by Australians but when the war started they were Greeks. They'd been Italians before the war started but when the war started they all had Greek flags in their windows.

14:00 He worked at that foundry. I don't ever remember him doing anything else. He used to repair stoves. Things were tough in those days, in the thirties. When I say stoves, you know the old cooking stoves in the kitchen?

Share with me?

You don't know what I mean?

Keep going.

Keep going? Well,

14:30 there was only the odd gas stove around in those days. There was only the odd electric stove. Most people had a wood fired stove, which you cooked on the top of and in the oven. In later years they had a cast iron back on it. The front was all cast iron but in the early days it was sheet iron and it used to burn out. I can remember my father fixing

15:00 those in our back yard. He had a shed and all sheet metal stuff there, and he used to make these things, and fit them on. They used to bring the stove to you because this thing had to be made to that particular sort of stove but apart from that, at the foundry I do recall...it might sound strange now but he couldn't join the army in the Second World War because he was in a reserved occupation.

15:30 They made coffin handles at the foundry, strange isn't it?

So he had a great desire to join?

Oh yes. He wanted to join in the Second World War. When the war started he was 39. It's a bit like my... just to go back a bit. My

16:00 grandfather, his name was Hugh James Molyneux. He was born on the 15th of February 1872, so when the war started in 1914, which was August the 4th or the 14th I think, he was close enough to being 42. I think in 1914, 42 was over the age for enlisting

16:30 but they didn't ask you. Back in those days they didn't ask you your date of birth. Anyway, he went in but he joined the army under the name of Edward Hugh Molyneux and for the rest of his life and he was in his nineties when he died, he was known as Edward or Ted. We always believed that it was because he was over the age for joining. My maternal grandfather, he was

17:00 a couple of years older but he died in World War I as well. There was no room or no space on the attestation forms for the date of birth. They'd ask where you were born but not when, strange.

Your mum, how did your mum and dad meet?

17:30 **Did they ever share that story?**

I don't know exactly. No, to be honest I don't know.

Were you, when you were growing up, close to your mum and dad?

Yes.

What do you remember about your mum?

18:00 Not a great deal. As I said, I was 12 when she died. You take so much for granted. You don't even think about it for years and years later. It still upsets me.

May I ask just a couple of questions

18:30 **about how she died?**

She died of cancer and of course I would say that things were pretty primitive then. Whereas we thought they were pretty well up on

19:00 things, I guess in the forties their knowledge of things like that weren't what they are today but when you get...if you delve into history and things, lots of the Romans died of cancer as well. It's not that it's a new thing. It's probably had lots of different names over the years.

How did the death of your mum

19:30 **affect you and your dad, and your brothers?**

It affected my father pretty badly. My brother, my eldest brother was up in New Guinea at Milne Bay at the time.

20:00 He was actually brought back and he was here when she died. I recall that when he came back, I didn't know all of this going on at my age. Mum was in hospital and all that but I remember that Phil came home. He had hair an eighth of an inch long.

20:30 He was in shorts, khaki shorts and shirt, boots, had a Gladstone bag. Do you know what a Gladstone bag is? Everybody had a Gladstone bag years ago. No self-respecting man went to work without his Gladstone bag. It was a leather bag, so long

21:00 and it tapered up. When it was closed it tapered up and there were two clips at the top. When you opened it up, they would hold six bottles of beer or something like that and his lunch, and a paper, and all of that. I particularly remember my brother's Gladstone bag because it had his name and everything all painted over it in yellow paint, another one of those stupid things that for some unknown reason you remember.

21:30 Well I think it affected us all but I can't remember to any great extent and say something in particular.

Did your dad ever remarry?

Yes he did but not for...it would have been probably a good fifteen

22:00 years or so later. Yes, he married. My stepmother had never been married before, marvellous woman. She and Dad bought a place up at Menzies Creek in Victoria, which is up in the Dandenongs. She always

22:30 introduced my two brothers and myself as her sons, never any...no wicked stepmother. You know what I mean? No, she was great, great and she survived my father by several years.

Given that your mum had died when you were about 13, that would have changed the dynamics of the

23:00 **household, who would have cooked and washed? What responsibilities were given to you?**

I don't think so because when my mother died we went...and my two brothers were in the services of course, so they weren't there. We went over to Glenroy and we were living with an aunt and an

23:30 uncle, my mother's sister, one of my mother's sisters over there. We were only there a few months and then we went up to Warragul, and we were living with my father's brother, a namesake of mine, another Hugh Molyneux. It was a different set of circumstances because we were on a dairy farm.

24:00 I used to catch a bus to school, ride a bike a couple of miles, leave it on the fence of a farm, catch the bus, in the afternoon, come back, get home. By the time we got home milking was just about finished but I didn't have any great chores or things like that because you spent half your time travelling. Even after I left school and

24:30 started work, it was a five or six mile pushbike ride to get to work, which wasn't bad on a good day but terrible on a wet day, terrible on a windy day, all hills, so you'd go like hell down one side, and get off and push the bike up the other side. I remember at one time when I was working,

25:00 I saw a watch in a window. I decided would like to buy it but it took three weeks' pay to buy a watch, so you used to go and pay a deposit on it, and pay it off. What seemed to be a lot of money then...I got 15 shillings a week, a dollar fifty a week when I started work and

25:30 it gradually went up, a couple of bob [shillings] at a time. When I went into the manager and said that I was going to leave, I was going to join the navy, he actually said, "Look, if you'll stay I'll give you a rise." So in the end I said, "Yeah, all right." So my pay went up to 25 shillings a week and

26:00 when I went back a few months later, and said, "No I'm still going to join the navy." He said, "Oh well, I can see it's no good offering you any more money. You're going to go." So I joined the navy at five

[shillings] and threepence a day. So what's that, about 54 cents a day?

So financially in a sense you went backwards with your pay?

You always do with all of these things. Just to jump on again,

- 26:30 I said I was an aircraft mechanic and I finished up but before I was promoted I was a mechanician first class. You wear chief petty officer's buttons on your sleeve but you're not really a chief petty officer. The next step above it is a chief petty officer aircraft mechanician. You live in the chief's mess and all that sort of thing but you're not really a chief. When I was promoted to
- 27:00 acting sub-lieutenant, you go to the next rate of pay because there are various rates of pay for sub-lieutenants. You go to the next rate of pay over what you were getting and that looked all right. You think, "Oh I'm going to get so much extra a day." But I had three good conduct badges, which you can't have as an officer, so I lost those but they were worth...
- 27:30 I think it was ten pence a day. So there was two and six a day I lost because I'd been promoted, so out of this extra money I was getting because I was suddenly an officer, two and six of it had gone before I saw it. With the various other things I think it worked out that I finished up, I got about a shilling or something, or one
- 28:00 and four pence a day more as an officer than I did before I was commissioned. Of course by this stage I was living in a wardroom and I've got to pay mess fees, and all this sort of thing, so I was sort of running at a loss. That progressed for many years would you believe! I know I'm jumping all over the place. Does it matter? When I joined the navy
- 28:30 they didn't have a pension scheme and it was introduced, I think it was on the 1st of July 1948. At the time we were at sea on board HMAS Kanimbla on our way to the UK and the offer was made to us to join this pension scheme. We'd only been in the navy four months and we said, "No, no! We don't want to join the pension scheme."
- 29:00 That was too far off. Who can imagine doing 20 years of all of this sort of thing, whereas being 12 year men when we finished we got a gratuity of 360 pounds. So I didn't join it and there used to be lots of stories going round about the inequalities of it. You know, you get two people that joined the navy the same day and practically slept in the same bed
- 29:30 for all of the years, and yet they wouldn't get the same pension. Well when I was commissioned in 1964, I had no option. They explained to me that I was out of the navy for that much time [indicates a small amount] and because I was coming back in, I had to join the pension scheme, so they were taking five percent of my pay
- 30:00 as a contribution to the pension. Every time you got a pay rise, up would go your tax, up would go your five percent contributions and I had got to the stage where I only had to have another pay rise, and my DFRDB [Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits] contributions, and my tax would have been more than the pay rise.
- 30:30 That was the time when the Jess Report...Mr Jess was a government MP and he was given the task of doing this thing about the conditions in the services. He came up with this report and they changed the whole scheme of things. In fact they wrote to me and said, "We
- 31:00 have overcharged...because of this business of what we've been charging you with, we've overcharged you. Enclosed is a cheque." I think it was for about 1800 dollars. They said then...the letter went on to say, "However because of this change in the thing, if you wish you can buy back your time to the 5th of February 1948." I think I was wrong when I...five per cent was what it
- 31:30 finished up as. Before it was "Brrrr" up. "If you'd like to, we'll charge you five per cent of your pay back to 1948." Well in 1948 when I was getting five pound thirteen and four pence or something, a fortnight, five per cent wasn't too bad was it? So they said, "If you'd like to buy this time back, sign the form, send the cheque back and it will cost you another 200
- 32:00 dollars but you don't have to pay that. We'll just take that out of your money when you eventually pay off." I tell you what; I couldn't sign the thing fast enough. I couldn't get it in the envelope fast enough and I couldn't post it fast enough. I went from having...I got 16 years of extra time towards my pension in overnight,
- 32:30 not to be sneezed at!

I'll have to ask for a loan a bit later on!

Yeah! That was many years ago.

Let me just go back again. You mentioned the word rationing. During the war period and leading up, what memories do you have of that?

I can't remember actually what was rationed here.

- 33:00 I do remember, when I was working in Warragul I went down through the markets one day and there was a bloke running a stall there that I had known. I worked in at Myers in Melbourne, in the ladies shoe department for probably six months of a Saturday morning. This bloke was there, always dressed in a very nice suit but when I saw him at the markets
- 33:30 he wasn't so flash. He wanted to know if I could get him any butter. Well, it didn't mean anything to me. I lived on a dairy farm. Butter must have been rationed but we wouldn't have known about it, would we? If we ran short we'd have probably made our own anyway. I distinctly remember him wanting the butter.
- 34:00 I also remember that rice must have been rationed because I can remember going to a grocer's store and picking up a ration of rice for my grandfather because of his ill health from World War I, and his doctor had given him something to get this rice. Mind you, it was going to take him a long time to eat this
- 34:30 big lot of rice. Petrol was rationed of course. Petrol was rationed well after the war. We had an ex-army desert truck, four by four thing. It was a 1943 Morris and it had a very spartan
- 35:00 dashboard but about at the place where your left hand glove box would be there was a pipe coming in, and it was a tap with two pipes going off like that, one to the left, one to the right. It went to two big fuel tanks underneath each running board. I don't know whether I should be saying this here but we used to have petrol in one of them and power kerosene in the other. When it
- 35:30 got hot, when the engine got hot, you'd just turn it from the petrol to the power kerosene. It would run. It would go all right and quite legal to use on the farm but not legal to use on the road. You could always tell when somebody was doing this because they were the vehicle in front of that black trail of smoke you could see going down the road. Tyres were rationed. Petrol
- 36:00 was rationed. But when you live in a farming community it didn't matter much. As I said, I didn't have a car. My mate had a car. He had an A Model Ford, big deal! Farmers used to come in and they'd say, "Oh! Do you want some petrol coupons?" So we used to get
- 36:30 enough for what we wanted and things like that. I remember cement was rationed. There were lots of things that we sold. If you came in for a bag of cement we couldn't give you a bag of cement. Occasionally we could fiddle the odd bag but if you wanted ten bags of cement, you had to put in for a building permit and that had to be approved before you could cement sheets.

How come the farmers had so many petrol rations?

Because they needed it for their tractors and trucks,

- 37:00 and things like that. Invariably they lived out of town. You used to see cars around in those days; they wouldn't last two minutes on the road now. The tread had worn off. They'd gone through the first layer of canvas and you'd see a big patch like this, and it would be rubber, canvas, rubber, canvas, rubber, canvas, and it might be...[indicates small amount] layer,
- 37:30 and layer, and layer. You wouldn't drive from here to the front gate in the things that people used to drive around in then.

I'm not familiar with the kerosene. Why if the engine got hot would you use the kerosene?

No, no, you couldn't start the engine on kerosene. There were kerosene driven tractors but this was car, a truck engine. So you couldn't

- 38:00 start it on it but start it on petrol and when the engine got hot, you could then change over to the power kerosene, which wasn't rationed.

And was it cheaper as well?

Oh yes. I think it was. Petrol wasn't very dear but you couldn't get that much.

Coming back again to the tyres and stuff, even though tyres were rationed people would just wear theirs right down to rubber?

- 38:30 Oh they'd just wear them right down, yeah.

Tape 3

- 00:51 **Thank you very much again Hugh. I just wanted to ask you a few questions firstly about your brother. You mentioned he went to World War II**

- 01:00 **and was in Milne Bay?**

That's right.

You mentioned also that he had very short hair when he came back. Can you remember any other recollections of what your brother was like when he returned from the war?

No, not a great deal because he was still in the air force until after the war finished and he got married then. He got married

01:30 in Adelaide. My father and my other brother, and myself, we all went over by train to Adelaide, went to the wedding. Of course he wasn't living with us any more after that. He was living in Melbourne and we moved up to Warragul. OK, it's only 60 miles but back in those days 60 miles was a fair way you know? By the time you got into

02:00 Drouin to catch a train and then down to Melbourne, and then get out to...I think he was over at Moonee Ponds way, you know? Edna Everage's territory? So I didn't see a great deal of him back in those early days.

Did he ever have a chance to talk to you about his experiences?

No. Once again, didn't talk

02:30 much about it. He used to say like the only wound he got, I think he scratched himself on some barbed wire jumping into a trench at Milne Bay when the Japanese bombers came over or something like that but not a great deal.

From what you were describing earlier, you come from quite a long history

03:00 **of family that have been involved with the various wars. What were some of your motivations for deciding to enlist?**

I don't know really. This friend of mine, John Blacker, he was an apprentice carpenter when I was a shop assistant and he first suggested that we go

03:30 into the navy for a couple of years, and he wanted to be a shipwright. I just wanted to join the navy. It just sounded good and I remember when I first asked my father about it, a definite sort of no, and then in the end he came around, and said, "Well yes, if you really want to."

04:00 Anyway, we wrote away for the papers and things, then in the end John got himself a girlfriend, and I think the glamour of joining the navy went off. He eventually married the girl and he's now...he's

04:30 retired now but he was quite high up in the Methodist Church. The girl that he married, her father was...I think he was called the Moderator General of the Methodist Church at the time. I've seen him a couple of times over the years. Once my late wife was reading the local paper and she said, "John Blacker,

05:00 you went around with him when you were a youngster?" "Well" she said, "He's at the church here on Sunday." He sort of travels around and does sermons at different churches up and down the coast. He's been back a couple of times and if he's up this way he'll ring up and say, "Listen I'll call in and see you."

Back in those days when you were friends were you and he going to church together as well?

05:30 No, no, no churches anywhere near us, miles to go to a church. We used to go...at Drouin West there was a tennis court there and we used to go around, hit a ball around, all of that sort of thing. There was

06:00 a hall there. They used to have dances. We used to go to that sort of thing. There wasn't a great deal of social life.

Why was your dad reluctant for you to join the navy?

I don't know, don't know. He probably didn't want me to go away. He might have been harking back to his early days and what it was like, all of that sort of thing.

06:30 I don't remember any specific reason.

Have I got this right? Did you initially want to be a pilot?

Yes I did.

So it wasn't the navy initially, it was the air force or were you joining to be a pilot as part of the navy?

I wanted to join the navy to be a pilot in the navy.

OK. Was that a relatively new progression in the navy at that point having aircrew?

Yes.

How much did you know about it at that stage?

07:00 Nothing! [laughs] I can answer that in one word, nothing apart from seeing advertisements in the paper,

like, "Australia is going to have a Fleet Air Arm, join now as a pilot." Back in those days you could join as a rating pilot.

What is a rating pilot?

A rating is a sailor, whereas usually...it was like during the war and in the air

07:30 force, my brother that was a pilot, he wasn't commissioned. He was a sergeant pilot but the norm was for aircrew to be commissioned officers. I can't quite remember the facts, whether they wouldn't take me or they maybe weren't recruiting aircrew at the moment but come in and then

08:00 changeover. In fact it was on board HMAS Kanimbla on our way to the UK I put in to changeover and that was when they said, "Oh, you've had low blood pressure at one stage. You'll never be aircrew." I had it when I was about 16. In fact all that happened was, I think I was at the Melbourne Show one night and in the thousands of people

08:30 there, and all of a sudden everything just went black with lots of stars around. I just passed out, well not entirely passed out but you get to that stupid and woozy stage. I just got out in the fresh and it came good. Something else I went to and a similar thing. I went to the doctor and he said, "You've got low blood pressure." He put me on some foul medicine for a while and I never ever had it again, ever.

09:00 **So why were you so keen in those days to be a pilot?**

I don't know. It might have been because my brother was a pilot. I don't know. It was something new. It was something away from being in the bush because I certainly didn't know anything about it. They said, "Do you want to be a naval airman?" We were

09:30 recruited just as naval airmen and in hindsight now, naval airmen covered so many things. You could have been a photographer, a safety equipment, a handler, anything like that but you went in as a naval airman and they chose what you would be. But I didn't have any particular...I think it was just a matter of getting there

10:00 and doing something.

Had you been up in the air before?

Never.

And what about going on ships?

I've got a faint recollection of going on board a ship when an aunt was travelling pre-war from Melbourne to Western Australia and that was back in the days when anybody went anywhere, everybody used to farewell them. I was just saying to Pauline the other day

10:30 about how...of course you say something and then you have to explain it deeper but back in the days of the Spirit of Progress, which was a train that went from Melbourne, finished up in Sydney, if someone was going to Sydney we all put our best clothes on, and went into Spencer Street Station, and farewelled them or if we didn't go in there, the railway line used to run at the back of my aunt's house, and we used to go down to the back fence and

11:00 wave, and all of that sort of thing. It was a big deal somebody going to Sydney.

What about contact with the water and things like that? Being in the bush did you spend a lot of time near the water at all?

No, no I hadn't. When I was a kid down in Melbourne we used to go to the beach occasionally. Once while I was in the country John Blacker and I went up to Lake's Entrance in

11:30 Victoria for a couple of weeks but no contact with the water at all.

So what did you think you were going to get yourself into?

I don't know, no idea, no idea. I think it's a bit like the story of the bloke that did so long in the navy and they said, "What are you going to do when you get out?" He said, "I'm going to get myself a pair of oars and I'm going to start walking west from Sydney, and when somebody says to me, 'What are those things on your shoulder?', I'm going to say, 'This is where I'm going to live'."

12:00 I think I was doing the opposite to that. I didn't have any attraction. I don't think I'd ever seen a warship. There used to be a wreck of one down off Williamstown but that was just something that poked out of the water. I couldn't explain it really.

Did the aircraft carrier scenario that you

12:30 **were telling me about before, that they'd been advertising this in the paper, what were the advantages of having that kind of a Fleet Arm?**

What, the advantages to Australia?

Yes.

Oh, lots and lots, which I think we should have today. The first advantage is that you've got a number of aircraft that you can position anywhere in the world in a relatively short time.

13:00 Back in those days the Sydney could carry about 30 odd aircraft and it could probably travel about 400 miles a day, so in five days you could have those aircraft, all of the aircrew, the maintainers, your ammunition, your food, everything, a couple of thousand miles away, and take it close to any trouble spots or things like that, a big advantage.

13:30 **When you first enlisted what happened then? How did the procedure work once you had enlisted?**

The procedure for what?

Like issuing your uniform and where do you go to?

Well as I said before, I eventually went back on the Monday morning down to HMAS Lonsdale, which is no longer and met all of these

14:00 other people that had come from other places. We were all sworn into the navy and put on a train, and we went down to Western Port Bay to HMAS Cerberus, Flinders Naval Depot. We were introduced to hammocks. We were given...I guess you'd call it a boiler suit, not quite overalls. It was like a navy denim

14:30 jacket which did up all the way down the front and trousers. That was all we had for the first two or three weeks to wear because they kept saying they didn't know what uniform we were going to have, whether we were going to wear a sailor's rig with a little flat cap or whether we were going to wear a double breasted jacket with a peak cap. They didn't seem to know. Eventually we were given the sailor's uniform and

15:00 we just did general training, marching, their power of command, us learning how to follow it, rifle drill, a little bit of seamanship. We were taught how to tie knots in pieces of rope, how to row a boat, things like that and I was actually in the third class of naval airmen

15:30 recruits. The first lot had joined sometime before Christmas in 1947. They'd already gone to England by the time I joined. Another lot went in in January. I went in in February and there was another intake in March. By the time the March intake had finished their basic training, the three classes, there was about 54 of us, we were all posted to

16:00 HMAS Kanimbla to go to UK for training. We spent about six weeks or something like that on the way to England and eventually in August in '48 we got to Plymouth.

Before we talk more about that I wouldn't mind asking you if you can remember, how they swore you into the navy?

16:30 I think we just held a bible and read something out. I can't remember a great deal about it.

How many other blokes were there?

About 30 or 40.

During that initial training period you just described did you make any special friends or do any mates stick out in your memory that you met during that time?

17:00 No, not particularly. I think we all pretty well got in together and all of that sort of thing. I think because it just happened and we were leaving, it didn't make a great deal of impression. You were so tired at the end of the day that you were just ready to go to sleep.

17:30 I can remember a couple of things. One of the things that we had to do was, we had to do low firing of rifles etcetera and the rifle range wasn't at Cerberus. You had to get into workboats and be taken to the rifle range. It was about 20 minutes to half an hour away and

18:00 we went over there. We had to learn how to pull rifles to pieces and put them back together, and fire mortars, things like that. My biggest recollection of there was, one part was an assault class. We had to be fully kitted out, rifle, jump over all of these obstacles. I jumped over one, landed on a rock or something like that and twisted

18:30 my ankle, and by lunchtime I was really hobbling. They had an SBA, sick berth attendant there. In the end he said, "Take your boot off and let me have a look." I took my boot off and it went "Brrrr", and grew like that, so they decided they'd have to send me back to Cerberus. The only way to get back was in the workboat. I couldn't walk or anything like this and

19:00 I can still recall when we got back to Cerberus, and the workboat pulled in next to the wharf, everybody looking down in the because I think they thought I'd been shot or something like that. I was taken up to the sick bay and they X-rayed it. I can't remember the results of the X-ray but I can remember them saying to me that they were the best set of moving X-rays that they'd ever taken because my foot just keep jumping

- 19:30 all the time. I couldn't hold it still. Another thing I can remember there is because you get vaccinations and injections for this, and injections for that. One of the quite famous things was they used to say, "Watch out for vaccination fever." We used to get vaccinated for smallpox and one day we'd been to the gymnasium for an early morning session there,
- 20:00 and we were all doubling back in to go somewhere, and we doubled right across the parade ground, and everybody did a left turn except me. I just kept running into a stone wall, just wasn't with it. The next thing I knew I was in the hospital. I wasn't hurt from it but I had this vaccination fever.
- 20:30 It was just like a high fever and you're not with it for a few days. Nothing else of any great consequence happened down there.

Was the Cerberus actually a ship?

No, no.

Is it like a training place?

It's Flinders Naval Base.

So you'd actually take the boats out from there and the rifle range was...?

The rifle range was...I'm not quite sure where it was but

- 21:00 I assume you must have been able to get there by road somehow. It was probably closer to go in these workboats.

Did you have much time on the water? Did you get seasick or anything like that at any point?

No, not at that stage. We were only in Western Port Bay and these cutters, which were about...I don't know. I can't remember how many they held but about eight or so of us would be out with these monstrous oars pulling it around and that sort of thing.

Were you pretty fit before you joined?

- 21:30 Well, I guess so. I used to ride a bike for six or seven miles into Warragul in and out every day, and work around the farm on the weekend, so I had lots of outdoor stuff on the farm. I guess I was probably average.

Did any of the other blokes suffer from fitness problems during that training time?

- 22:00 The only one I can remember was a bloke by the name of Max Laurie and we were all fallen in one day. We had fixed bayonets and I think we had the rifles at the slope, and the chief gunnery instructor,
- 22:30 if anybody ever hears this and they were there at that time they'd know, his name was Schmidt, and they all called him Otto. He was one of these people from 400 yards away he could tell if you blinked an eyelid when you weren't supposed to. He'd come doubling over and he'd stop in front of Max Laurie but as he stopped in front of him he was about three inches out in his calculations and he knocked
- 23:00 his rifle. It came down and his bayonet sliced his eyebrow. The blood was running down. That's about the only thing of any consequence I can remember. I recall that if anybody did anything wrong, say a bloke deserted or broke his leave, or something like that, something really bad in those days,
- 23:30 they'd read out a warrant for his punishment. A warrant is this thing with all this stuff on it, "On such and such a day, 12345 Bill Smith did contravene the Naval Discipline Act." Back in those days I think it was the King's Rules and Admiralty Instructions and so and so, "He shall suffer the following punishment."

- 24:00 When they read out one of these we used to be formed up in sort of three sides of a square and this bloke would be brought out to the front, they'd off cap, and you'd look at this fellow, and you felt as though they were going to shoot him. There'd probably be one of those every two or three weeks.

- 24:30 A bit hard to imagine now because the sort of things that they did then and what they do now, they can get away with a lot more now I think.

What were some of the punishments?

They'd get 30 or 60 days stoppage of leave, deprivation of a good conduct badge but of course that didn't apply

- 25:00 to us. You had to be in the navy for four years to get a good conduct badge. If it was bad enough they could be given so many days in the cell.

What would warrant 30 days in the cell?

30 days in the cell? That would probably...I don't know! That would probably be desertion for several months, I would say!

Did you ever find yourself in a situation where you were being punished for anything?

Yes, I did at that

25:30 place and we used to get jobs at night. They had what they called rounds at night. The officers of the watch used to come and look around all the living spaces, and I was given this job of sweeping the billiard room. So you had to have it all swept out and everything in its

26:00 place, and then when the officer came around you had to call everybody to attention in there, and salute the officer, and tell him that the place was ready for his inspection. So I had it all ready and we waited, and waited, and waited, and all of a sudden he appeared at the door. I called everybody to attention and just as I called them to attention, somebody hit a billiard ball with the cue,

26:30 and it was rolling around the table. I got...I think it was seven days. They called it Backward Class. It wasn't the same as the number nine punishments but it was listed under a different name, rifle drill everyday, doubling around for a couple of hours, working early in the morning, and I got that because somebody in the room, who I never ever knew

27:00 who it was, had just happened to hit this ball, and it was moving.

What about the other blokes? Did they get punished too?

Yes, I think we all did. I've got the feeling that all of us that were in there got the same punishment. When you think back it was pretty childish on the part of the navy, wasn't it, but that's the system. That's the system!

Does that kind of

27:30 **thing bring blokes together or does it make people resent each other?**

I think it brings them together. It doesn't give them a very good opinion of some of the things...as an example, the very same officer that got me that punishment, sometime later the class that I was in, we were being doubled

28:00 down to the water section. We passed the wardroom and as we came past somebody just out with an oilskin and a sou' wester. Do you know what a sou' wester is? It's like a fisherman's hat. Remember a fisherman's hat? In fact we used to call them fisher hats. When I went to school we used to wear khaki ones. It covers your head, a bit hanging down over the back and a brim.

28:30 Somebody walked out from there and I was just one of those being doubled. I wasn't the class leader in charge or anything like that. All of a sudden this voice called us back and it was an officer, in fact it was the same one that I got into that other strife with, and why did we not salute him? Our class leader said, "We didn't see you, sir etcetera." So we were paraded before the commander and we got another lot of punishment

29:00 for that, everybody, not just the one out the front, everybody in the thing. That was the only two times that I got into strife there.

Would this kind of rigorous regime in that initial training period, what kind of food and things did they give you?

I don't remember ever complaining about the

29:30 food. I guess it was good wholesome food designed to keep young men healthy. You have to look at it that we had joined a service and we were going through an initial training period, whereas that if they told you to jump, it was a matter of "How high? There was none of this business of "Why do I have to jump?"

30:00 or "I don't want to jump." It was, "Is this high enough?" or "Do you want me to jump higher?" You just jump and it's a good idea. You can't...we all agreed that in wartime if somebody said do something, you did it. You don't have the chance to say why should I jump or that my union says we've got to negotiate

30:30 this, you jump.

So how do they train you to the point where you're that kind of a machine where you just able to go?

I think a lot of it comes in on the program where you're taught to march in unison, in step and everybody is doing the same thing. Everybody is doing it as one and I think that's how it comes about. You just accept it after a while.

You mentioned

31:00 **before that some people may be punished quite heavily for going AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave] or going off on leave and not returning. Did you have any experiences, maybe not yourself, but did any of the blokes not come back after leave?**

No, no I don't recall any of ours ever having that happen.

Where would you go for leave?

Leave from there? Melbourne but that was an hour

31:30 or so away on the train. You didn't get leave at night. You didn't get any leave at all in the first six weeks and then after that we used to get a train at around about four o'clock or something on a Friday afternoon. We had to fall in on the parade ground, be inspected, make sure we were in a

32:00 presentable state to go ashore. They used to search our bags to make sure that we didn't have any stuff we shouldn't have taking out, like non-service clothing and things like that. The train used to get up I think about six o'clock on a Friday night and another train came back on Sunday night at around about seven or eight o'clock. We used to leave the city to come back, go back down there.

So you'd go for one day?

32:30 You really only had...you had Friday night, all day Saturday and Sunday, and that was it.

You weren't allowed to wear civvies [civilian clothing]?

No, no and in fact when we first went to Cerberus, we had to wrap up all our civvies, and they were posted off for us home.

Did anyone manage to break

33:00 **that rule?**

No I don't think so. We were all so proud. There we were, going to be in uniform before long. We used to break some of the dress rules in so far as...would you believe in those days in your best going ashore uniform, we had to wear boots with them. If you were caught with a pair of shoes you were in trouble again.

33:30 But we all used to have a pair of shoes. We kept them up in Melbourne somewhere. I had them at my aunt's place. Some of the items of uniform were the pusser stuff [navy issue]. The stuff that was navy issue wasn't quite like what the sailors like to wear. The suits were pretty baggy and things like that. The uniform

34:00 was baggy so they'd go to the naval sailor ashore and they'd get a tight fitting one, and there used to be expressions like there was...I think the naval tailor was Robertson and one of the things they used to say was, "Tighter Robbie, I can still breathe." You know, you make the uniform tight and it made you look all slim, and we had square neck shirts that you wore underneath it.

34:30 They came up to about here, about up to your Adam's apple. Well the in thing for sailors to do was to have a Dickie front, which was just a square at the front, two straps, a square at the back, tapes and tie it off right! Well you could alter the height and you could have it down here, and show the hairs on your chest you see! They were completely banned. If you had been caught with one of those when they were having that search as we left, you wouldn't have gone ashore.

35:00 You probably wouldn't have gone ashore the following week or the one after but years later they sold them in the naval clothing store. That shows you how things change, you see.

Where was Robertson, this tailor?

I don't know, somewhere in Melbourne. I never ever got a suit there. We didn't have a great deal of time for that sort of thing because the mob of us that went over to the UK, we joined in January, February, March and in June we were on a ship, and

35:30 gone, so we didn't have a great deal of time in Sydney. I remember later on there was naval tailor in Sydney, Glendenning and Stacey and they actually had a shop down in Nowra as well for many years. They used to make sailor's suits. Then of course civvies came in. Sailors were allowed to wear plain clothes and the naval tailors gradually went out because

36:00 it didn't matter if you had to wear an issue uniform, because you didn't wear it ashore anyway. You only wore it on parade and divisions, things like that.

Why was there this preoccupation with having the uniform just so, tapered in?

I guess it made you look better, like a pair of bellbottom

36:30 trousers had a...I can't remember the regulation width, probably about 28 inches. If you got one made at a naval tailor they had 32 inches and they'd come down from the knees, and spread out. The issue trousers had a flap at the front, two flaps came across and did up, then this flap came up with buttons across.

37:00 They had pockets but you had to undo the button to move the flap to get a handkerchief out, whereas if you got one made at the naval tailors they used to have zips across the front with a flap on them, very flash. I guess a bit like a woman getting into the latest fashion and all of that sort of thing. Even to hats, the

37:30 regulation hat that you were issued with, the sailor's cap was oval but if you bought one from one of these naval tailors, they were round and you could squash them, and pull them down at the sides, and wear it down over your eyes, things like that.

How would the navy view these modifications?

They didn't view them with any good thoughts at all. It was many years before you

38:00 could get away with wearing this sort of thing.

But when they searched bags and things, would they actually notice modifications?

They'd notice it if they found it. If they found a collar or something that had been altered, you probably wouldn't get out on leave that night.

That's quite shocking really.

Yeah but

38:30 we accepted it because I think it gets back to this "How high do I jump" business. I honestly think that that was what they were trying to instil into us anyway.

With the naval tailor, how come he was allowed to make alterations to the uniform in the first place?

He wasn't. He wasn't in the navy, was he! He was in Melbourne or Pitt Street, or somewhere like that.

And people just used to

39:00 **go to him from the navy but he wasn't official?**

No, he wasn't an official naval tailor. No. When you say he was a naval tailor, he made naval uniforms for sailors. He didn't make them for the navy.

Tape 4

00:42 **You were going to tell a story about the uniforms in the UK.**

There was a bit of difference over there. The 54 of us that were the naval airmen, we went over. When we got to

01:00 England in August '48 we were sent to a Royal Navy air station at Brancourt in the Midlands, a few miles out of Birmingham, a few miles out of...I can't think of the name of the place now, anyway about 20 mile out of Birmingham. HMS Gamecock it was and it was a training establishment for naval airmen

01:30 mechanics. Well it probably had about 1500 Royal Navy sailors being trained there at any time and we were dispersed pretty well right through them. We could get away with a certain amount of things because they didn't know our regulations. For instance,

02:00 we used to wear those Dickie fronts and we'd pull them down, and if they said anything to us, "That's not the same." We'd say, "Yeah, but this is what we're issued with" and we'd get away with it. We all had by this stage those little round hats I was telling you about. We wore them over there and if they said anything, "Well, that's what I was issued with." Lied through our teeth of course!

02:30 It was pretty swish at that time, not to go on divisions or parade in them but to go ashore in uniform with your big 32 inch, or maybe a little bit bigger, bottoms on you. We'd wear white socks instead of black socks. Instead of lace up shoes we'd have a pair of shoes with a buckle across the front. I guess... ones

03:00 I don't know how you'd put it. Is it a bit of flashiness, a revolt against authority? We thought we were doing something different, beating them at their own game, all of those sorts of things. I guess every sailor that was ever in the navy during the war, they all did this. If you look at any old photographs of sailors on any of the ships during the war, you'll see them.

03:30 They've got the bow in their ribbon round over their eye, right? Well it was supposed to be worn on the left ear, over the left ear on the cap but the moment you got out of service...for instance, back to that parade of service before we got on the train, when you put your thing on it said, "Cerberus". I can't remember but it might have been the second "e" of "Cerberus" you had to have over the middle of your nose and your bow round here. Well the moment you got on the train blokes would shift their bow round so it would

04:00 come down over their eye or you'd have another ship's tally and you'd tie the bow right at the end of the name of the ship, so that you could have it up here. It made you look swish or good, or whatever the "in" word would be! We used to wear narrow collars over in the UK. The regulation collar, ours was

exactly the same as the Royal Navy one and

04:30 we'd get narrow ones, and we'd wear them. I recall one of our blokes was asked by an admiral why did he have a narrow collar on instead of a wide one and he told the bloke that was his best uniform, "We only wear the wide ones in our working uniform." He got away with it, got away with it. Yes, amazing isn't it?

What is the history behind the bellbottoms?

05:00 We were told a lot of these things at Cerberus. The origin of the bellbottoms was merely so that they could roll their trousers up when they were washing the decks in the old days when they used to swab the deck, right? You get a pair of trousers like this and roll them up, by the time they get to here the material won't go any higher. You get a pair of bellbottoms you can roll them up to here. I guess that

05:30 the creases in them, seven creases, we were always told they were one for each of the seven seas but whether...I don't know about that. To get the creases in you turned the trousers inside out, ironed them flat, turn them up and that was a concertina crease, so that by the time you finished pressing a pair of bellbottoms

06:00 you had so wide, depending upon the width of the bottoms, each crease that wide, they were about that high, and you just rolled them into the top of your trousers. Then you had a bundle...how can I say? Like that, like that. Now you could put that into a kit bag or anything and move it around, kick it around and take it out, roll them out, and put them on, hardly

06:30 any creases or anything. So that was the bellbottoms. The collar, the blue collar was originally a relic of the days when the sailors used to have a pigtail and they used to tar it, and the collar was to keep the tar off. The three stripes around it are supposed to be in memory

07:00 of Nelson's three greatest battles, the Battle of the Nile, the Battle of Copenhagen and the Battle of Trafalgar. The black scarf around here, do you recall seeing that on a sailor? It comes under right round here. That's in memory of Nelson. I only read it the other day. I'm not really an expert on this but I knew about the others and I'd forgotten about that. I just read it last week somewhere and I thought, "That's right. I recall that now."

07:30 For instance that same black scarf in memory of Nelson, when you're issued with that, with your silk it was a square about so big and you had to fold that up but when you went to this tiddly gear, you got a piece of black satin about so long, but you only got it this wide, and you folded it in, and pressed it so that

08:00 the creases stayed in, and it was quite thin, and it shone!

So with these modifications to the uniform, when you would go out for leave, why didn't they notice when you were walking out with these uniforms, or did you hide them in your kit bag?

You'd hide them. For instance, when we were at Cerberus I didn't have them there. I just kept them up at my aunt's place in Melbourne and when I got up there

08:30 I'd put them on but other people, they'd hide them in their bags. If they got caught they didn't go on leave.

Did you have civvies at your aunt's place as well or you were proud to wear your uniform?

Oh, you wouldn't have worn civvies. No, you'd wear your uniform.

I have to ask you what was the response of people to the uniform that you'd be walking around in?

09:00 "Oh, oh, you're in the navy!" Even though you were only home for the weekend that was probably the first time I heard that phrase in all the time I was in the navy. I hated and probably every other serviceman has hated when they go on leave, "Hello! When do you go back?" Every serviceman hates that.

09:30 You walk in the door, "Hello! When do you go back?" not, that they're trying to get rid of you! I don't think!

What kind of things would you do when you were on leave?

I think that I just used to spend the time with my cousins and

10:00 things like that. I'm probably a bit unusual and it probably is unusual for a sailor but I had no attraction whatsoever for going to the pub. I didn't drink. If I did go to a pub with the blokes, I would say, "Yeah, all right I'll have a lemonade." I might go into a pub with five blokes, "I'll have a lemonade." Right, then they'd have another round and you'd say, "Yeah all right. I'll have another lemonade." So it finished up

10:30 That after you'd had two or three lemonades and the blokes, they wouldn't be talking on the same plane as I was any more. They were all OK with each other but if you've ever been to anything when you haven't had anything whatsoever to drink and everybody starting to get...I'm not saying drunk. I don't

mean that but they

11:00 talk on a different plane. So I'd finish up and say, "Righto. I'll buy a round!" Then I'd shoot off somewhere. I'd say, "I've got to go somewhere" and I'd go. I used to go out with them but I didn't stay a great deal of time.

Was this with the other navy blokes?

Yes.

How did they view you being a non-drinker?

It didn't worry them. You know there was never any pressure, "Come on have a beer or have this or have that."

11:30 They usually used to drink beer because back in those days the big thing...people probably wouldn't believe it now but for a Melbourne man to say that Sydney beer was good was sacrilege and vice versa. These were blokes from Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, from everywhere. They used to drink the beer but

12:00 it was probably the "in" thing for sailors to go and get drunk on the weekend, but I didn't like the taste of beer then. I didn't like the smell of it. I still don't like the taste and I still don't like the smell, so it has never held any attraction for me.

Was that the only kind of alcohol on offer, beer?

No, I suppose you could get anything that you can get now, I guess, but it was probably the cheapest.

12:30 **Was there any reason why you didn't want to drink?**

No, I just didn't like the smell of it and I didn't like the taste of it. That's always stayed with me. I think, "Well if I don't like the smell of it and I don't like the taste of it, why do I have to have it? Why have it?" So I don't. That's the only reason. Don't get me wrong. I'm not a wowser. I'll have a glass

13:00 of wine with our meals and things like that but I've never ever been able to see the need to drink just because it's there. Even on free beer days I never ever collected a ration of free beer, things like that.

So the boys would only just go to the pub? Is that all they'd do on leave?

I guess so,

13:30 yeah. Well in Melbourne, I'm talking about Melbourne when we were first recruits. When we were in the UK they used to go a bit further a field but then again we only got leave more or less enough time to go anywhere at weekends. That was one a month I think.

We'll go into that a little bit later. People always talk about the navy and they associate them with two things,

14:00 **Well, lots of things but in terms of R&R [Rest and Recreation] they often talk about homosexuality and stuff like that. I have to ask you a question about that.**

Yes?

Were there any instances or anything like that about that kind of thing?

No. What you've got to remember is that it wasn't until the last few years that it was sort of accepted.

14:30 I never ever personally saw any. Occasionally a rumour would suddenly go and somebody has just been caught, and they're gone. They'd be usually gone within a couple of days but never any problems. Mind you, back in those days

15:00 I suppose if they were around and I guess they probably were, they'd have kept it well undercover because it was a big thing in those days that the bad Russians would be looking for homosexuals to blackmail them. That was one of the big things where they tried to recruit people to...for the want of a better word,

15:30 to spy for them. It was the fear of if they find somebody and the fear of them being discovered.

So was there quite a stigma associated with it?

Oh yes.

How would the army respond?

I don't know. I was in the navy!

Sorry! How would the navy...I'm so sorry Hugh.

That's all right!

How would the navy respond to that?

16:00 If they found somebody? They'd be probably gone within 24 hours.

Did they have lectures or talk to you about it?

Yes, I guess they must have. I don't particularly remember it. I remember them telling us about things about...with the security and all of that because they were considered a big security risk in those days,

16:30 big security risk.

In what way?

Well, just like I said, because they could be blackmailed. I don't remember any great problems with it.

So that journey from Cerberus to the UK, what was that like? Was that your first

17:00 **big ocean journey?**

Apart from seven days I think we did, on a minesweeper as part of our training at Cerberus, it was my first.

And how was that?

Well the 54 of us, we were in the Number One Troop Deck on board this HMAS Kanimbla, which was previously a coastal liner,

17:30 I guess you'd call it for want of a better term. It had been converted to an armed merchant cruiser during the war and into a troop ship. It used to do most of the troop movements between Australia and Japan with the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, and fairly spartan accommodation. We slept in bunks on it, not hammocks

18:00 and I guess that would be because it was mainly army troops it was used for moving. We worked part of the ship. We painted. We chipped paint. We did various...I can't remember whether we worked in the galley at all or places in there. I do remember we all had to have gos at steering the ship and I had a go. We were in the

18:30 Red Sea and they promptly told me that we were heading back for Melbourne after about five minutes, and took it off me. It was really a matter of us passing the time to get to England.

That history that you described that the ship had been previously a navy ship and then was a Merchant Navy ship, and then back again BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces], what kind of ship would you describe it as

19:00 **with that kind of history behind it? Was it a sturdy ship? Was it rough and tumble?**

It was fairly spartan with all of the bunks and things. I remember the canteen for instance. They used to sell Goffers. Goffers is a soft drink.

19:30 You know the dispensers that you see down the street and they pull one handle, and they get Fanta out of it, and they pull another one, little things like that. You used to get them out of those...do you remember the big milkshake glasses? You got them in those but they had the bottom broken off them. There was a reason for that. You couldn't put them down. You see that had a round bottom didn't they? So you had to drink it

20:00 and turn the glass upside down, and leave it at the canteen, very clever when you think of it. The canteen manager was a civilian and then after a while they started to get short of these glasses because the blokes used to get their drink, and when they finished, they'd just throw the glass over the side. So suddenly

20:30 the canteen manager found that he had a monstrous stack of tin mugs in his store, so he only started selling these soft drinks if you had a tin mug, so you had to buy a tin mug off him to get a soft drink.

You had to buy the mug?

You had to buy the mug yes, so then people started carrying them.

So there was a canteen on board that was operated by a civilian bloke?

21:00 Yes.

What kinds of things were available, apart from this strange drink and strange mugs?

Cigarettes, soap, writing paper, envelopes, sweets, all that sort of thing, no clothes or anything like that, just like corner shop stuff.

And you had to buy it?

Oh yes.

21:30 **How many blokes were actually on board the ship?**

On the Kanimbla? Let me think. It had its own crew of course and there would probably be the best part of a thousand I guess because not only was it taking us over to do

22:00 our training but it had a lot of the seamen that were going to go over to be the crew for the Sydney, and other people were going for training as well. Most of the people on board were, for the want of a better name call them passengers. We were all in transit.

So after that initial training had you...and I assume you were going over on the Kanimbla with those blokes, were there

22:30 **any in particular that were good friends at this stage when you were journeying over to England?**

No I think we all used to muck in together pretty well. No I don't remember any bosom buddies sort of thing.

You mentioned before that they were from quite diverse places?

Yes.

What were

23:00 **some of the people like that stand out in you memory. Where were they from and what kind of blokes were they?**

They were all like me I guess, 17 and a half, 18 year old young blokes, some were probably a couple of years older. The only thing that I think we all had in common was that...

23:30 I won't say that we came from broken homes but I think that if you sat and talked to any of them something had happened in their home life. Something had happened to their family, like with me. When I was just nearly 13 my mother died and of course that changed the whole thing. I think you'll find that if I could recall it or

24:00 had asked them all, there was something in everybody's life like that. One of their parents had died, their parents had split up or something had happened. Do you know what I mean?

That's interesting. Did you actually have big conversations with them like that or how did you find out that kind of information?

I think it had just come up in the conversation, that sort of thing.

Once you arrived

24:30 **in...was it Plymouth?**

Plymouth, we arrived at, yes.

Did you go straight to Plymouth or did you go via major townships?

What, in England?

Yes.

No, Plymouth is one of the major naval ports.

So when you arrived did you have any major impressions of the UK post World War II? Could you see...?

Yes we could.

25:00 It was rather strange. When we arrived there, we tied up right behind the King George V battleship and we'd been six weeks at sea. There was rust. There was paint peeled off and everything off our old Kanimbla, and there we were, King George V, which was sort of the flagship in front of us shining like a new pin.

25:30 I remember Plymouth then because this was 1948, not that long after the war, still bomb damage around. It gave you a strange feeling just to see because the town is almost on the water and five

26:00 minutes, and you're...bombed out churches and houses, then just rubble laying there. In fact I went to live there in 1965 when I was at the Engineering College. That was outside Plymouth and the change that had been made in that time was unbelievable. They rebuilt all the shopping complexes and

26:30 things like that.

Did you have much contact with the people?

At that stage no. We were only there a day or so and then we were put on a train, and we went up to Mount Eton.

What about things like rationing and coupons, and things like that?

We used to get...when we went on weekend leave we were

27:00 given ration cards or ration coupons. If you bought in a restaurant, that wasn't rationed but if you were going to stay with people, they had to use coupons to get it so you could give it to people, coupons and all of that sort of thing, sweets, everything was rationed.

Was that a hangover from World War II?

Yes,

27:30 rationing was still...I can't remember exactly when it finished but I came back from the UK on that occasion in January 1950. I came back on a civilian ship, the Otranto and there were only six sailors. Six of us came back on it and probably about 95 percent of the rest of them were migrants,

28:00 English, Scottish, Irish. The canteen or the shop used to open about nine o'clock every morning and there were queues a hundred yards long for people to buy chocolate because they could go there and buy as much chocolate as they could possibly eat, whereas before they were allowed a couple of ounces of chocolate a week or something like that.

That's really interesting.

28:30 But I can't remember when it eventually finished. I don't remember it being in...that was 1950 and I went back in '55 again. I don't remember any rationing at all in '55.

So just to explain it, they actually issued you with coupons when you arrived there because that's all that...some places like you mentioned you'd have to use money but people were still using coupons there as well? Is that why you were using coupons?

29:00 You were given coupons because you were going on leave for the period and you just gave them to the people who you were staying with because meat, butter, everything was practically...clothing, clothing coupons. I don't know that we got clothing coupons though but we certainly got the food ones.

So in that first time in Plymouth what did you actually do? You were there only briefly?

I was only there a day or so, yes.

29:30 **Where did you move from there?**

Went by train to HMS Gamecock in Brancourt near Eton. That's the one that I said was quite close to Birmingham and the other one I couldn't remember was Coventry.

OK. So on that train trip what kind of other indications of war damage could you see?

I don't remember seeing anything.

30:00 **What about when you arrived?**

At the naval air station, no damage whatsoever there. It had been...I don't know whether it had been an RAF [Royal Air Force] place during the war but it was a grass airfield. There was a Royal Naval Reserve Squadron.

30:30 I think it was 1832 or 1833 Squadron, was flying Sea Flyers out of there but I do believe it had been probably RAF during the war, but a grass airfield, no runway.

Did you hear any stories about its involvement with the war?

The only thing I can recall was in the section that I lived in. It was a hutted camp.

31:00 The main camp was a two storey brick block with big dormitories and there were about three hutted camps, which were probably three or four hundred yards away from the main entrance. They were all Nissen huts and one of them had a lot of murals painted, beautifully done. We were told

31:30 it had been done by Polish troops during the war but whether or not, I don't know. Could well have been.

Can you describe the murals?

Not now, no! No I can't.

Were they war scenes?

I don't know. I can't remember but I remember that at the time we thought they were beautiful, lovely.

And where were they?

Just painted on the walls. A Nissen hut is round, this shape

32:00 and they were just painted on the walls.

That's very unusual. So what did you do when you were there? Was that for more training?

This was when we decided what we were going to be. So far we were naval airmen. It was decided we were going to be naval airmen and so they said,

32:30 "Righto. You're going to be naval airmen GPs", general purpose. A naval airman general purpose did four different trades. He did airframes; engines, ordnance and electrics, and I guess you'd say that you were a jack of all trades and a master of none. You were taken up to do a daily inspection standard on an aircraft.

33:00 So once again we were all split up into various classes. Some went off and started to do the ordnance. Some went to engines. I was doing airframes and we had probably been there about three months and the Royal Navy decided they weren't going to have these naval airmen GPs any more. So just out of the blue, they walked into the classroom and said,

33:30 "Stop teaching." So we all went back down to our accommodation and we were given jobs just cleaning up, things like that. This went on for several weeks and I remember they took us all up to the gymnasium, and they said, "Righto. We're now going to

34:00 start training again and we're going to train you in both...in either of airframes or engines." They said, "What we really want to do is about half of each." So they didn't say to us, "You're going to be this and you're going to be that", they said, "We want about half of each. Those that want to do engines go over there and those that want to do airframes go over

34:30 there." So we did that and they said, "It's not quite even. We need a couple more for the engines." So a couple of blokes said, "Oh, all right." They walked over to the engines side and that was how we were chosen. Years later you go and you see a psychologist, and he tells you what you're best suited for but we did it in the gymnasium, "Who wants to be this and who wants to be that?"

Did you know at that point what the differences

35:00 **between the two would be?**

Yes, because we'd just been doing this general purpose course and we had been doing these same little things but not up to the same depth of training.

So what were the differences between engines and airframes?

Well the engines are the things that back in those days used to drive the propeller.

35:30 The airframe was the fuselage, the wings, the controls, and the undercarriage, and that sort of thing.

So it was all specifically related to air?

Oh yes.

Which section did you opt for?

I opted for airframes.

Why did you opt for airframes?

Because I had almost finished doing my airframe training, so it was easier to do it and I liked it.

36:00 **Do you know why they separated the two?**

I think that the Royal Navy decided that they had all of these people...actually there was four trades, that they weren't getting enough out of the people I would say because they were only up to a daily inspection standard. They didn't know any more or weren't trained to do any deeper

36:30 maintenance than that.

So the aim was to...?

The aim was to bring everyone into a single trade and give you a greater in depth knowledge of it.

Make you an ace of the trade rather than a jack?

Yeah, make you an expert.

You mentioned the Royal Navy and that you were dispersed amongst them.

37:00 **Was there any sort of rivalry? What were they like?**

They only had three problems with us; that was it.

Three problems?

Yes. We were overpaid, oversexed and over there.

Why did they present as problems?

I think the only great problem was

37:30 the comparison of money. As an example, as a second class naval airman under training over there and there's only one thing lower than that, and that's to be a recruit, I was getting something like sixpence a day more than my instructor, who was married petty officer.

38:00 We were not very popular you know. Mind you, we didn't think it was great money at all but we were very lucky in so far as we used to get paid about a pound for pound sort of thing. If our pay was five pound Australian we got five pound Sterling. We didn't have to pay exchange rates because back in those days I think it was 25 shillings Australian

38:30 to make up one English pound but we got paid pound for pound from memory. If I had my pay book I could tell you but my pay book is out in the Museum in Elwick.

So that's interesting that you were actually getting more pay. Why was that the case that it wasn't equivalent to the Royal Navy?

Probably different standards of livings in the two countries. You don't get the same pay in England as you get here now.

39:00 **So how did they find out that you were getting a different rate of pay?**

We probably told them! [laughs] I can't remember! I think it was well known that we had a higher rate of pay.

What were their attitudes towards the Australians?

All right.

Was there any resentment about that whole money issue?

No,

39:30 I don't think so. I mean things might have been said in jest but there was no real animosity and that sort of thing.

Tape 5

00:44 **So do you want to if it's possible Hugh give me an overview of some of the things you were learning in Warwickshire when you were there for training?**

OK. Well for instance, doing the basic training

01:00 all aircraft have got an undercarriage and wheels, and brakes, and this like that but they're not the same on every aircraft, but you learn the general sorts of them. When you go out onto the squadron and you get onto a specific aircraft, you're then getting down to what that particular aircraft has got, and how to change it, how to fix this, and do this and that, do that and the other thing. For instance when I went from

01:30 HMS Gamecock to HMS Vulture, I started off on 796 Squadron, a Fire Fly squadron. They were Fire Fly Mark 1s, which were not the same as the Australian navy was buying. They were an earlier model but I guess it's a little bit like an '81 Holden and an '85 Holden, that sort of a thing. So I got some pretty good experience on there with Fire Flies

02:00 and then I was moved to a maintenance unit, and it so happened that it had Sea Furies on it. I was pretty lucky. Lots of other of our people, they went to places and they didn't work on Fire Flies, and Furies. I worked on both Fire Flies and Furies, and Sea Fires, which were a navalised version of a Spitfire, and I was there until about November of that year.

02:30 That was where I met my wife.

Could you maybe give me a description of each of those aircrafts, the Fire Flies and the Sea Furies?

A Fire Fly was originally designed as a fighter bomber. In the latter stages of the war I think they were used in Burma towards the end of the war, two seater, one pilot, one observer. It was later

03:00 converted and then rebuilt as anti-submarine aircraft, radar and things like that. Depending upon the Mark some of them had four guns, later on some of them had none. They could carry bombs, rockets, torpedos. Whereas the Sea Fury was a fighter bomber that was more of a fighter,

03:30 single engine, 18 cylinder radial air-cooled engine, Bristol Centaurus, carried bombs, rockets, things like that, single seater. I might have said that, built for two different roles. The Fire Fly was much slower and the Sea Fury was reputed to be the fastest single engine piston driven aircraft in the world.

04:00 **Great description, thank you. With Fire Fly, you said it was pilot and observer, how would these other...the aspects of their weaponry...was that the pilot actually operating?**

Yes, the pilot operated the guns and fired things, and the observer told him where they were, if they were...?

Formatting?

04:30 Yes. Well the observer had the radar in the back and they used to have a few sonar buoys in them, not very many, things they could drop into the water to listen, and see if there were any submarines around but we used to get the aircraft out of the hangars, service them in the morning, and they'd fly off on an exercise, and they might

05:00 fly over France, and to the Mediterranean, turn round, and come back. They'd be back in the afternoon and we'd refuel them, and do anything they needed fixing on them, and that was it for the day.

So what would you have to do to service them?

Well you have laid down schedules that tell you what to look at and all of this sort of thing. If there's nothing wrong with it you look at the next thing, just

05:30 looking for faults, damage on the aircraft, things like that, refuel the aircraft with fuel, oil, all lubricants, all of that sort of thing.

You mentioned radar, was that a recent development that they were implemented into aircraft?

Oh, it was in early in the war, Germans had it, English had it, yes.

In terms of the way that

06:00 **this worked with these aircrafts on the actual ship, this probably sounds like a silly question but how did they actually get enough room to leave the ship to actually take off? How did that work?**

Well it varies. For instance the Sydney, it had a

06:30 hydraulic catapult and I don't know if you're familiar with the layout of the flight deck of the ship? The Sydney was about 697 foot long and about 8 inches, about an 88 foot wide, something like that, deck, straight through deck right? For the resting of them it had about

07:00 ten wires strategically placed to be about so far off the deck. Aircraft come in to land and he was directed in by a batsman, a hook came down and caught on one of the wires. That pulled him up. Now that's the opposite to what you asked me. You asked me about getting them off. Up the front end was this catapult, place the aircraft on it, they hold the back end, the tail end down with a little contraption

07:30 and they put a wire strap or some means on the front end, and it's attached to the catapult. They get the aircraft to go up to full power and when he is, he lets his brakes off. They fire the catapult, the quick release thing at the tail end comes off and a shuttle, which was attached to the aircraft by this strap, pulls the aircraft down, like firing a catapult.

08:00 You know you get a catapult and you've got the leather bit, and you fire it. That pulls the aircraft off. By the time it gets to the end, it has gone from nought to maybe ninety knots, and it's airborne, and that's it. The other method is or was, free takeoff but if you've got a lot of aircraft on the ship and they're all spaced out, there's not enough

08:30 room for the first aircraft to do a free takeoff. They go off on the catapult but you can do a free takeoff from down the back end. I've done a free take off on the Sydney in a Fire Fly and from the after lift, so you've probably got about 300 feet of runway, and it's unbelievable how slow you feel as though you're going

09:00 when they're going "Spffffff" down that deck.

Was that you actually operating that Fire Fly taking off?

No, no! I was just the passenger.

Just in terms of the logistics of these takeoffs and landings, and considering the fact that this new section of the navy was

09:30 **introduced where aircraft were on ships, what modifications had to be made to the ships to accommodate the aircrafts, and to be able to have them land on the decks, and leave, and these catapults?**

The ship was built as an aircraft carrier. The Melbourne was laid down during the war for the Royal Navy and it was going to be HMS Terrible,

10:00 and the war finished, and they decided they didn't need it, and they didn't do anything with it. Then the RAN bought it and had it finished over there, got them to finish it off, and it became the Sydney. It was the same with the Melbourne only the difference with the Melbourne is that when the Australian navy bought it, they decided that by this time angled decks had come into fashion, and steam catapults,

10:30 so they had it converted long before we collected it.

So they didn't have to make modifications to the deck to be this open space from them to take off?

No. Both of the aircraft carriers that we had and the Vengeance, which we had on loan from the Royal Navy, they were all specifically built as aircraft carriers. There were different things during the war. There were aircraft carriers

11:00 that were liners and the war started, and they ripped the top superstructure off, put a deck on, and made them into an aircraft carrier. There were others, for instance the ship that I went to the UK on in 1964 was an Italian Flotta Lauro line ship called Sydney and

11:30 it during the war had been a British aircraft carrier HMS Fencer, and it had been made. It was one of these Lend Lease ships built in the States, all welded construction. It was built as an aircraft carrier and I think they used to build one every 30 days or something like that. Getting back to the Sydney, it was specifically built as an aircraft carrier.

In so much that it is

12:00 **built specifically for that purpose, does that mean that it comes with these things like the catapults?**

Yes.

I hate to sound sceptical but it sounds really hairy to be catapulted off a ship. Were there any risks involved with that?

I guess so. I won't say that there were many but we had more than one aircraft crash

12:30 on takeoff. Then again we had lots crash on landing too.

Really with the hook? That was my next question. What about the hook catching?

Well sometimes they'd miss the wire and if all went well they could fly around, and have another go. I did mention it but between where all these wires were for them to catch there were three barriers come up and they were like a big net stretched right

13:00 across the decks, steel cable about an inch thick. They went up about ten feet in the air and if the aircraft missed the wire "Spftttt", straight into the barrier, in other words crashed into the barrier.

Was the barrier there to fold into that or was it just an impact?

It was hydraulically controlled and it would slow it down

13:30 but it would damage the aircraft, no mistake about that. Your propeller was gone for a start. That might have shock loaded your engine, so might have an engine change. The wings would probably be damaged.

Just a few more questions about takeoff and landing. You mentioned that there were a few hit and miss accidents and things that happened. Was that in

14:00 **Warwickshire or was that later on?**

No this was on the Sydney later on, on board the Sydney and the Vengeance.

Can you maybe talk me through some of those accidents?

I don't think I can specifically remember anything. You see the Sydney and the Vengeance were straight through carriers,

14:30 so in other words it was like runway only it was 690 something feet long with a catapult at one end, and wires at the other. The Melbourne had an angled deck, so you still had if you like, the straight through but it also had it like that. So this time the aircraft took off there but when they landed, they landed along there. So you didn't have to have those barriers because if they missed the wire they'd just carry on.

15:00 So this was one of the greatest...another British invention of course. A great thing and that changed the whole concept of the amount of crashes on ships. Also in the earlier days on the Sydney and the Vengeance, they had what they call the batsman, and he used to stand down the portside aft with wands

like ping pong bats. You've probably seen those in the movies. He's watching the pilot

15:30 and he's showing the pilot where he is in relation to the ship or whether he's going to fast, whether he's got his left wing up or his left wing down, or he's too slow, and all of this sort of thing. He virtually guided that bloke in. When you get to the stage of the Melbourne a few years later, we had a carrier approach system of lights and mirrors.

16:00 That bloke is coming in and he's got a big reflection in a mirror, and it's all set up with giros, and he can tell from all of these lights that are on exactly what his position is in relation to the ship, much safer. Even though the human element is gone, it was very safe but not in my precinct, if you like.

Did they use the mirrors are you saying?

16:30 On board the Melbourne, yes.

Did they only use the guy with the...?

There was a landing control officer and he use to get up and practice but on the whole you used the mirror-controlled approach.

So that was on the Melbourne or the Sydney too?

The Melbourne. The Sydney didn't have the mirrors.

OK. So in terms of casualties would he be vulnerable as well,

17:00 **the landing control officer?**

Oh yes. He was sitting...if I can just pick something up. Look, if that's the back end of the ship right? There's an aircraft coming in to land like that? He was standing about 20 feet there on the side of the ship, on a platform. Mind you there was a net all around him, which they could dive down into but this aircraft was landing

17:30 and even if it came in, and made a perfect landing...if I'm the bloke, its wing was only at that wall away from you. It's a pretty hairy thing the whole operation. Even when you get down to operating jets on board. The moment that aircraft picks up a wire and stops, there were aircraft handlers out there disengaging the wires, and

18:00 doing other things. It's screaming engines around you. That's why I can't hear half the time. You're just there. You're standing...like I can remember even in the days of propellers, you're wandering in and out of aircraft with propellers going that would slice you head off if you walked to close to them.

So how much room for error was there?

None.

18:30 There's no room for error anywhere. Sorry!

With a landing it had to be a perfect landing. If it wasn't a perfect landing it could be fatal?

Oh no, no, no, no. No I probably misunderstood you. Say for instance a bloke comes in and does a landing, a good landing, no bother. If he catches the last wire, back in the days of the Sydney,

19:00 his nose might go into the barrier. That wouldn't be a great deal of work to repair but if he went in, he might tip up, still got the wire on him but tip up on his nose. Well then you've got a propeller to change. You might have an engine to change. You might have damage to the aircraft and all of that sort of thing. The whole aim of course is to have it ready to fly again the next morning.

19:30 **Can you give me a bit more information about these wires that would catch the plane? How did that actually work?**

There were about an inch and a quarter diameter wires that stretch across the deck. They go through sheaths and pullies, and two big hydraulic rams. When the aircraft gets on it and pulls it, it's a bit like

20:00 a shock absorber in your car, which is really a piston going down into a hydraulic cylinder. That's what these did. It pulled the wire through against hydraulics and it gradually slowed it up, and stopped it.

Where would it actually catch the plane?

Well, this deck hook poked out at the back. It hung down probably about five or six feet with a hook on the end and it would just catch the wire. The wires were

20:30 about eight inches off the deck, just at the right height for you to trip over every time you walked down the deck.

Was that a common thing?

Yes, that was right. I recall on one occasion I was on board the Melbourne when I was a mechanic and I bought a new pair of white leather shoes, tropical gear. I spent hours and hours, and hours and

hours

21:00 spit and polishing them. I got them up like mirrors. We had a church parade on divisions on a Sunday. I went to that, went to walk away, tripped over a wire, ripped all of the spit and polish off! They were there and you knew they were there. They were there all the time but you could just forget and trip over the things.

21:30 **So during these operations at Warwickshire, was that training for both you and your unit to actually be servicing these planes as well as for the crew to be learning the logistics of landing and leaving?**

No. At Warwickshire it was merely mechanical training for us, no aircrew there, only apart from that reserve squadron

22:00 I was telling you about, who we had nothing to do with.

How would that take place? Were you actually on the Sydney at this point or were you in a classroom?

No, we were in a classroom at Warwickshire. Basically what it was; I went to Warwickshire to do the training, went to Cornwall, did more training, came back to Australia and then went on the Sydney.

Gotcha. So you spent nine months was it, in Warwickshire?

I spent nine months in Warwickshire, went down to St Merrin

22:30 I think in May until November, then I went to HMS...well OK, I went to the Royal Naval air station at Yeovilton in Somerset, HMS Heron, and actually did courses in Fireflies and Furies, which they called Samcos [?],

23:00 acquaintance courses for type aircraft. Of course the whole reason for this, as I said I was very lucky, I actually did work on Fire Flies and Furies. A lot of our other people that went over with me for training, they might have worked on other things you see? So we went back, did our acquaintance courses with Fire Flies and Furies, and then some of us came back to Australia, some were posted to other places in UK, and eventually

23:30 joined the squadrons, and came out here on the Sydney. But I was lucky. I came back on a civilian ship, six weeks free travel.

During that time in Warwickshire and Cornwall, and the other training, is it difficult to learn about the logistics of these aircraft when you're actually in a classroom? How did they teach you?

24:00 Most of the classrooms were in hangars. They did have aircraft in the hangars and pieces of aircraft in the hangars, and all training aids, so no great problem. Films, we used to see quite a lot of films.

That's interesting. How many people were in your class?

In the class? Probably about a dozen,

24:30 not very many at all in each class.

You mentioned earlier that the response of the Royal Navy was...I can't remember your exact words but that you were overpaid, oversexed and over here...?

Over there.

Over there.

It's a well worn, hackneyed joke. I think it started off about the Americans in Australia during the war.

Oh, really?

Yes.

So did you have much contact with the local people during that

25:00 **nine months?**

No, not a great deal because once again, you only got weekend leave once a month. Things weren't as liberal back in those days. We could have night leave. Night leave would consist of...we could go into the Nuneaton to the movies but the last bus came back at about half past ten, eleven o'clock and that was it, no overnight

25:30 leave or anything like that.

How would your days be structured? What time would you get up and how would you work the day?

I think we got up about six. Where was this at?

Warwickshire?

We had breakfast. We then had to work part of the ship doing something, cleaning up around the ship for a certain time. Then we had a parade and we marched off to the hangars for

26:00 instruction until lunchtime.

So you'd actually be in the classroom for a couple of hours?

Yes, probably three hours I guess, then lunch and then back for another three.

And then?

And then...well, back in those days you used to get four meals a day, so after we finished

26:30 you used to go to tea. That was what it was called. It was tea and that's what it was, tea, bread, butter, and jam. Then your main meal was at about six thirty I think.

So you had a big break when you could rest or did you have to exercise?

No.

You just killed time between then and dinner?

27:00 Well when you're in a situation like that it's a little bit like the bloke that joined the navy and after he'd been there a fortnight, he wrote home to his mother, and said, "Dear Mum, I used to wonder how they kept the ship so clean. Now I know." Right? You've got to do all your own washing, your own ironing, write letters and all of that sort of thing.

27:30 You don't have a great deal of spare time.

How would you use your spare time?

It was very difficult doing your washing and things like that. They had no washing machines, no specific place for you do the washing. You just used to do it in the hand basin in the bathroom,

28:00 no ironing rooms or anything like that. They didn't supply irons. We used to invariably...somebody would have one. We used to do the pools, football pools. You know, you have to try and work out who is going to win, and all of this sort of thing. We were only having a laugh about it recently because I sent away for these pools for about six months before I found out that...I thought they were playing rugby,

28:30 and they were playing soccer, so that's how much I knew about it, but I was putting in these things. We never ever won anything though. We had a radio in the mess, which we rented but that was the entertainment, a radio.

Was there any way that you could give someone else your washing to do or go and get it done in town or something?

No, you wouldn't have had the money to do that.

29:00 Funnily enough, I say we had a rented radio and I'm now talking about the early part of 1949, and I can tell you now what was top of the pops.

Tell me!

"Unchained Melody" and where is it now? Somewhere near the same place isn't it?

Had a revival, yes.

Same thing.

Would you get together with the blokes, like do social activities with them?

No, there wasn't really

29:30 much to do.

Were you much of a letter writer?

I used to answer letters. I wasn't a prolific writer in so far as I'd write to anybody but if I got a letter I always used to answer it.

During that time who were the people mainly writing to you?

I used to write to my father, a couple of cousins, aunt.

30:00 **Would anyone send you things over?**

The odd photograph.

I guess it would take weeks for things to get there?

Oh yes. There was no fast mail there. I took a lot of stuff over to some people in

30:30 Scotland, things that they couldn't get over there, some friends of an aunt. I took all of that up to Scotland for them, food and clothing, all that sort of thing.

What about the other blokes? Did they receive any special parcels or anything they'd share around with everyone?

I can't recall. I can't remember! [laughs]

You mentioned before that you guys would go in

31:00 **to watch a movie sometimes. What was the town like? What kind of things were on offer?**

Nothing much on offer except the pubs and the theatre. There was probably only one theatre. There was no town at Brancourt. It was about five miles out of Nuneaton.

31:30 Nuneaton was an old town but not big. Where can I think of here? It was a bit like...not as big as Nowra and this is going back in the late '40s, big place now but not then.

32:00 **What kind of movies did they have on?**

I haven't got the slightest idea.

You can't remember the movies?

No.

You mentioned before that the R&R in Melbourne was different to the R&R in the UK. How was it different?

I think it was different...

32:30 on once occasion, I think it was the first Christmas we were in UK, about seven or eight of us went to Belfast because in Australia when you go on leave you get a leave pass to go to your next of kin. We didn't have a next of kin over there so we got a leave pass and we got a warrant to go anywhere in the UK, so you used to say, "Well, what's the furthest place? Oh, Belfast, that's a long way. We'll go

33:00 to Belfast." So you'd get a ticket to go on the ferry, go to Belfast. Anyway, we went over there and about seven or eight, we all stayed at a boarding house for a couple of weeks. We used to wander around the shops. On once occasion one of the blokes said, "I'll make arrangements" and we went and visited Gallagher's Cigarette Factory.

33:30 Somebody said, "They'll give us some pretty good samples. We'll go around there." So we spent a couple hours going around the cigarette factory and when we left they handed us a little packet with three Gallagher's cigarettes in it, which everybody was pretty disgusted with. There was lots to see and the sort of things that interested me, even in Belfast

34:00 you'd be walking down the main street, and down around the Town Hall, and you can see all the marks, and bullet holes from the Germans raiding the place during the war. They're still there, probably still there today. I don't know. I haven't been back to Belfast for many years. I don't remember what we did. I can remember going to a tattoo artist. I didn't get one but

34:30 I can remember the bloke I was with did, only vague memories of it. I remember one of the blokes...I won't mention his name because he lives in the area here. He was pressing his uniform or he wanted to press it and he wanted a damp cloth, so he had his pyjamas on. He cut it and he ripped the bottom

35:00 of his leg of his pyjamas off, and wet it, and he used that to press his uniform. Same bloke was a little bit eccentric, another time he put his sock on and it had a hole in it, so he got a bit of black boot polish, and put it on his toe, and put his sock back on! [laughs] We actually went out and had a look at Short's Aircraft Factory while we were there. Strange as it may seem, they were the sorts of things we'd do.

35:30 A lot of them would be down the pub. The "in" thing for them to get drunk and all that but it never ever caused any trouble. I don't remember any of them having problems because they'd been on the drink.

I was going to ask you about tattoos because lots of people in the navy seem to have them. You didn't end up getting one?

No.

Why not?

36:00 Funnily enough, probably going back...my father had tattoos. As I said, he had a cross with "In memory of my dear brother" on it. He had a butterfly on the other side and they were always black. I don't know whether they had colour in them when he first had them but they didn't do anything for me. I remember another bloke, whose name I won't mention, I was with him when he had a tattoo.

36:30 I almost had thoughts of having one and I watched the bloke do it, and I thought, "I could have drawn that better than that. I'm not going to get one." So I didn't bother.

What did he end up getting?

He had it down here and it was an aircraft carrier with a laurel wreath around it.

37:00 **And it looked really bad?**

Yeah, dreadful.

Oh no. What is it with the tradition of getting tattoos in the navy or is that a myth?

I think it's just one of the...lots of these traditions come up so that it becomes the thing to do. A lot of blokes would go out and get half tanked and, "Let's go down the tattoo shop."

37:30 Well, they seem to be coming back into fashion. You go down to the shopping centre here and half the women have got a tattoo on the back of their leg or their arm, and I don't think they're the sort that wash off! It's there forever.

You have to really, really want it.

Yes, I think that's

38:00 getting back to it all, to what your question was. If you could have had it and said next month, "I don't think I like it any more, I'll wash it off", I might have tried one but the thought that it was going to be there forever. Nah!

Absolutely. So in terms of...you said it was hang out at the pub and that kind of thing, and you mentioned before that you don't drink but

38:30 **what kind of contact did you have with the locals? Did you meet any people?**

I used to talk to them in the pubs and all those sorts of places, yeah great. Of course it was always, "Oh you're Australian. What's it like there? My Auntie Billie or Uncle Billy went out there. You must know him. Blah, blah, blah", or "We'd like to go", or "We're going to go", and all of that.

Was it in Warwickshire that you

39:00 **met your wife to be?**

No. Cornwall.

Cornwall?

Tape 6

00:43 **Thanks, Hugh. Let us continue on the story. You said earlier that you met your wife in the UK. Can you share how that actually happened?**

Well I was posted to 796 Squadron, Fire Fly Mark One Squadron at St Merrin

01:00 and by this stage I was a Naval Airman Air Mechanic Airframe. She was a WREN [Women's Royal Navy Service] Air Mechanic Engines and we were both put on the same aircraft. I was doing the airframe side and she was doing the engine side, and that was how it sort of came about. So then I came back in January 1950 and

01:30 she migrated out here I think about November 1950. We were married the following June down in Melbourne.

She migrated out because you were engaged?

We were engaged, yes. Back in those days it wasn't as easy to get out of the services as it is now and to get her out of the WRENS, she had to have proof that we was migrating,

02:00 and had a passage. So that's the way we went around it.

Did she at all share with you her experience during World War II?

Yes, she was the same age as me and she and her brother, they lived in Southeast London only probably about four or five miles as the crow flies from the centre of London.

02:30 They were evacuated at the start of the war and they finished up at Horsham in Sussex. They used to see the German aircraft flying over on their way to London and all of that sort of thing, when they were at school. Occasionally, I think the school was strafed once. If they didn't do anything in London and if the aircraft had bad weather,

03:00 and then they'd come back, they'd just drop their bombs, and fire their bullets off anywhere. So I think they had a fairly tough time of it.

Rationing, was that still going on in England when you were there?

Yes it was.

Can you just share? Was that similar to the Australian rationing or was it different in any way?

Much more restrictive, like sweets were never rationed here. They were over there. I think they used to get a

03:30 banana a week, one egg a week and an ounce of butter, and things like that. It was much more restrictive than we had. Rationing went on for a few years after the war before they eventually lifted all of it over there.

You mentioned sweets and I understand when you came home on a normal cruise liner the English got stuck into them?

Not just the English. We had a lot of...the passengers

04:00 got stuck into them, put it that way. We had a lot of Irish migrants on the ship as well and they talk about the Irish from the bogs, and they were.

What do you mean?

They didn't know what a knife and fork was. You know it would just about make you sick to sit at the same table and have a meal with them! [laughs]

It was hands in, all in?

Yes, all that sort of thing. If you had a stew they used

04:30 their fingers, probably all they'd been brought up to I guess. You can't knock them for it but if it's not what you're used to it's a bit surprising.

Were there classes as you were coming home?

What?

On the ship were there certain classes?

I guess we would have been Tourist Class. The navy wouldn't have put us any higher than that and being mainly a migrant ship, there probably would have been about 90 percent Tourist Class.

05:00 It wasn't a bad trip. At least we were on our way home.

Any funny stories of people heading out for the first time on the big ship to Australia?

No. I can tell you one funny story. We were down playing Tombola. Do you know what Tombola is? Bingo? Lotto?

05:30 One of the blokes and I can't remember who it was now, he'd been...something came up and he was talking to one of the stewards. They were into everything, those stewards on the ship and he said to him, "When you get to just having one number, you call a number, just write the number in next to it and yell out that you've got it." He said, "I'll come

06:00 and check your ticket." Anyway, he gets down to having one number and he's just getting ready to do this, and a little kid pokes his head over his shoulder, and he says, "My Mum's waiting on that same number!" [laughs] So that was the end of that. Strange isn't it. I can't even remember who it was. There were only six of us.

Kind of ruined it?

It wasn't me! Apart from that, very uneventful. I can't remember where we stopped, probably Portside,

06:30 Colombo, all of those sorts of places.

You also showed me a picture in there in respect to a Fire Fly with two propellers, reverse direction?

No, that was a Sea Fire.

A Sea Fire?

Sea Fire.

Can you just explain why it had two propellers at the front?

Yes, it gives them more thrust. The aircraft flies by the

- 07:00 reaction to the thrust produced by the propeller and so they drive two, one in two different directions. We had the same thing in one of our own aircraft, in the Gannet, which was a turbine driven aircraft but it had two engines each connected to a common gearbox and then coming out, and driving one propeller clockwise, and the other one anticlockwise. The difference in that one was
- 07:30 that you could close down either engine. Once you got airborne and say you were on a long anti-submarine patrol or something like that, you only needed a slow speed just to stooge around, they would say close down the port engine, run on the starboard engine, watch their oil temperatures, and when the closed down engine started to cool off too much, they'd just auto-rotate the propeller, put the propeller into a pitch so that it would turn in the
- 08:00 airstream, start the engine up again, and then close the other one down, and just keep alternating. It gives you a much longer range and things like that, more miles to the gallon.
- Because these planes obviously if they were surveillance weren't designed for speed?**
- No, they don't really need it for surveillance and things like that.
- You mentioned to Claire [interviewer] as you were chatting to her that you received news on the way over that your hope to become a pilot was**
- 08:30 **dashed. How were you feeling in that respect to morale knowing that you were in the navy for 12 years?**
- At the time I thought you know, "Look at this. I've joined the navy. They told me to join and then change over, and now I've tried to change, I can't." But it just wore off and then by the time I got onto aircraft carriers, and things like that, I thought, "Boy, wasn't I lucky!" [laughs]
- 09:00 **Why is that? Pilots didn't have a good time?**
- I think they had a good time. It's just that it's not a piece of cake flying off and on carriers. There's no room whatsoever for any error. One mistake is all you get, so over the years I haven't been sorry.
- 09:30 **Now war is looming in respect to Korea, can you tell me about the lead up and your involvement in Korea?**
- There wasn't any lead up. I went down to Melbourne, got married, came back and I think I had about seven days leave. When I went back out to
- 10:00 Albatross we were told that the Sydney was going to Korea and the aircraft squadron, which of course I was part of one of them, was going. That was it. So that would have been probably the first or second week in July and I think we left in August to go, so we didn't hang around for long but I only found out.
- 10:30 There was no great lead up. I don't recall things going wrong in Korea and any build up to it at all.
- The Sydney would have been, it wasn't a new ship but it would have been quite a new ship for those involved in going off?**
- Yes, well we hadn't had it that long. We only got the Sydney in late '49, early '50. We'd only had it about 18 months.
- 11:00 **Can you just describe for me the first time you went on board and had a look around?**
- Yes I can. The ship was anchored in Jervis Bay and we were taken down in buses, and the aircraft were already on board. We got onto the ship and I can still remember the maintenance petty officer said to me, "You're on
- 11:30 Aircraft 103. The other mechanic's name is Jones, so go down with him." So I thought, "OK! No bother", and I walked all along the flight deck, looked at every aircraft, no 103. So it must be down in the hangar. I went down the hangar, all through, no 103, back up to the flight deck, checked them all again and eventually,
- 12:00 I'd passed about an hour and a half, two hours, and the petty officer said, "You're supposed to be on 103." I said, "Yeah, but I can't find it." He said, "It's down the end of the flight deck." "No, no. No aircraft of that number." "Oh well, it hasn't got the number painted on the side yet." Its registered number I think was VX 728, so that was it. I'd been walking past the thing because it didn't have it on but
- 12:30 a couple of days later we sailed up to Sydney for storing the ship ready to go to Korea and that was when all our aircraft were up on the flight deck, and we were given tins of black paint, and white paint, and rolls of masking tape, and we put all those black and white stripes around the wings, and the 103 on the side. Suddenly there was my aircraft with number 103 on it you see, which is...
- 13:00 I guess it's a reminder. That was my first aircraft in the RAN. It's had a lot of reminders. Our first fatality up there was flying it, flying my aircraft and there's a playing field out at Albatross named after him. I got another aircraft and

- 13:30 after two or three weeks or so, the pilot in that was killed. I got another aircraft, another two or three weeks after that, the pilot was shot down and he landed upside down in the Han River I think it was. Another aircraft, my fourth aircraft. Eventually, for the first time would you believe, it was flown by the designated pilot. Before we left Sydney they designated an aircraft
- 14:00 to each pilot and his name was put on the side, and all this sort of thing. For the very first time at this stage the proper pilot actually climbed into it and flew it, and when he landed on, he had a very, very heavy landing, and twisted the back end of the fuselage, and that wrote the aircraft off. So then I got a fifth aircraft, painted the number. I could just about put these numbers on freehand by this stage and
- 14:30 the last one, it survived the trip. The armistice was signed. We went back to Hong Kong and I think we landed the aircraft at Singapore, and that was it. The replacements that we used were Royal Navy aircraft, not the ones we brought from Australia. We only had two spares and we'd used those, so back to Australia, and the squadron disbanded in Hong Kong.
- 15:00 All of the aircrew who were on that squadron...sorry I'm getting the two trips mixed up. We brought all of our aircraft back except for these RN [Royal Navy] replacements and we came back to Nowra. The next time we went up we disbanded in Hong Kong and the aircrew all flew back to the UK.

How long was that period of service?

That period of service?

When you left and came back?

- 15:30 If you can give me 30 seconds I can grab my thing on the table and give you the dates.

No that's all right, just off the top of your head roughly.

From about August '51 to something like June '52, something like that.

So about eight months. Just so that I can understand correctly, what you're telling me is that with the planes, basically three of them crashed?

Yes.

- 16:00 **One made it back but was damaged?**

Yes.

Finally the fifth one...?

It wasn't that he made it back. He damaged it when he landed it. I think it was all right before he decided to land.

And they were the five planes that you were associated with?

On that one trip, yes.

Was there any sort of superstition or unlucky charm associated with all this?

No I don't think so.

- 16:30 It was a bit of a joke that I...people would say, "Do you want a pot of paint?" and all of this sort of thing. I don't think that there was any superstition with regard to it. It sticks in your memory though. Two or three years, maybe a bit more than two or three years ago, there were some stamps issued and they had the Korean aircraft on them. Would you believe one of them had my stripes and

- 17:00 everything on it, and was 103. It was painted by...I can't remember the bloke's name but whenever they have an air display out here, he has these big paintings and there were a couple out there that he has presented to them. He was there and I said to him, "I know that aircraft because I worked on it all the time that it was up in Korea." I said, "You've got all the markings...", not the markings wrong but I said, "You've got the number

- 17:30 in the wrong place." He said, "People tell me that's exactly how it was." I said, "It wasn't. I painted the numbers on." I even produced some photographs from somewhere and said, "This is where they were." He said, "Well I'll change that" but I've never seen the results of it.

So the stamp was wrong anyway.

Yes the stamp was wrong too.

So these planes, they weren't what you had been working on in England, the Fire Flies?

They were Sea Furies, Sea Furies that I had worked on

- 18:00 in England, yes.

So therefore they were reconnaissance aircraft during that time in Korea?

No they were fighter, fighter bombers.

They were fighters?

But they were used in the bombing and strafing role. I don't think they ever did any fighting as such.

You've shared working on those particular planes that took off. I take it there were other men working with other guys?

Oh yes. I didn't mention it before

- 18:30 but by this stage I had done another course you see, which involved several months and whereas my original training taught me in four trades; airframes, engines, ordnance, electrics up to this daily inspection standard. Then they decided they didn't want that and I went back and did the single trade course, well then after I came back to Australia, I was called in one day, and asked would I like to become a pilot's
- 19:00 mate. Now a pilot's mate is trained in four trades; airframes, engines, ordnance, electrics, except that in one trade you were fully trained up to maximum maintenance standard. Well I was already trained up in that way, so I only had to do these other three and it was a piece of cake. As pilot's mate, you were allotted an aircraft and wherever the aircraft went
- 19:30 to do anything, you were with it. If it went down to the hangar to get a new engine fitted, you went down to the hangar and helped fit the engine. When it went up to the flight deck, you refuelled it and did the servicing on it, strapped the pilot in. He was catapulted off and disappeared for an hour, an hour and a half or so, and you disappeared, and came back when they went to flying stations to land the aircraft.

Just again so I understand,

- 20:00 **when you were on the Sydney you were part of the 103?**

No the 103...I was the leading pilot's mate on aircraft side number 103. I was on 805 Squadron...

805 Squadron?

...which was part of the Sydney Air Group.

OK, sorry. I'm getting a little confused here. Therefore on the Sydney there was only one squadron on board?

No, there were three squadrons. There were two squadrons of

- 20:30 Sea Furies, 805 and 808 Squadron, and one squadron of Fire Flies.

Are we talking roughly about 15 to 20 planes on board?

No probably more like about...with a couple of spares, 32. I think we used to have ten aircraft to a squadron in those days and they gradually decreased the numbers over the years down to eight but I think it was ten in those days.

So even though there were only five flights

- 21:00 **that you shared earlier, there was five guys didn't take off I take it in respect to missions?**

Sorry?

Sorry I'm just trying to understand. There were the five flights you shared, three crash landed, one guy made it back, and one guy finished up somewhere else?

Yes.

That was only five flights. Were there other flights in the squadron?

Yes, there were. I don't know that there

- 21:30 were any other aircrew killed. Certainly others were shot down. In fact there's a painting out in the museum of a Fire Fly with the pilot and the observer, they've crash landed, and they're

- 22:00 just about to get into a rescue helicopter or something. Actually the observer just died. He lived in town here. He just died a couple of years ago. There are a couple of Sea Furies circling round the top keeping an eye on them and one of them has a big 103 painted on the side of it.

So there were quite a few missions from the ship itself besides the five you've obviously mentioned?

Oh yes.

- 22:30 Those five...if you like I had five different aircraft in that few months that we were up there but we used to go to dawn action stations and there'd be a serial of aircraft take off, and then about an hour and a

quarter or so later, another serial would take off, and the first one would land, so they were sort of alternating. Then you'd refuel them and

23:00 service them, then they'd take off, and the others landed. It was just a cycle all day. At one stage the Sydney held the record for the number of sorties in one day. I think it was 83 aircraft launched and landed in one day, which is quite a few. These days they talk about thousands at Kingsford Smith Airport but when you're talking about a 14,000 ton ship,

23:30 83 aircraft off and on it in one day is pretty good.

Given that America had the major air power in Korea, did you respect the Americans and what they could do, and how did you work with them?

We used to have escorts. Sometimes they were American, Dutch, British and New Zealand. We as such, didn't see US carriers except in the Harbour and things like that.

24:00 I'm not saying the aircrew didn't see them but we as the crew of the ship certainly didn't see them. We were always a little bit surprised when we ran into them because the average Australian knew a hundred times more about America than the average American knew about Australia. They'd speak to you and they'd say, "Wow!

24:30 You're an Australian. You speak good English." You'd say to them, "What else do you think we're going to speak?" "Well, we thought you'd speak Spanish or something there." They had no idea.

So you'd go into port in Seoul or places like that?

Oh yes. When we first went to Korea, we went into our first port

25:00 of call was Yokosuka, which is not so far from Tokyo and while we were there, there was a cyclone or typhoon warning as they're known there, came up, and we put to sea. We had a pretty hairy 48 odd hours, aircraft washed off the flight deck of the ship, boats washed out of their moorings on the ship where they'd been wired down. The aircraft had anything up to 20 steel cables holding them onto the deck but size of the waves

25:30 and the power just washed them off. I guess everybody that night thought we were never going to see the next day, boy she was rough.

Is it safer for you to go to sea than it is to sit in port moored?

Oh, yes.

Why is that?

Well I guess...I can give you one example of that. That photograph I just showed you and I said I went up to Darwin when Cyclone Tracy

26:00 went through there, HMAS Arrow, a patrol boat was in Darwin at the time. They couldn't get out and it just got washed underneath the jetty, written off because half the time they'd all finish up on the beach, rocks and all of that, whereas if you go out to sea...I don't know. I'm not a navigator but I guess you can

26:30 either try to ride it out or try to get away from it, get around it you know.

You said it was a pretty rough night that one, seasickness amongst the blokes?

Yes, a certain amount but I think we were too frightened to be sea sick, too frightened.

It was that dangerous?

Yes, it was.

27:00 I don't know anybody that...when we used to talk about it, that said, "Oh, nothing to it. Enjoyed it" or anything like that. I don't think I was actually seasick but I think I came pretty close to it.

So shore leave? You had it here at this particular place called...?

That was Yokosuka.

Yokosuka. What other places did you have shore leave?

27:30 We operated out of Kure and that was a big Japanese naval port during the war. We'd store ship in there and we might stay in for a fortnight, and go out for a fortnight, and sort of alternate. We didn't always go back into Kure. We went into Nagasaki once, just the once but normally we went into

28:00 Kure because it was a British port. It was the Headquarters of the Australian Occupation Forces. It wasn't far from Hiroshima. I went over there a couple of times in a bus and just had a look around, probably got radiation sickness now from it. Yes, mainly shopping, we

28:30 used to go mad over the shopping because you could get all stuff in Japan you couldn't get in Australia, all gaudy stuff you probably wouldn't buy now but it was very enjoyable. We didn't travel anywhere

because you couldn't travel in the amount of time you had off. You didn't get weekend leave and things like that, just night leave.

Claire has earlier discussed the issue of homosexuality in the forces and another thing that the archive

29:00 **is interested in, is the fact that sailors seemed to have a girl in every port, brothels and those sorts of things. Did sailors have time to go and visit them?**

Well, I know lots of them did go to them. It's probably no worse than the army and the air force. They were there but

29:30 nobody was ever forced to go to them. I don't recall anybody being grabbed, tied up and taken to them.

What warnings did the navy give you about them?

You were certainly given warnings on board the ship and all of that sort of thing. I can't remember anything specific but we did used to get warnings.

So there were lectures in respect to venereal

30:00 **disease?**

Oh yes, all that sort of thing. Mind you, we were on a war footing I guess and you'd line up on the flight deck for payment. You'd get your pay and you'd go a little bit further in the queue, and you'd hold your hand out, and they'd put a couple of packets of razor blades in it, and you'd go another couple of feet forward, and you'd get so many packets of cigarettes handed

30:30 to you, and you'd go another few feet forward, and you'd get salt tablets, and cod liver oil capsules to take. I don't remember exactly what they were for. They were soft and had to dissolve after you swallowed them. I think we also used to get

31:00 butterscotch I think it was, packets of butterscotch. They were all OK. The worst thing they used to give us were the cigarettes. They were...I remember the brand. They were Turf and they were so stale that if you lit one, it burnt your mouth. They were dry!

What did you do? You traded them or smoked them?

You'd smoke them for a while

31:30 until you couldn't stand it any longer. We used to use them for...you weren't allowed to gamble but we used to use cigarettes for that because it didn't matter if you lost them all!

Going ashore, did you try and trade some of these things?

No. I don't ever remember taking cigarettes ashore or anything like that.

In respect to Japan,

32:00 **during the BCOF days they were told to keep their distance, not to fraternise. Was that an order you were given?**

I don't recall but we used to speak to people and people would speak to us. In the street I used to feel a tiny little bit guilty about it.

32:30 On the whole the Japanese at that stage were very subservient. If you walked down the street they got out of your way and bowed as you walked past. I used to feel a little bit uneasy about that.

Was there any ani....?

Animosity.

Thank you very much.

No.

In respect to fellas that had served in World War II towards the Japanese?

No, I don't remember any and yet

33:00 we knew a few people in the army at the Kure army base, and I'm sure that some of those were ex-World War II but I don't know that there was any animosity. There was a lot more of...they looked down upon the Japanese

33:30 but I think that was probably because they were there permanently. We were going in for two weeks and away, whereas they might have been there two years.

Sounds a pretty quiet time the two weeks that you had off?

You wouldn't go ashore every night. You might only go ashore twice in that fortnight. Apart from

anything else, you don't have the money or you didn't have the money.

34:00 Why would you want to go off and pay X amount for a meal, which was going to be rice and something anyway, when you could probably have a bit of steak on board for nothing? That was not just then. Even later on, on board the Melbourne a friend of mine was the ship's photographic officer and we used to go ashore. We'd go over to Kowloon and

34:30 sometimes we'd have a meal ashore but quite often we'd just catch the ferry back. You used to pay about five cents or something on the ferry, come in quite near the ship and we'd go and have a meal, sometimes we'd even go ashore again after. It doesn't worry you but back in those days when you're thinking...at the time we were up in Korea, you didn't have any money to spare.

Given that when you're in port you're meeting Americans and

35:00 **also...?**

Not so many Americans at Kure. The Australian Army was there and the Australian air force was at Iwakuni, which wasn't so far away, 77th Squadron but didn't even really see many air force people in town, mainly army.

Kure was very much an Australian town then?

Well it was run pretty well by the Australians.

35:30 **Did you play any sport against the army and the air force?**

I never excelled at it because I didn't understand it but we used to go and play baseball. That's a strange thing to do, isn't it? But I could never hit the thing or if I did hit it, it never ever went where I wanted it to go, so if you don't excel at it, don't play it.

What about sight seeing when you went to

36:00 **Hiroshima? What did you see?**

We didn't get out of the transport. It was still a mess you know, buildings lying around everywhere but lots of those things, it just goes over you head to be honest. At another time when I was on board the Sydney, we went

36:30 over to Western Australia, the Montebello Islands and the British were doing an atomic experiment there. We went over to that and we weren't allowed to tell anybody where we were going but you'd get into Darwin, and everybody says to you, "Oh you're on your way over to Montebello are you, for the Atomic test?" "Oh no! No" but they knew more than we did. We actually...

37:00 we were a few miles away when they let it off and we had to stand with our backs towards where the explosion was going to be, and then after that, a few seconds or something later, they said, "Righto! You can turn around now." We turned around and you could see the big cloud billowing up, and about half an hour later they said, "Right! We're on our way back to Sydney."

37:30 Away we went.

You had no idea at the time why you were there?

We knew we were going there for the...well we weren't going to set off anything. We were going there for the aircraft to make sure that the area was clear of anybody. Actually we didn't do anything on the ship but our aircrew and our aircraft flew sorties all around the area

38:00 making sure there was no shipping or people, or anything in the area.

Given what you saw in Hiroshima and you were also at war in Korea, did you reflect at all that they may use the atomic bomb in Korea?

No, never thought of it. I think it was a bit upsetting

38:30 when your aircraft doesn't come back and you know that the pilot has been killed. I think the only time I got a bit scared was we were on our way back from Korea, back down to Japan once and something was sighted underneath, not sighted, something was probably on sonar underneath the ship, and we thought we were being tailed by a submarine underneath,

39:00 so we all had to go into a silent routine but by the next day it had all disappeared, but a bit worrying for a couple of hours. What's going to happen to you?

North Korea had an air force. Did they have any shipping?

I don't know. I think they had relatively small ships but I can't remember whether they had submarines. What you've got to remember is that back in those days the North Koreans were

39:30 very pally with the Russians and it could well have been a Russian submarine underneath.

Tape 7

00:43 **Given that your service in respect of the Korean War was for about nine months, what did you do on the ship during that nine months besides the actual missions that the planes may have taken off on.**

01:00 **How did you occupy your time?**

Well, you had no spare time really. As I said, I was a pilot's mate. We went to dawn action stations.

What does dawn action stations mean?

That means that at dawn you're at your aircraft and the ship is ready for action.

01:30 Probably within 45 minutes we'd launched the first lot of aircraft, so if your aircraft was in the first launch that meant that give 20 minutes or so, meant that it wasn't coming back in a hurry and you'd go and see if you could get something to eat, and be back for when it landed. That was just a cycle all day.

02:00 if you'd serviced the aircraft and it was waiting to take off at 12 o'clock, you'd see if you could find somebody to stand there for you while you went to get something to eat, and if you couldn't find anybody you didn't eat. It was as simple as that and by the time, say five or six o'clock at night when the day's flying finished, well you still had to service your aircraft. It had to be refuelled. It had to have covers put on it. It had to be lashed down, not that we did the lashing but it had to be covered

02:30 and all of that sort of thing. It might have to go down to the hangar and have an inspection done on it. It might have to have a repair done. It might have to have a bullet hole fixed up, something like that, so it wasn't a nine to five job. You started probably at five o'clock in the morning and six o'clock at night you could be just going to get a meal, and going back to work till midnight. You never knew.

What was some of the common maintenance you'd be doing on the aircraft? Were there common

03:00 **things given you were at sea and aircraft need their engines...?**

On the engine side apart from the normal servicing, fuel and oil, checking for leaks, you only used to do so many hours before you had to change the oil and

03:30 things like that. Those Sea Furies used to drink oil as though it was going out of fashion. If a Sea Fury flew on an hour and a half mission, and came back, if it took three, four gallons of oil, boy that was OK. That's normal.

Did the sea salt play any part in corroding the planes?

Not a great deal in those days.

04:00 We used to get a lot of salt on them because some rough weather up there and spray came over the flight deck but it didn't seem to affect the aircraft a great deal, not like these days. Like when we went to later type aircraft, you had to watch them all the time and in fact by the time we got to the

04:30 era of Trackers and Sky Hawks around about 1970, it had even got to the stage by then where the ship had to allocate a certain amount of fresh water so that we could wash the aircraft down.

Because it was going to cause problems?

Could well cause problems. One of the many courses I've done, I did an anti-corrosion course

05:00 in the United Kingdom and I've seen English Wessex helicopters that had come back from being out round Borneo and places like that, and they hadn't had time to do any husbandry on them, troops getting in and out, muddy wet boots, and it soaks down into the bottom. You could put your hands the holes where they'd rusted and would you believe

05:30 that if you get a piece of magnesium alloy, which is most of the skin off an aircraft, and say a piece of copper, and connect a bit of wire to the two of them, and put it onto a volt meter, and just dip it into some salt water out of the river, you get a reading, not a high reading, not a hundred volts but you get a microvolt reading, and that's the

06:00 corrosive action taking place between those two different metals.

Now I'm going way back to my Year Ten science class, so sorry about the information. It's been almost 20 years but my understanding on ships is that they actually on the ship place a weaker metal so that that rusts away rather than...

Yes they do, anodes and cathodes. You're getting outside my province now.

Oh really?

You're getting into ships. You know that big book that I said was written by that shipmate, you're

getting into his province.

06:30 They put these big things bolted onto the hull and that attracts the corrosion process, and that corrodes rather than the steel in the ships.

Exactly. Therefore on some of the planes did you guys do the same sort of thing?

No, you can't. I'd probably say that weight is a big factor and also the materials

07:00 that are used in aircraft are much more prone to corrosion. You're talking about magnesium alloys instead of steel in a steel hull ship and a magnesium alloy skin on an aircraft.

OK. You've answered my question.

Well some aircraft. One of the many courses that I did in England was a...and I was probably one of seven or eight Australians that were ever trained in it, was the repair of

07:30 wooden fuselages. The Sea Venom aircraft that we had, they had a twin boom. The cockpit part...have you ever seen...you mightn't have seen a Sea Venom. You know a Vampire? The fuselage of a Vampire is made out of two layers of plywood filled with balsa between it.

08:00 The three ply on either side is about an eighth of an inch thick and about almost half an inch of balsa, and then another piece of plywood. I did a course at De Havilland's on how to repair that because you have to do many repairs. It's not just cutting out a square hole and putting a plug in. It's all got to be tapered and fitted in, and leak proof for when the aircraft is pressurised, so it all had to work from the

08:30 inside out, pretty specialised it was. For all of that I never ever did a repair on a wooden aircraft.

That was specifically for wooden?

That was when we went over to England in 1955 and formed up a Sea Venom Squadron when the RAN bought Sea Venom aircraft.

OK. So the theory though

09:00 **of what you were working on with the wooden fuselage transferred forward to later aircraft that you might work on?**

No. There weren't very many wooden type aircraft that were built like that. The Mosquito during the war was built like that, the Sea Venom, Vampire. I don't even know of any more.

Well, we are really at that point where the Korean War was sort of

09:30 **the beginning of jet fighter aircraft in conflict?**

Well, we didn't have jets there.

No but my question is jets were on the way.

They were on the way.

How was the navy going to prepare you for what they might buy?

What they might buy in the future? OK, well just to lead up to it quickly. After the Korean War I came home. As I said before I was that far off going I think on the coronation cruise

10:00 but went back onto the Vengeance and worked up with 850 Squadron, and went back up to Korea but this time it was more of a flyover thing rather than shoot up ox-carts and ammunition dumps.

This is with the Sydney again?

The Sydney again, yes. This time I was on 850 Squadron. I was in a maintenance team.

10:30 I didn't have a specific aircraft of my own. Anything that went wrong three of us descended upon the aircraft and fixed it. We might sit around playing cards all day and at six o'clock at night get called out, and work for the next 30 hours without a break apart from a meal. Now I've lost my thread. What was I leading up to?

11:00 Oh, the jets, wasn't it? After we came back from there I was posted back to the United Kingdom again, once again to HMS Heron, where I said we went and did a month's training before. I went back on HMAS Vengeance, which was then handed back to the RN. The squadron had already formed

11:30 and they were using Sea Venom Mark 20 aircraft, which the RN had been flying for some time. We were getting Mark 53 aircraft, which were the equivalent of their Mark 21s, just slightly different to the ones that we were hiring. I gather the Australian Government hired these things or something. They were a jet. De Havilland built the aircraft. De Havilland built the engine, Ghost Engine.

12:00 It was rather funny because when we got there we were taken down to the station cinema. I can't remember what you call the things. You know the little...not a camera but a little projector and they put

not a slide in, but a strip of film, and they just click it, and it goes through like one 35mm section down the strip? Well they had this strip probably about so long and they

- 12:30 said, "This is a Sea Venom. This is the Ghost Engine. This is where you fill the oil. This is where you do this." They got to the end and they said, "OK, away you go." And that was me qualified on Ghost Engines. Half an hour I guess it took and only about a week or so after this, it was rather funny, they were also forming
- 13:00 up two Gannet Squadrons down in Cornwall at the Royal Navy station at Cardross. The inauguration of the squadron had all been done by the Australian High Commission, so aircraft flew down and we went down there by bus. When we got down there our aircraft had been fuelled and just pushed
- 13:30 into a hangar, so we went in, and I had a look over mine, and I went up to the chief. I said, "Chief, do you know where I can get some oil?" He said, "What do you want oil for? We're only here for a day or so." I said, "Oh yeah, but I need some for my aircraft." "What do you mean you want oil?" I said, "Well, it needs topping up." He said, "Come on. These things use about three drips in a week." I said, "Oh no, not mine." I said, "Mine uses about five
- 14:00 pints an hour." "What?" I said, "Oh yeah." I said, "Every time it flies I have to go and get an oil can, and top it right up." Well they're down there and they're looking inside. You can see where the main bearing is and there was traces of oil back, so they decided in the end that they would fly it back to Yeovilton because it was only about a 30 minute flight. The first thing they did was do an engine change because it was using excessive oil. I said, "I'm used to putting three and a half, and four gallons
- 14:30 in after an hour and a half, and you're winging because I'm looking for three or four pints!" And that was my first experience on the jets.

So it did have some sort of oil leak or oil problem?

Yes it did but you see the big difference between...a radial air-cool engine, it just goes through oil and

- 15:00 a drip, you wipe that off with a piece of rag. One day you'll try and tighten a couple of nuts to stop the leak. Well you get a small leak like that in a jet and it's an entirely different matter. It could mean different sorts of bearings impending failure and all this sort of thing.

I'm just struggling at the moment with the fact that you were trained for so long on the propeller

- 15:30 **planes and then suddenly you're servicing jet aircraft with a half an hour slide show?**

Yes, about a half an hour show.

When surely the two engines are...and two planes?

Yes, well this is the sort of thing that happens. You see, I spent over a year in the workshops alone when I did my mechanician's course, fitting,

- 16:00 turning, machining, all of the welding, all of that sort of thing. After I finished in that workshop I never put my hand on a lathe or anything like that except to lean on it, well I mean as far as the navy is concerned. When I was the engineer in Melbourne for that period, one of my many tasks was that I was in charge of the sheet metal workshop and we had a lathe in there.

- 16:30 I used to go down and make little things for myself but never...by this time I was an engineer anyway so it wasn't my job to make anything. If something needed making I told somebody else but I just used to go down and fiddle myself. I've got a lathe out in my garage but I never ever had to do any of those things, much to my dismay.

So when there was a problem with one of these

- 17:00 **jet aircraft, how did you diagnose what the problem is and know how to fix it given your training?**

You learn quick and you've got manuals. Most aircraft have got a fault finding schedule. If I'd read all of those, but we're talking about almost hours after I'd first

- 17:30 joined the squadron. I probably would have seen something in there that said, "Excessive oil consumption can be caused by so and so. The possibilities of being able to fix it are probably about one percent. The possibilities of having to do an engine change are 99 percent."

So that particular aside, was there an occasion or occasions where you actually did make big blunders because the aircraft or engine

- 18:00 **was so unfamiliar?**

Not because it was unfamiliar. I came very close once when I was a mechanician. I was on board Melbourne. I was on a Gannet Squadron and I had an aircraft, and it had an internal hydraulic leak,

- 18:30 hydraulic system to work the undercarriage , the flaps and various other things. They have in them what they call an accumulator, a big cylinder, piston in it, inside it, one side air and the other side when the engines are running, they're turning pumps over, and they're producing hydraulic pressure, and this produces
- 19:00 a buffer. It increases the air pressure and you can increase the hydraulic pressure. So if you turn the engines off this pressure should stay there fairly indefinitely but with this aircraft within about four hours, the only pressure...I can't remember the air pressure but lets say it was 300 pounds to the square inch, that's all you had because that's the pressure you were reading.
- 19:30 So we checked everything on this, changed lots of things and we'd try it, and say, "Oh, it looks all right." Another day or so later it would be back. Anyway, in the end I found what I reckoned was the little component that was causing this. It was just letting fluid leak out of it. We had the aircraft up on jacks, so in other words it was suspended with
- 20:00 its wheels up above the deck. Now this is on board the carrier. The aircraft's up on the thing, always a little bit if a hairy thing. The ship is rolling and all of that sort of thing. This same aircraft, this is the one I said had the twin contra-rotating props, two engines. They had a very modern thing where you could put what they call rollout rails on the thing and literally roll the engines out, disconnect the jet pipes,
- 20:30 roll the engines out onto these rails, and change the engine, work on it. Right, now another bloke was doing all this engine stuff and he had the engine rolled out on these rails. The stand that held these things up, the two rails, they were fixed into the front of the aircraft poking out like that and at the front there was a yoke, came down like that. It had a big spigot on it and that sat
- 21:00 in a place on the front undercarriage. So you could even move the aircraft around. If it was down on its wheels and you had the engine out, you could move it, not tow it or anything else but you could move it. So I reckoned I had this thing right, connected up a hydraulic rig, which means you didn't have to start the engine to get the power. The engineer
- 21:30 officer of the squadron said, "I want to know when you're going to do all of this." So I went and told him. He came in. He stood next to me. I was standing here. The bloke up in the cockpit was going to do what I'm telling him, another bloke over here at the hydraulic rig. "Righto, start up the rig." He starts the rig. "Got hydraulic pressure?" "Yes."
- 22:00 "Right! Up undercarriage" and the bloke put his head down. I said, "Stop!" And the engineer turned around and he said, "What the bloody hell is the matter now?" I said, "Well, when I said up undercarriage my brain just started to think of what happens. Two wheels at the side just came up like that no problem." I said, "But the nose wheel when it comes up, that yoke holding the engine up,
- 22:30 the yoke is going to move away. What's going to hold the front of the engine up?" And he said, "Close down the hydraulic rig. You with me! Out the hangar." As you walked out the hangar door on the left was a wardroom galley and opposite was the gunroom
- 23:00 where the midshipman used to go. He poked his head inside the wardroom galley and he said, "I want two cups of coffee in the gunroom. You, in there with me." He sat down and he pulled out a packet of cigarettes. He said, "Have a cigarette and a cup of coffee is on the way. How the bloody hell did you think of that?" I said, "I don't know." I still don't know till this day. Now if my brain hadn't done that, that aircraft would have fallen off those jacks and that would have been about half a million damage.
- 23:30 Well, you never know. It could have caused a fire. I never ever knew. I went all through the books and I could not find anything in the book that said that you could not contract the undercarriage when you had this thing in.

So let me just continue on this vein in respect to someone in your position. Surely there were occasions when

- 24:00 **a fella got it wrong and damaged the plane?**

Well, of course, yes.

Do any stories come to mind in that respect?

There have been odd occasions when people have been moving aircraft around and hit the hangar with the wing tip. We've had to repair the wing tip.

- 24:30 You might be towing aircraft down to the line and they miss the corner, and just run off the hard standing onto the grass, and the aircraft sinks down to its axels in the mud. Most of them you can turn around and say, "Well, it was an accident. It
- 25:00 won't happen again. He won't do that again, etcetera , etcetera , etcetera ." But if there is a great deal of damage you've got to report it and then they finish up. They've probably got to go before the engineer commander and he might just say the same thing. You don't see technical offences very often.

I guess what I'm driving at is if you hadn't spotted this on the plane perhaps, what would have happened to you?

- 25:30 I would say that you wouldn't be talking to me today! [laughs] You see, you never know what's going to happen. An aircraft could fall off a jack, right? Now, to take it to the worst, the falling off could have created a short circuit in some electrical wires or it could have ruptured a fuel tank and sparks from...
- 26:00 you're on a steel deck, could have ignited it, could have set fire to the hangar. You get a fire in the hangar of an aircraft carrier, you're 21 foot something above the water line. The only way they can put them out is...they've got overhead sprinklers and they virtually...you can't breathe in there when they're going. So what happens?
- 26:30 So much water cascading in there, in a cloud, that it's all condensing there, the spray and coming down in the bottom, and two feet of water 21 feet above the waterline, you start losing the ship's stability. Now don't get me wrong. I've never seen it happen but that sort of thing can happen.

So that's the scenario but pretend nothing like that happened, but the plane is damaged. What happens disciplinary-wise to someone in a position

27:00 **such as yours?**

Such as me? Well, what could I have got? I don't know that they fined people that far back. I can't remember but they put in fines later on. I don't think they did. Stoppage of leave maybe? Of course that's not always as bad as it seems. If you're at sea and you get 14 days stoppage of leave,

27:30 and it's 16 days before you're going into harbour again, you've done your 14 days before you get in. I never ever had it but that's the way it works. It's not leave stopped a day every time you go into harbour. If you go in 14 times for one day, it doesn't take you that amount. It's the next 14 days. I don't know, but I had blokes

28:00 do the odd thing. For instance, we had a system brought in called Tool Control. There was a great fear of tools being left in aircraft causing damage, so we introduced these toolboxes and all of the tools in them were colour coded, and numbered to that aircraft. Before you could even go and get a toolbox,

28:30 it had to be put into the aircraft's documentation. Then you were given a tag and you could use the tag to get the toolbox. They wouldn't accept the toolbox back if there was a tool missing. Say a tool is missing, the bloke would come to me as the engineer of the squadron and say, "I've lost a tool." I remember a bloke came into me once and he'd lost a six inch rule and I said, "Well,

29:00 have you been all through the aircraft?" "Yes." "Have you been all through your clothes?" "Yes." You try to pin them down and pin them down. In the end I said to him, "Go back up to your cabin and have a look at the clothes you had on yesterday." And he came back down 20 minutes later and said, "I've got the ruler. It was in my pocket from yesterday." He'd left it in his pocket but it could just as easily be in the aircraft and work its way down, and jam the controls or

29:30 something. Now, if I couldn't find that, I had to go to the senior engineer of the station and get permission to let that aircraft fly but I never ever saw an aircraft down because of tools left in it. I saw plenty of tools that had been left in aircraft but I never saw one that affected it. I've seen an aircraft...

30:00 we've finished with Korea but up there I can remember a Sea Fury. A bloke, before his aircraft took off and he forgot about it, he put a screwdriver and a fuel key...a fuel key was a thing with a handle about that long, came down and it was horseshoe shaped, and it went into the slot on the top of the fuel caps, and you turned it to loosen it off, filled it up, turn it tightly up.

30:30 We eventually all got little holsters made to carry these things but anyway, he just sat them for the time being in the air intake. The aircraft started up, on the catapult, away it goes for an hour or so, comes back, lands on, not even when the bloke caught the wire did they come out. The aircraft taxis up into its spot and he goes over to refuel it.

31:00 He couldn't find his things, then all of a sudden, "Oh, God!" And there they were still sitting in there. It happens. The best laid plans of mice and men or something like that they say!

So just on the subject of fines. You said they were brought in later?

Yes.

Why were they brought in?

I don't know why they were brought in.

31:30 Lots of these things you don't know that they're coming until they start. If a bloke did a minor thing and he was taken up before the commander, say he was two hours late in getting back on board he could be fined 50 dollars. Lots of things there was a little bit of

32:00 inequality in it, in so far as...I'm trying to think. There was the odd case where, say a bloke came back on board drunk and so he was apprehended. They said, "You're drunk. Righto, you're on commander's report." The commander says to him, "Righto,

32:30 returning on board drunk. Fined seven days leave and we'll say a 50 dollar fine." The same bloke might have been in Nowra and been caught driving a car above the limit, so then he's got to come into court. A few of them tried it at one stage. They'd go before the magistrate and

33:00 they'd say to the magistrate, "I've already been punished for this." You can't punish them twice. I'm not sure how they got out of that one in the end but it was well worth a try I guess.

Given now you're working with jet aircraft and so was the air force, was there any liaison between you and the air force engineers or crews?

33:30 Not at that stage. Not because of the jets. I did have a certain amount of liaison on that squadron with the air force because we had a couple of Dakota aircraft. We used to get the spares

34:00 through the air force. The navy had a lot of spares for them but if they didn't, they'd go to the air force. So put it this way, I had contacts. Then later on, the RAN was buying two Hawker Siddeley 748 aircraft and they were flown out from England. While they were on the way I went around to (UNCLEAR) and had an acquaintance with these things for a week or so, and made lots of contacts there, so I

34:30 was able to do quite a lot I guess. I don't mean unofficially but I mean by skirting a lot of the correct channels by ringing somebody up and saying, "Have you got it?" If he says, "Yes." You say, "Righto, I'll put a demand in." Rather than putting a demand in and waiting for it to go through all the proper channels. Yes, we did have a

35:00 certain amount.

They did the same thing I take it, with you?

Well they didn't have the same need for us. They were operating a lot of the one type of aircraft and we only had two.

This is a question that might be outside your particular area of expertise but it seems to me that during World War II, the later part we were dealing a great deal with the Americans fighting the Japanese and supporting them, particularly

35:30 **in the navy, yet in your early years up to, and around the time of Korea, we were buying a lot from the UK, so the Sydney, the Melbourne and the aircraft. So do you know why we weren't buying from the Americans at all?**

I don't think we bought it from the Americans during the war. It was all lend lease and it all had to be given back to them at the end of the war. For instance, within 30 mile of where you're sitting now there's probably a couple of hundred aircraft in the

36:00 bottom of the ocean because they were dropping them just outside the entrance to Jervis Bay. I don't know, possibly because of the relationship between Australia and England. The carriers were built in England. We bought English type aircraft from them. Invariably we used to modify them so that they got away

36:30 from their standard but basically we could get all of the parts from them with no trouble. We did change over to American ones in '69, '70, when we went to Trackers and Sky Hawks.

Coming back to your Korean service, when planes took off and landed were there many injuries from the staff who were servicing the planes?

No.

Everything was pretty safe?

I won't say there were

37:00 none. I can remember one bloke got hit by a propeller.

What happened there?

The aircraft had what was called a Coffman Starter, a little bit like the cartridge chamber on a revolver but shells bigger than a shotgun cartridge, which had cordite and stuff in them.

37:30 They fired stuff into a cylinder that turned the engine over. If the pilot tried two or three times to start the aircraft and it didn't start, we'd then say, "Righto, switch it off. Hands on your head so we know you're not going to do anything." We would manually turn the propeller over a few blades to clear the cylinders.

38:00 One day, it was on board. This was going on and just as the bloke got hold of the blade to lean on it, the pilot pressed the button for some unknown reason, and then it went "Srptttt", just flicked him. I don't think it killed him. It didn't kill him but I can't remember that it did a great deal of damage now. You know, if it had chopped his head off or his arm off, I'd have

38:30 remembered that but I don't recall.

Did the pilot get in all sorts of trouble for this?

I can't remember. I can't remember who it was. He probably did but we wouldn't have been told. I'm sure he did.

Tape 8

01:03 **Hugh, on casualties in Korea, you were going to share a story about one pilot that was killed.**

Lieutenant Keith Clarkson was killed in the first of the aircraft that I had on board. He was the first casualty and I had seen the aircraft off, and I had a dental appointment,

01:30 I went down to the dental surgery. We used to carry a couple of dentists on there and I was in the chair with my mouth open. I can remember the phone ringing and the dental commander answered the phone, and spoke. I thought, "Something's happened here." He turned around and he said to the other bloke that we'd lost a pilot. I knew exactly who it was. I didn't have to ask the name.

02:00 I just said, "I'll have to go." So they let me off and about half an hour later I was called down. I never ever worked out why but they thought it would be nice if I packed his kit because his cabin was exactly as he walked out of it to go flying. So, I just

02:30 had to get some boxes and put all of his clothes, and personal papers, and everything into it to be shipped away to somewhere. I don't know whether it would have gone straight to his family or back to the navy to sort. I don't know but that was pretty disturbing.

Just to understand, when you're in the role of a pilot's mate, you establish quite a close relationship with the pilot?

03:00 Well, yes and no. You establish a sort of a bond between you and all of them. Back in those days as I said, they did put a name on the side of each aircraft and you were really supposed to be like this with that one bloke but they never allocated...just the luck of the draw I guess, they never allocated the aircraft to the bloke whose name was painted on the side. But we

03:30 used to get out there and every time they did a mission, we used to paint another picture of a rocket on the side, like you see in the wartime movies. They used to paint a bomb on the side, well we had a stencil and I think we used to put them on five at a time. Every time we got another five, we'd stencil another five rockets on it.

Why do you think that the powers that

04:00 **be felt that you should go and sort through the pilot's possessions?**

No idea. I would have thought that a steward would have done it. I mean, his cabin was in an area that would have been serviced by one of probably four or five or six cabins that one steward would have looked after. Why they didn't do it, I don't know.

04:30 They probably thought that it was a good thing for me to do. I didn't.

What was your response to it?

"How high do you want me to jump?"

Did it have any effect on you?

I don't think so, no. No, I don't recall being upset or

05:00 anything like that at the time.

Just on the issue of the Korean War, it is often called the forgotten war. People somehow have this absence of memory about it in terms of the collective memory of Australian involvement. Why do you think that is?

I don't know that it's called the

05:30 forgotten war because of that. I think that it is more that the time is past and you tend to gloss over things, and let them go. The only way I've ever thought of it as being the forgotten war was when all of the hoo ha was going on about the Vietnam veterans. They reckoned they were in the forgotten

06:00 war and they had never been welcomed home. That used to make my hackles rise I admit because they eventually got their welcome home and we said, "Hang on! We've never had a welcome home. We didn't even think about it and we were before them." You needn't put this in if you don't like it but I'm a bit biased against Vietnam vets.

06:30 They always felt that they should have had everything. I'm not saying they didn't get it tough up there and I know that a lot of them were conscripts and that, and we were volunteers but by the same token...

- 07:00 I guess it's a little bit tied up with the fact that I'm the Secretary of the RSL here. We are the Returned Servicemen's League and we cover everybody, navy, army, air force, merchant marine, whatever war you were in, whereas the Vietnam blokes want to be in a little clique all by themselves. Anyway, as I said keep that bit out but it does annoy me!
- 07:30 I've got to admit it. It does annoy me.
- There is also the distinction and I don't know if you'll agree with me but when the Vietnam War was on there was a lot happening on the home front in terms of protesting and passivism. Was that happening when you went to Korea?**
- No, I don't recall any of that.
- 08:00 No, I don't ever recall it being mentioned.
- How was it reported in the media and how were people responding generally?**
- What, the Korean War?
- Yes, or is it hard to pinpoint that?**
- I don't know. I wasn't here to see a paper.
- I mean the build up to it and prior to going?**
- No, I didn't know much about it at all.
- Did you**
- 08:30 **have much information? Were you given much information about why you were there?**
- No, not really. I was just telling Pauline a few days back about how on the back of all the toilet doors we used to have silhouettes of Russian aircraft for you to sit and study. But no, I think...
- 09:00 I'm not trying to teach you to suck eggs but I think what we all have to remember when it comes to these things is that if you think back to the last two or three years when the last of those Anzac Veterans were on their last legs, and they'd say to them, "What was it like at Anzac?" The old bloke would sit there and he'd say, "Well, if they had done this, this wouldn't have happened and they sent us here, and they shouldn't have" and all of that.
- 09:30 The generals sent them in and they didn't ask the privates. All of those blokes that they were interviewing, they didn't have a clue what they were doing at Gallipoli and it's very much like that on board a ship. The captain and the operations officer, and everybody like that, they know what's going on but we're only told...for instance, when I was up there I was a leading hand, the equivalent of a corporal in the army. You only
- 10:00 get told what you need to know. OK, they might say we're going out for a fortnight and we're going to do strikes on...one of the big things in those days were ox-carts because the Koreans used to have these two-wheeled carts pulled by an ox but the back was filled with ammunition, so they used to shoot up the ox-carts and the ammunition, and
- 10:30 the ox-cart would blow up. A lot of this stuff I'm convinced, "General Haig shouldn't have done this at Gallipoli." Well General Haig wouldn't have told them if he was going to and he didn't ask them whether he should or not, and it's the same now. Do you see what I'm getting at?
- Yes, I do. I guess I'm just asking the question because I understand what you're saying from talking to other vets that have**
- 11:00 **been in World War II, they had a distinct idea about who the enemy was for instance. There had been lots of reporting in the media. There were attitudes floating around about who the enemy was and all this propaganda surrounding it.**
- Well, we knew about Koreans and all of that sort of thing. Funny thing you know? You go up there and you fight...well we didn't actually. No fighting for us as such
- 11:30 but when you think back to World War II with the prisoners of war and all of the atrocities that were committed in the prisoner of war camps, do you know that in lots and lots of those cases, the guards were not Japanese. They were Korean because Japan actually controlled Korea for many years before
- 12:00 World War II and possibly that would be something for a lot of our ex-prisoners of war, and their families that were so against the Japanese, should maybe have thought of that, that the Koreans, whether it was North or South. This 39th Parallel [actually 38th] only came in post-war. Before that it was just Korea
- 12:30 and they were supposed to be the most vicious guards of any of the prisoner of war camps. So we knew about that. I don't know. It was just another day and you just accepted it, not like a soldier. He wakes up in the morning and he's in the trench, and it's wet and he goes out, and does all of that sort of thing.

- 13:00 When you're on a ship, let's say you've got 30 aircraft and because some of them are two seaters, there's 50 aircrew taking off and going, and doing something 50 mile away but people on the ship, you're sitting in your heated compartment. You're getting into the queue and going to the dining room, and having a roast meal with
- 13:30 bread that came out of the oven half an hour ago. It's not like even during the war when two battleships were standing back, "bang, bang, banging" at each other. An aircraft carrier is not meant to go in where it's in danger. It's meant to be out where everybody is safe on board the aircraft and these poor 30 characters or 50 characters in its aircraft, they're all going out and doing all of this stuff. The rest of it... I guess you could say it's no different
- 14:00 than a day at the office. If you think about it when you're on board an aircraft carrier, OK I think I've got the most important job and I've got the aircraft maintenance, and the aircrew think, "We're the big fly boys. We're doing the end job here." But down below there's the stokers keeping the engines going and there's all of the writers making up our pay, and keeping, and there's another bloke in the store section. It's no different to any of them than what it was
- 14:30 the last 12 months ago when they were down operating off Jervis Bay or 18 months ago when they were in a shore depot. There's still a lot of boxes in front of them with little spare parts. No different. I don't know whether I look at all this stuff too casually or not. I don't know.

Is there something to be said about a different type of war in the sense that I can appreciate what you're saying about the lack of information that's

- 15:00 **inherent within the job that you're doing but just the idea that being involved with this kind of a war where it's actually not necessarily a personal war. It's kind of an intervention war. Does that make things different?**

No I don't think so. I don't think it's any different. If you think about...I don't know whether you've seen many movies on World War II but England was covered in airfields right?

- 15:30 Their bombers eventually started bombing Germany and the ground crew serviced the aircraft, they armed them, they bombed them and all of that sort of thing. The aircrew got in and they flew over to Germany, and they dropped their bombs, and they flew back to England, and they landed. The people in England, even though there was a possibility of them being raided from Germany, possibly no different than what it was for us on an aircraft carrier.
- 16:00 Do you see what I mean? When you look at things during the war, you see destroyers firing at each other and cruisers firing at each other, and submarines firing torpedoes. It wasn't like that and in fact if it hadn't been
- 16:30 for the fact that you knew that you were at war, it was no different to operating down off Jervis Bay, and using blank ammunition in the aircraft. As far as everybody on the ship is concerned, you're still going and having your three square meals a day.

Did the pilots share with you much about their missions?

No. When an aircraft landed

- 17:00 you go up, you help the pilot out and he might just say to you, "So and so, and so, and so. The compass is not working properly. I'll put it in the book. Blah, blah, blah" and that's the end of it. They didn't discuss that with us because they were all going down to the operations office to discuss it with intelligence and all of those sort of people. If they had, it wouldn't have meant
- 17:30 anything to me if he said, "Oh I saw a train 50 miles out of Chong Pang" or something like that. It wouldn't have meant a thing.

Just looking back on it, what would you say the Australian's involvement with Korea was about?

I think it was to stop the invasion of the Communists

- 18:00 because that's really what it was. North Korea was the Communist section and at that time there was a big fear of Communism around the world.

With the limited information that you had at the time, is that how much you knew back then as well?

No, I think we knew it then. For instance, some things make you laugh. Like we'd go into Hong Kong and of course there were Americans and everything there. Do you know that an American was

- 18:30 not allowed to buy anything wrapped up in string because the string was probably made by Communists? Just getting back to this other business. I think a lot of the difference is and it goes back to what I said about these blokes at Gallipoli, they didn't know anything. They weren't meant to know anything. The difference
- 19:00 when I was say, a leading pilot's mate in Korea in 1952 and the different in being a lieutenant on board

an aircraft carrier in 1970, I guess you could say was fantastic because I knew a lot more about what was going on, because I needed to know for my job

19:30 what was going on. Everything in the navy is really on a need to know basis. If you're filling an aeroplane with petrol, you don't need to know where it is going even. Does that sound a bit offhand?

No, it actually makes a lot of sense. Would you say though that even in that kind of chain of command or however you describe it, that need to know basis,

20:00 **how does that affect you? You talked before about the jump how high thing but you were a recently married man and away from your family and wife for nine months, how does that affect you knowing that there is a war going on, and you're away from your family? What are some of the things going through your mind when you're in that situation?**

I don't remember a lot going through my mind with the worrying about that.

20:30 It's like when we were talking about travelling these days and I said, "Whenever I go anywhere after the first couple of weeks I'm ready to go home." I think everybody was like that then. If we knew for instance, that we were up there for six months, you can bet your life that every calendar on that ship had an X marked on that calendar everyday. Do you know what I mean?

21:00 It was just a matter of getting home and home was a place in those terrible inverted comma things but it was no different being on a ship because we were off Korea than it was on being on board the Melbourne when we hit the Evans and cut it in half, no different.

21:30 All of the everyday things for 99 percent of the people were exactly the same. The only difference was that the aircrew in Korea were using live ammunition and on another exercise they're using dummy ammunition. As far as everyone else was on the ship, they were just doing their job.

So it doesn't come down to a personal

22:00 **cause as such? It's not about, "We're fighting Communism." It's about, "We're doing our job."**

No, I never thought, "Here am I. I'm one little feather in this great big bagful that's fighting Communism." But generally the world was and you were well aware of that.

So how were things like correspondence organized? Were you able to correspond?

Yes.

22:30 We got mail about once a fortnight. Every time we went into Kure we picked up our mail, so you'd get a mob of mail there the night you got in and you'd answer that, write to the wife and family. Then you'd be out for a fortnight and you wouldn't get any mail but you might get two or three lots in that fortnight when you were in harbour. No restrictions on what we could say because we didn't know anything, didn't matter.

23:00 We didn't know anything to tell anyone anyway. No dark secrets!

You mentioned before that your first wife was a WREN?

Yes.

You mentioned that you met her doing a similar job?

Yes.

So what was her role when she was working?

23:30 She was an engine mechanic and I was an airframe mechanic on the same aircraft.

Were there many women in the navy at that point?

Not at that point. Well, there were women in the navy and there had actually been WRENS in the navy since during the last war but not as air mechanics. She was one of the early ones on that.

So what were some of the things that she knew, that you would have known that she

24:00 **would have known, if you know what I mean?**

No, I don't know what you mean.

What are some of the things that she, as an air mechanic, have had to know to do her job?

That I didn't know?

No, not that you didn't know. What was her job? What did she have to do?

Her job was to keep the engine serviced. That's about it.

24:30 Fuel the aircraft, oil it, do inspections on it if necessary, look for any damage after flights and things like that.

So how many women were in roles like that?

There were probably three or four on that squadron but then there were probably about 150 odd men, so they were quite new into that part

25:00 of the Royal Navy.

It is rare even these days to see women in that kind of area.

There are quite a few out at Albatross. They've got women pilots flying helicopters out here now. Of course we had the equivalent here. It was WRENS. Don't have them any more. They're all just sailors. Female or male, you're just a sailor.

25:30 The argument these days is that if a man can do it, a woman can do it and why shouldn't she?

In terms of going away for nine months from your wife, would she have understood better than other men that were married because she had been

26:00 **experienced in this area?**

No, I don't think so because she hadn't had that long in the services and she'd only been posted to the one place. That was her first aircraft posting. It was very difficult for her because we lived in Nowra here. My closest family was in Melbourne

26:30 and her closest family was in London. It's very difficult when things like that come up. You've got nobody to turn to and that was a bit of a worry when you're away. I've got to admit that. It was a worry. At the time when I went to Korea, we were living down at St George's Basin and we'd let

27:00 a holiday cottage on a permanent basis, pretty primitive for those days. We had a fuel stove in the kitchen. There was an old tin bath but if you wanted a bath you had to heat up the water on the stove and carry it in. In fact I bought a chip heater and put it in, so that we could heat water for the bath.

27:30 Quite primitive it was actually but by the same token we were a hundred times better off than a lot of people that were living in at the Showgrounds. At the Nowra Showgrounds it was like a tent city. There were no married quarters in those days, or very few and there were sailors and their wives living in tents in Nowra. Unbelievable isn't it?

I've heard about that.

You've heard about that have you?

Can you expand on that any more?

No, I can't

28:00 a great deal because I said I was living out there, so I was away from it. I do think that lots of them, a good percentage of them were Royal Navy people that had come out and brought their wives and families with them. It was always said that a lot of them, they were living on the smell of an oily rag up there but getting good allowances. There was no accommodation in

28:30 the town. You could not get accommodation. That's why I was living way out here, 25 mile out at St George's Basin. There was a little bit of...I guess you'd call it class distinction. A lot of the officers lived at Huskisson. The navy did not enjoy a good reputation in Nowra. We were looked down upon.

29:00 I'm not saying this because the navy had been here for 50 years and played merry hell in the town. I'm talking about a naval air station that had been commissioned in 1948 and I'm now talking about four or five years later.

Was there any reason for that?

Yes, town's people. We hadn't lived here for 50 years. It got to the stage where

29:30 a towns person went into a shop and asked the price of something, and it was five pound. A navy wife went in and asked the price, and it was six pound. We were actually all paraded and the commander told us that he was coming in to see the Chamber of Commerce, and if it didn't change he was going to put Nowra out of bounds to us all.

30:00 How's that? It changed and gradually over the years we got more and more accepted, and people don't even realise. I've lived in Nowra probably as long as half the locals but that was a bit of a hard thing.

Was there any anti-British feeling that you wife encountered on top of

30:30 **everything?**

No, no, no. There has always been, I won't say anti-British feeling, always been a good hearted banter

between the Australian navy blokes and the British navy blokes when they were out here. We used to say they were only out here for the money and the sunshine. They used to call them Kippers

31:00 at that time. You always used to refer to a bloke from the RN as a Kipper. I don't know why. Do you know what a kipper is?

Those little tiny wee fish?

It's a fish and it's about the size of a herring, and they put them down the middle, and they open them flat, and smoke them or souse them in vinegar. This was just a thing. They used to call them that because a kipper was a thing with two faces and no guts.

31:30 Then again that was just one of those things. Like you wouldn't remember it either but I can remember and I didn't know what it meant at first, when during the war here, the Second World War, they used to call conscripts Chocos. Have you ever hear that phrase? So you know what it means?

Chocolate soldiers?

Chocolate soldiers, brown on the outside and yellow on the inside.

Did it also refer to

32:00 **the rate of pay?**

They were paid extra money for being out here, marriage allowance and things like that. Like we were paid extra money for being over there but they got rental allowance and all this sort of thing I think. You've also got to take into account with all of those, that when an Australian goes up to a bloke and says, "G'day, you old bastard." He doesn't mean that he is illegitimate. You know? It's that sort of thing.

32:30 Anyway, where are we?

Just one last question about the time difference that was happening between your wife and you being at sea, was there any sort of particular way that you handled that before you left? Did you work out some sort of system? How you'd correspond or did you not have time to do that?

I don't think we needed to.

33:00 We always knew where we were going. We knew we were going to Korea, so I didn't have to work out anything with her to say if I put the elephants are howling tonight, I'm in Korea, which they used to do during the war from England and Australia. We didn't have to do it. You always knew where you were going. In fact when you left you had a pretty good idea of when you'd be back, which was once again different altogether from during the war when the army, navy or air force, when they left

33:30 they didn't have an idea if they were coming back or when they were coming back. We were pretty certain that we were coming back and also fairly certain when we were coming back, a different thing. OK, a little bit different from the blokes that went up to Vietnam but they were army. You see, navy going up to Vietnam, the Hobart used to do quite a bit up there shelling but it knew when it left,

34:00 when it was coming home. Those blokes on board the Hobart, apart from the shot that they fired, they probably never saw another shot. I think sailors get it pretty well these days.

Is that new in terms of their treatment?

In terms of their chances of being hurt if you like, in a war. By these days, I

34:30 mean since the end of World War II. God, they had it pretty tough then because it was more hand to hand fighting, ship to ship fighting. Well you never know where you're going to finish up. I know a bloke in this area that I think had two ships torpedoed underneath him and things like that. We don't have that worry really. I'm not saying it will never come back.

So there was never any concern when you were in Korea

35:00 **that there would be any chance that you could be sunk or attacked, or that you felt that the ship was vulnerable?**

Only that one worrying night when I said we were on our way back and they were getting a thing off a submarine or something underneath us. I don't know. It might have been a big whale but possibly a submarine because it followed us for some time.

Just one more question about being on board. Was there any rivalry between the Fleet Air crew and the

35:30 **general crew?**

Oh this Fish Heads and the Birdies, no more than when I was talking about the other things. No more than that. No more than, "G'day you bastard." No more but it was there. They always referred to us as the Birdies. "Look at this. The Birdies..."

- 36:00 For instance, stand easy was at ten thirty on a ship and you got ten minutes off for a smoko. Smoko in the air force, stand easy in the navy, right? We could go down to our mess deck, have a cup of tea and a cigarette. You weren't supposed to smoke at any other time but if your aircraft is going to land on or if you're working in the hangar or something, you can't get away at half past ten, so you either go at quarter past ten
- 36:30 and have it or you go at quarter to eleven and have it. I think what covered us is that we were flexible. You get a mob of seamen and if they've got the morning watch doing something or the forenoon watch doing something, they are there from eight o'clock till twelve, and come twelve o'clock, that's it, finished. They could not understand that if my aircraft flew all day and then did something when it landed at five o'clock
- 37:00 at night, that I might have to go and work in the hangar all night. They thought somebody else would go and do that. I've seen an occasion where at 11 o'clock at night we've gone out from the hangar where we've been working for 12, 14 hours, we've gone out and sat at the weather deck and had a cigarette, and the gendarmes have come around, "What are you doing here? Get to bed! It's after lights out." Lights out is at ten o'clock right? After lights out, get to bed.
- 37:30 So you say, "Oh that's it? We do have to go to bed do we?" "Yes, I'm telling you to go to bed." "Well do you want to go in and tell the chief or will we go in and tell the chief that we're going to bed now, so that he can finish fixing the aircraft?" "Oh! Don't be funny. Get back in to work." They don't work like that. It's not jealousy and it's not animosity. It's just that they don't understand the two different ways of working.
- 38:00 **So what were the two different ways of working?**
- The different ways of working were that we're flexible. If a job needs doing, we do it. They do a watch on and a watch off, and a watch on, and a watch off, and that's it. They could never get it into their heads that...they might walk through our mess at ten o'clock in the morning and there's 20 blokes there with a cigarette and a cup of coffee, whereas they couldn't have it until half past ten. By the same token, they didn't realise

- 38:30 that in five minutes from then we could be out working doing another five or six hours straight off. Friendly rivalry, put it that way! Friendly rivalry and don't get me wrong. They mixed ashore. It wasn't a matter of when you got ashore the stokers waiting at the bottom of the gangway and thumbed to all of the Birdies. I don't mean that at all.

Why were you called the Birdies?

Because we were Fly Boys, Birdies.

- 39:00 We called them Fish Heads.

Where did that come from?

I've got no idea but then again you wouldn't want to call them anything complimentary would you.

Tape 9

- 00:42 **Before we start Hugh would you like to give a brief overview of your life post-Korean War?**

Well, after the second Korean trip I went over to England and

- 01:00 that was when we converted to jet aircraft, and came back on board the Melbourne. I then went back to Albatross and after a few months I did some further training, and became a mechanic. In 1964 I went back over to England and was commissioned as an air engineer officer sub-lieutenant, and

- 01:30 back to Nowra, and starting moving around between Nowra, squadrons, HMAS Melbourne, the Engineering Headquarters in Sydney, the Air Engineering Headquarters in Sydney. I was over in Canberra at Navy Office. Another thing which I didn't mention, I was also seconded for my

- 02:00 sins. When the RAN was buying the guided missile frigates I was seconded to a team with a commander, a marine engineer and they wanted somebody from the Fleet Air Arm because the new frigates were getting gas turbine engines in them. This was the first time the Australian navy had ships with gas turbine engines in them.

- 02:30 So I was chosen for my experience to go and work with this bloke, which amused me because for the previous five or six years I hadn't had anything to do with jets. I'd only been with piston driven aircraft like the Trackers that we had. So I went over to Canberra and was there for about a week with him, and we went over to the States, and we went up to Seattle,

- 03:00 and saw them building the ships. Where else did we go? We went to Chicago and went to a training

school near Chicago where they were training our people. We went over to Washington, spent quite a bit of time there with the United States Navy people talking about their procedures for the ships. I think it was in Maryland we went to

03:30 General Electric where they were making the engines. We went to San Diego where we could see the engines being overhauled, then we came back...we actually drove back from San Diego up to Los Angeles, flew back from there to New Zealand and had a look over the Air New Zealand repair facilities because at that time Air New Zealand was

04:00 operating DC10s. Remember DC10s? Three engines, two down the back and one up in the tail. A DC10, 25 percent odd of the engine in a DC10 is the same as the engine in an Australian FFG [guided missile frigate], HMAS Sydney, HMAS Melbourne and all of those. The same basic engine and quite a good percentage of it is identical parts. So we went over

04:30 there to see how they'd go as being a repair facility for us and then I stayed with them. I came back to Australia and we moved our office up to Sydney. In fact we moved it to the Aircraft Maintenance Section and I wrote a book for them, a manual, sort of an administration manual modelled along the lines of what we did in the Fleet Air Arm as far as engines are concerned because

05:00 you have to have so many safety features. If something goes wrong with an engine in an aircraft, you can't get outside and stand on the wing and fix it. It's got to go. So that was that. That was my experience with the general service. Back to Nowra and then I went over to the helicopter evaluation team. I think I told you about that, didn't I? And the Fleet Air Arm manpower party.

05:30 Back to Nowra again and then I eventually paid off. So I've been retired for a few years.

Thank you. You mentioned there were two incidents related to the Melbourne. Can you maybe elaborate on those?

Yes OK. Two incidents. The first one was when I had to do examinations

06:00 to go for the promotion and I used to get up real early in the morning, and study when it was nice and quiet. I used to have a little radio just sitting on the table, just going in the background, couldn't hear what they were talking about but it was just a noise. I was sitting studying and a news flash came over to say that there had been a collision down off Jervis Bay, and that was how I first heard

06:30 about it. So I had no involvement in that whatsoever. With the other one, at that time I was the ship's air engineer officer and I think it was about ten past three in the morning. I know because I read it in a book out there before. I felt a thump. I was in bed asleep and my first

07:00 thoughts were that we had bumped, that we were refuelling another ship at sea. With all of that water out there they come within about 60 feet of each other and pass hoses across, and pump oil from one to the other, and I thought that we'd just gone like that you know. While I was sort of thinking what the hell is going on, they piped, "Hands to collision stations! Hands to collision stations!" I thought, "Oh God,

07:30 it's more than that." I just threw on a pair of overalls, up onto the flight deck and I could see half a ship sinking. We cut it right in half. Once again, when anything like that goes on everybody has things to do, like the ship's divers were in pulling people out of the water and the helicopters were out, and all of this and that.

08:00 As the ship's engineer I had other things to do. I had to keep all the cranes and the forklifts, and everything like that going, so I wasn't actually engaged in that like getting my hands wet pulling people out of the water. I guess it's a little bit like going back to our other thing, everybody has their job to do and you get on, and do your own thing. A bit of a trauma, all those poor buggers being pulled out of the water and

08:30 knowing that there were 80 or 90 blokes trapped in it, terrible but by the same token, and of course everybody was saying, "Oh look! We've done it again. The ship's done it again!" It was so close to what happened to the Voyager down here except...it's not an exception. The carrier has got the right of way and the others get out of the carrier's way.

09:00 If you're on an aircraft carrier or any big ship like that and somebody gives an order, "Stop!" It might take you four miles to stop. If you went "Bang" like that, it might take you four miles to stop, so everybody immediately felt, "Oh God! Here we go again but it can't be our fault." Of course, I don't know if you ever went into

09:30 any of the things for the court martials and all of that but they were only looking for somebody to hang all the way through. I've got the books on them here, "One Minute of Time". I guess if ever I was ashamed of the navy, I was ashamed of the top brass in the Royal Australian Navy, ashamed of them, yes.

10:00 Everybody right up the top was looking out for themselves and who can we kick. In fact there was a program on TV not so very long ago and it went into it. It hasn't changed, still the same. Admirals that you thought that you had a lot of respect for...[shakes head]

- 10:30 I knew a couple of the people that were engaged in it. Lieutenant Peter Cabanne, he didn't come out of it too well. He was an ex-Fire Fly pilot. I knew him when I'd been on board the Sydney with him. I didn't know him personally like that but you know. I just felt that the navy
- 11:00 let the navy down. It sounds strange doesn't it? I don't think it has recovered from it, probably never will while there's blokes like me around. I thought that Captain Stevenson didn't deserve what he got. I thought on both occasions, the captain of the Melbourne should have been treated
- 11:30 with far more respect. Anyway, slightly off the subject.
- Probably one of those things you said before was a scapegoat. So just in terms of Darwin, you mentioned before that you had some involvement when Cyclone Tracy hit?**
- Yes, Tracy as you know hit Darwin on Christmas Eve.
- 12:00 For the first time in many years my brother and his wife had come up from Melbourne, and Christmas morning we all woke up. We heard about Cyclone Tracy and then about half an hour later I had a phone call from Albatross to say that we were going, so I had to go out there and spend the whole of Christmas Day out there getting aircraft ready, and loading stuff into aircraft ready to go up.
- 12:30 We left early in the morning of Boxing Day. We flew up to Sydney, took on a lot of blood, Red Cross workers. We'd already loaded up down here with lots of medical supplies and clothes, and
- 13:00 would you believe things like makeup that the local chemists were sending, sending up for the women to keep up their morale. Sounds funny doesn't it but it went down very well up there. So we went into Sydney airport and as soon as it was known we were going, we couldn't get enough support. This 748 is only a small aircraft.
- 13:30 You could fit...we didn't have 40 seats but you fit 40 seats. We had 20 seats and so we could only carry 20 passengers at a time but we didn't have galleys. There was a tiny galley but you couldn't do much more than make a cup of coffee and we were going on a flight to Darwin for several hours. So I went over to the Qantas kitchens and said to them, "Look, I'm just about to go up to
- 14:00 Darwin. Is there any chance of getting a couple of loaves of bread?" Well, we walked out of there and Qantas had given us practically everything they could lay their hands on, absolutely marvellous. It was beyond our wildest expectations. We really would have been happy if we got a loaf of bread, a pound of butter and a few tomatoes or something to make a sandwich for everybody on the way up. Qantas were absolutely marvellous. We got up
- 14:30 to Darwin, still daylight and the devastation when you looked around. I don't know whether you've ever seen photographs, unbelievable. It's hard to believe it now, even if I see a photograph of it now it's hard to believe. We went to the naval base and I actually slept the first night that we were there in a WREN's bed.
- 15:00 God knows where she was but there was no roof on the building and you looked up, and all you could see was the sky. The next morning we took out about 30 or so, sailor's wives and children, and
- 15:30 what baggage they had. There wasn't that much. Most of them had what they stood up in and that was it. We only had the 20 seats, so...maybe I shouldn't say it but we had to pen the 20 people in the seats and on the spare cabin floor we had people just sitting around. We didn't have safety harnesses. We had nothing but there was no other way to get them out. We were flying down to
- 16:00 Alice Springs, refuelled at Alice Springs and depending on where all the people were mainly from, we might go down to Adelaide, Melbourne, and then we would go up again. I was sleeping in Nowra one night and Darwin the next for about two or three weeks, up and down, up and down, every day. We were doing our bit and then right in the middle of it a ship
- 16:30 hit the bridge in Hobart. I can't remember the name of the big bridge and knocked one of the pylons out on the bridge, so one of our two HS [Hawker Siddeley]748 aircraft had to divert, and take divers down there. We just carried on doing this to Darwin. At the time Qantas were bringing jumbos in and they were taking 600 odd people out in one go. Little kids,
- 17:00 little kids, all they had was a dress on and they were holding a doll, little boys. I'll never forget the sight of a Hercules. You know the RAF Hercules? The big four engine, high winged thing? They were carrying families out, a couple of hundred at a time and the last thing before each aircraft took off, they dropped the ramp down at the back, and all the tiny little
- 17:30 boys had to come out and stand there, and all have a wee before the aircraft went because there wasn't a toilet on the whole aircraft but the sight of all these little boys down there. It was the sort of thing that made you feel good in all of this sort of thing. That was the last major thing that I did I guess.
- 18:00 Oh well not really. I was tied up with Operation Trochus looking for these Indonesian illegal fishing boats for a while in Western Australia but that was pretty run of the mill stuff. We just go over there and we had three aircraft there. Our aim was to get two off every day and they'd launch at about six

18:30 o'clock in the morning, and they wouldn't be back for nine hours, so if the other aircraft was serviceable there was nothing else to do but lay around the swimming pool at the camp.

Was that when you were eating lobster?

That was in the motel, not at this time. The very first trip that we were there we were in a motel and that's when we were eating the lobster. When we were in the petrol company camp it wasn't

19:00 as good. It was good but not to the same standard as it was in the motel. But it was quite interesting and quite enlightening there. You don't realise that these Indonesians can come so close you see and one of the problems was that the Indonesians, they might bring a goat

19:30 on their boat with them to milk it and things like that. They're only a few miles off the northwest Australian coast. Well if that goat brings in foot and mouth, say they take it in and for some reason they put it on the land, that could introduce foot and mouth disease. Up in the Kimberley area there are thousands and thousands of beef cattle. So

20:00 I can quite see the reason why the government doesn't want them coming in close to the shore because all of these...there is a typical one going at the moment with this bird flu. They're trying to keep all of these exotic diseases out of Australia.

Was your role similar in that instance as it was in Darwin?

I was the engineer on the squadron then. Yes,

20:30 I guess you could say I was doing all of the squadron organising and all of that sort of thing. Because we were so far from home we probably had about ten aircrew and about 20 maintainers, so there were probably about 30 of us there. We used to operate out of the local Customs

21:00 House. We didn't have an office. We just used to sit in there because they had a good jug and milk supply. I can tell you a funny thing that happened there. When we first went to the Customs House and it was coming up to the fishing season. They kept saying, "Oh well. We need extra staff here. We're going to bring Tom down from Darwin."

21:30 Well that didn't mean anything to me and then a week or so later, "Well, Tom will be here in two and a half weeks. We'll be able to do so and so." And then, "Tom will be here in two weeks." I used to think, "Who is this Tom? Can't this place work without this Tom?" So anyway, it gets to the day when they said, "Well better get up to the airfield and pick up Tom. He's just landing." About quarter of an hour later the door opens and

22:00 Tom walks in, and he looked at me and he said, "G'day Hughie! How ya goin? I haven't seen you in ages!" And it was a bloke that I used to know in the navy. After he'd got out of the navy he'd joined the Customs Service. Here I was, for about three weeks I'd heard about Tom coming and I couldn't care less. When he arrived, he didn't even look at any of the others. He just came straight over to me! Strange isn't it?

Just as an evaluation what would you

22:30 **say were the most important life skills you learned in the navy and in your time during the war?**

The most important thing I think was getting on with other people. There was nothing like period when you've got to live together. For instance, when I was on board HMAS Melbourne as a mechanician

23:00 I was in the four kilo [?] chief's mess and there were ten of us lived in there, so there were ten fold up bunks but the room was...the mess was probably two thirds the size of that dining room in there.

23:30 We did acquire on of those square card tables in the end and we had four chairs around it but if you had the four chairs pulled out from the table, there wasn't room to put the bunks down on the side. It was probably the equivalent of about 30 people living in this room.

24:00 So you have to get on with each other don't you? It was very difficult at one stage there. We had a bloke who had a drinking problem and he began to hallucinate. They decided to send him off the ship but we weren't anywhere where we could send him off. So one of us had to keep an eye on him. Rather than put him in the sick bay, one of us had to stay with him all the time,

24:30 which was all very well until he realised that we were watching him. I was very stupid one day. I went down to the mess for something and the bloke that was sitting in there with him, as soon as he saw me, he said, "Hughie, I've got to go back to work. Will you stay here a few minutes?" I said, "Yeah." Anyway, I was sitting there with this bloke. He got up and he went through one

25:00 bulkhead, and he went to the wash place, so I walked into the wash place, started to wash my hands, and I said, "How ya going? You all right?" He said, "Yeah. Are you following me?" I said, "No but I was a bit worried. You left the mess in such a hurry. I didn't know whether you were feeling ill, so I thought I better come and see how you were." He said, "Well I'm alright. Don't follow me." And he walked out ahead of me

25:30 and I followed him back to the mess, and we walked into the mess, and somebody else came in and sat down. I said, "Good to see you. I've got to go back to work." [laughs] I made sure I never went down there again!

Was it code language that you had between the other blokes?

Yes and he was taken off the ship a couple of days later. I never ever saw him again, terrible.

Bizarre.

Oh bizarre!

26:00 You know, when you think...I guess that mess was about this big and we were in there, and he used to sit, and he had the bunk over the top of me, so I was fairly safe. He used to sit there and read a paperback. He invariably had a paperback that had been passed around so many times the spine was broken, and the pages were loose, and his hands would be shaking, and he'd be trying. He'd drop a page and he'd get

26:30 it in the wrong place. Then he'd say, "Can somebody come up and get these little blokes of this trunk here? There's little men up there."

So was he actually mentally ill and needed attention?

The DTs [delirium tremens] I guess.

Poor bloke.

I'd known him for several years but when we first got onto the same squadron, just a few weeks prior to this,

27:00 we had to get a job done on the controls of an aircraft before it could go to the ship and this bloke always had a bottle of coke. I thought it was a bottle of coke in my being naïve, thought it was a bottle of coke but it wasn't. There might have been a tiny bit of coke in it but I think it was probably all brandy or something. Of course when he got to the ship he couldn't get that, could he? There used to be a beer

27:30 ration on the ship, one can of beer per day, per man and I used to be fairly popular then! "Do you want your can of beer?" "No!" That was a big can. I don't know what size it was. It would be about that tall and that round.

In terms of other skills would you say that was the number one skill, getting to know life skills, getting

28:00 **along with people?**

I think that was probably the major skill for when you're not in the navy any more but you pick up so much as you go along, like fault diagnosis, the correct way to go about finding what's wrong with something, which after a while comes naturally, but at first it is a bit of a battle,

28:30 the acceptance of strange things that go on around you. I used to do my duty out at Albatross as duty lieutenant commander and it used to come up about once a month. You might do it about six times and nothing would happen, not a solitary thing. The biggest problem you had all night was trying to work out

29:00 are all these buttons on this remote control for the TV. That was the problem. Then another night I got woken up and the name Wollongong comes to mind but a patrol boat had run aground down on Gabo Island, so I had to call out the

29:30 captain, and the commander. It was sinking etcetera , etcetera , etcetera and while that was going on, we got the news that some bloke had hung himself down in one of the hangars. You know, that can all happen in half an hour. Everything got too much for him but I didn't really have too much to do with that. We called the padre in for that one.

30:00 I went off with one of the Regulation Staff and found out where he lived to give the news to the padre but I was too tied up in this other one of the ship sinking. You wouldn't believe two things like that could happen and then happen the same night, and happen within half an hour of each other.

Was this a bloke that you knew quite well?

No, no, I didn't even know his name.

Did any of the padres stick out in particular?

Did they?

30:30 **Do any of the padres stand out in particular?**

I think I liked them all. I think one stands out in particular because he was so well known and so well

liked, was Tiger Lyons. He was the RC [Roman Catholic] padre and I'm not too sure he's not a bishop now. He's not in the navy any more but

31:00 he still has close associations. He comes to reunions and all of that. He was always interested in rugby and very popular with all of the blokes.

Would they have mass on the...?

On the ship? Oh yes. An aircraft carrier has its own chapel, bigger than this room and

31:30 we used to carry two padres on board, a Black Fish and a White Fish. So one minute the RC had Mass in there and ten minutes later the Protestants were in there. Either that or we'd have it on the quarterdeck.

Why did Tiger Lyons stand out so much?

Probably because he was sort of

32:00 one of the boys I would say. I'm not an RC but I always knew him. I could probably today, if 12 people stood in front of me, pick him out whereas the others I would say, "Oh have I seen this bloke before or not?"

Did he inspire anybody to be more spiritual?

32:30 I have no idea, no idea.

So just to sum up your experiences would you say that they changed you in any way, your experiences of being in the navy and being in the Korean War?

I don't know. I don't know how I would have been otherwise. I was only a 17 and a half year old kid when I joined. You never know do you? All I guess I could really

33:00 say is that I don't regret my 37 and a half years I did in the navy. I don't regret it at all. There were times that had its ups and times that had its downs but on the whole I enjoyed it, and from what I can see of the navy today, and what a lot of other people that were in the navy in my time,

33:30 we were there at the best time. That's the way we look at it.

Very good. Do you remember any sea shanties or dirty songs that you guys used to sing?

No.

No? Come on!

No, I never used to sing. We don't sing sea...no not in Australia I never saw it.

34:00 I never heard sea shanties sung.

It's a bit of a cliché?

Except at a mess dinner at the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, they were a big effort there. The mess dinners were held in the Painted Hall and a massive hall. It would seat about 400 people at great big oak tables.

34:30 All of the ceiling was painted with murals from end to end. After Nelson was killed in the Battle of Trafalgar on the 21st of October 1805, his body was pickled in a barrel of spirits and was brought back to there because that was the Royal Naval Hospital in those days, and it was laid out, taken out of the barrel and laid out on the table at the end of the hall where we ate our meal. That was a very impressive place.

35:00 I do remember singing sea shanties there one night. I remember another night at a mess dinner the guest of honour was...it wasn't the French President but it was somebody high up from France and it was a Trafalgar Day dinner. He got up and he gave this speech about coming over. He said that he'd been invited to the mess diner and he

35:30 suddenly realised that here he was, he'd been invited to a mess dinner by the Royal Navy, which defeated the French at sea. It was to celebrate the victory of the Battle of Trafalgar where the British and Nelson defeated the French, and just to add insult to injury, when he left he was going back, and he had to catch a train at Waterloo Station, which was where

36:00 Napoleon met his Waterloo. So they used to have some magnificent things, things like Royal Marine Bands playing. They would bring in the roast beef and it would be carried by four blokes dressed up in old fashioned sailor's uniforms on...you know the old wooden stretchers, like first aid stretchers? On there would be half a bullock all carved up and

36:30 the skin put back on it, all of that sort of thing. Fantastic!

In these kind of traditional historical contexts can you remember any of the songs for the

archives?

No I can't remember any of them, probably "Blow the Man Down, Bully" or something like that. I don't know any other ones

How does that go?

I don't know. "Blow the man down bully, blow the man down. Give me some time

37:00 to blow the man down." These were all things from back in the days of sailing ships that they used to sing to give them the impetus to turn the capstan, to wind ropes up and down.

And to row?

Yes, all of that sort of thing, very interesting period. Have either of you seen that movie recently?

Master and Commander?

Master and Commander.

Good movie, yeah.

How'd you like it?

Good, I liked it. Did you?

Excellent. I thought it was good because I've read many, many books on

37:30 that subject and I thought it was very true to life.

So you can't remember any songs?

No.

Not even one?

Not even one. Sorry.

I'm appalled! What kind of sailor are you?

Yeah. Strangely enough I'm not musically inclined. I like Scottish music. I'm a fully qualified Scottish Country Dance teacher, have been for

38:00 17 or 18 years now. I like Scottish music very much.

What about any poetry about the sea? Can you remember any?

I never, ever heard any I don't think.

Tape 10

00:45 **Thank you very much. Hugh I'm just wondering if you could quickly, briefly illustrate how you progressed through the ranks?**

How I progressed through the ranks? Well I started as a recruit naval airman. That's about as low as you can go, in

01:00 1948. It's only a matter of time to become a naval airman, you know get out of the recruit stage. I was actually promoted to an acting leading airman while we were up in Korea. As matter of fact, much to my disgust at the time, I was the leading hand of the shore patrol in Kure, in Japan, on Christmas

01:30 Eve 1951 and I was terrified in case something happened. So then I was promoted. I did a mechanician's course and of course automatically you're made a petty officer. Then I took a couple of exams and became a mechanician first class. Then in 1964 I was promoted to sub-lieutenant. In 1966 I was promoted to lieutenant.

02:00 It must have been '75 or '76, nine and a half years later, I was promoted to lieutenant commander, and I was a lieutenant commander when I left the navy. So, that's it in a nutshell.

Thank you. That's excellent. Were you given any awards during that time?

No, not really, only that sort of

02:30 thing on the wall in there. I had various medals handed out, long service medals and all of that sort of thing but no. I got a thank you letter from an admiral, like everybody on the squadron did, for the work that we did with Cyclone Tracy but no.

You should have got a cheque in the mail as reimbursement for that aircraft you saved!

[laughs] Yeah, should do!

03:00 **So, if you had anything that you would want to say to future generations about war, what would you say as a message for them?**

I think I'd say to them to just take it all as it comes and hope that if we ever have another war that we're back to the stage of being able to take orders, and

03:30 do all these things automatically again. I think that's all I'd say to them but hope that they never ever get into that situation. We don't need any more wars. No, that's about it I think.

Do you want to add anything else to you interview today?

No, I don't think so!

All right! Thank you very, very much!

Is that it?

That's it!

Wow! Do you want a cup of coffee or tea?

INTERVIEW ENDS