

Australians at War Film Archive

Geoffrey Maidment - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1255>

Tape 1

- 00:41 **Geoffrey, thank you very much for doing this. We couldn't do it without your help, so from the archive and everyone at the office and us, thanks very much for taking part. To begin with, we need a summary of your whole life, so if you could start to tell me again with not too much detail about your upbringing and where you were born?**
- 01:00 I was born in Bournemouth, west of England, 17.09.26 11:30, went to school when I was 5 and left when I was 13. I think the term is persona non grata - they didn't want me. Then I worked for Dad for a little while and then I went to Sea School when I
- 01:30 was 16. Left there and went to sea when I was just, oh about 16 and a half. First ship was an LSI, which is landing ship infantry, and I had to sign 'special articles' on that ship which included the D-Day landings and
- 02:00 various exercises before D-Day, some of which I can go into detail later, but then I joined a little coaster, we were taking ammo [ammunition] over to the French ports, again there's a big story attached to that.
- Do you remember the names of these two ships?**
- The Isle of Guernsey was the LSI and the little ammo ship I went over on when we were taking ammo over to
- 02:30 the French ports were the Yew Park. I left that one, I was still under the 'special articles' which they could shift me from any ship to another onto a small tanker, again carrying fuel across the channel to the different ports, another story attached to that later. Then I joined the Llangibby Castle, it's a Welsh name so you've got to lisp
- 03:00 a bit there, and we got sunk on that. That was sunk by another ship in the convoy because as you would appreciate with convoys, it's a very precarious - and we got sunk, managed to get all American troops off and they then salvaged us and towed us back into Sudan. We did actually settle on the bottom and that was one of my worst experiences, if maybe -
- 03:30 I had worst experiences but that one's always stuck in my mind because I got trapped up in the foxhole which is the sharp end of the ship and that's never left me. I had to be in, not confined spaces so much but in somewhere I can't see a way out, I do really get a bit distraught about that. However, I got taken off there obviously because the ship was no use and then we started running
- 04:00 out from South Hampton to Bombay. You know, with the Japanese war being in progress and so on. Went out there for quite a few trips and then we went straight from there, on one occasion, just straight into Singapore just after it was liberated and I'll never forget till the day I die the sights I seen there of the ex-Jap POWs [prisoners of war] and so on you know, it really - even
- 04:30 to this day if they mention Jap to me it - My brother was there by the way and he was also there on the day they landed and I didn't know this and anyway, we then proceeded to take some of these Jap POWs back to Sydney - pathetic sight! Pathetic sight! Never left me! Then we see Mountbatten take the surrender there
- 05:00 in Singapore and he didn't let 'em wear no side arms, he made 'em walk right up through the big, oh it was a big, big place. I can't think of the name of it for the minute but he made them walk up there and really, no ceremony for them, you know. Come the end of the war, VJ [Victory over Japan] Day, we were in Bombay and they wouldn't let us ashore, VJ
- 05:30 Day - and they wouldn't let us ashore. He reckoned if he did, the crew would be missing for a week which was probably right anyway but he wouldn't let us - you know, VJ Day, everyone ashore was going wild and so on and not us and we came out with the last convoy from Bombay to South Hampton, but I carried on going to sea for quite a while after that. I was on a couple of mail boats, the El Kantara, the

06:00 Andes, the – oh – one other. Names escape me it was so long ago but I finished up my sea-going career on the Aquitania. I got married then, what was I? About 21, we just had our forty-fifth anniversary, by the way, and that's as far as that goes. And I settled down and I worked for Telecom for a number of years. Good job, very good job –

06:30 and then the wife and I decided we were going to immigrate out here, I've got relatives in Melbourne and we were out here for about 3 or 4 years and then the wife's mother died, so we had to go back and then we came out again, it'd be about 20 years ago and we've been here ever since. That's more or less up to date, I probably missed quite a bit out but –

That's great because we have plenty of time to go and fill it in but that's a really good,

Is

07:00 that okay?

That's like a skeleton for us to hang stuff on if you know what I mean?

Yes, yes.

A couple more things about your personal life, did you have children or, tell us about them?

Yeah, I've got two daughters. One is 50 – ooh, I've got to remember this. My oldest daughter – she'd be 54, 54 the oldest one. The youngest is about 37, 38. My wife would kill me if I don't know the exact dates but – and they both live local.

In Australia?

Yeah, yeah. Just

07:30 what? 10 minutes from here.

Grandchildren?

Ooh, yeah, we've got grandchildren. Got three, we've got two boys and a girl. The oldest is 18, about 6' 3," and still growing. The youngest one's about 15 and I got a grand-daughter of 18, you know. Lovely kids.

Just one question, what motivated you to come to Australia? Had you been here before during the war?

Oh yes, I'd been here just

08:00 after the war. I brought the POWs back to Sydney.

Is that when you decided you'd like to live here or – ?

Well, not really, because I was a bit of a roving lad then, you know. I had my eye on Canada actually because I had a job offered to me on the Lake Boats, you know the Lake Boats before they built the Atlantic Seaway? I knew quite a few people over there and I've got a lot of relatives there actually in Canada. The only thing I wouldn't – are the winters! I've always

08:30 had an abhorrence of cold, wet weather because going to sea it's not the best. That Atlantic crossing could be a very cold – I've never done a Russian convoy although, although, at one time in 1944 on New Years Day, now I can't remember the name of the German battleship, but we were supposedly going to be one of the rescue ships. Now can you

09:00 imagine that little Isle of Guernsey, it was only a cross channel job, and it took all our LCAs which is landing craft assault off the side, rigged extra lug-boats. We were going to be the rescue ship in that convoy which is unusual, because most convoys do not rescue ships, you know. Once you're in the water, that was it. There is a little interest in the side there too, you know. They always go on about the Japanese kamikaze pilots, you know,

09:30 inhuman. If you, not many people do know this but the merchant navy had what they called CAM ships, catapult assisting merchantmen, in which we took aboard this RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] pilot bloke, he never mixed with the crew incidentally, I think there is a subtle reason for that. Now, once we fired him off on this steam catapult, there was no way we could pick him up

10:00 so therefore once he landed and if it's anywhere near, like Russia, your life expectancy in the water was only about 2 minutes anyway and he'd be out there waving to you as you – now to me, that bloke had a lot more guts than the kamikaze who just bangs on, hops on – he maybe sat there for a couple of weeks, he would have known what his life expectancy would have been, you know.

10:30 **Did you have a CAM on the Isle of Guernsey, was that – ?**

No, no, no, no. CAM ships were specially adapted merchantmen. They had this steam catapult right up on the foxhole there and the idea was and I always thought it was a bit stupid myself – these Dorniers would be circling the convoy, see and they'd be radioing back your position to the various U-Boat packs, okay? Well, that's all right but I always thought, by the time that bloke gets up there, they've radioed

11:00 all the relevant information anyway. There you are.

We'll come back to that, that's an interesting point about the CAM ships, we'll come back to that during the day. With that summary out of the way, I'd like to go back, right back to the beginning and talk a bit about your childhood?

Yeah.

Maybe you could start by telling me a bit about your parents. What was your father like?

Dad was a bricklayer. Mum, she was a Channel Islander, by the way. I was the only one in the family

11:30 who couldn't speak French but they spoke Apatoua actually. They didn't speak your French. My sisters and that could speak French but see, being Mum, that was her native language and most people say, "When you get excited, your arms go like a windmill so that proves your Gallic ancestral streak."

What was your father's background?

Mysterious, mysterious.

12:00 He comes home the first time he got a couple of medals and he said, "Look son, you can die on the dole here with a drawer full of them." Very, very, astute man for that age. He had no time for the church, Mum was a Catholic. When they first came there - to send him to the devil for not sending us to a Catholic Church, he put the local priest straight over the side gate, cassock flying.

12:30 You could mention certain things to him and he'd be way ahead of you. He had a very mysterious background, if you know what I mean, in that sense. He was a good man, perhaps that's where I get my - as I've often been told, 'Communitistic tendencies', from but that is a way of trying to put your say in actually. If you don't go along with the system you know, which

13:00 I don't on many occasions, and I must have inherited a lot from that, you know.

What did you know about his war service when you were growing up?

He was in the First World War. He'd never forgive 'em for what they'd done, you know, how they treated their Veterans of the First World War. He'll never forget them for that how they - you know when I was a kid you'd see ex-servicemen wandering up the road singing

13:30 for a couple of you know, a couple of coppers and history's repeated itself. No debating about it, the Brits would be one of the hardest in the world. Like drawing blood from a stone it is, to get anything out of them. It hurts, don't tell me 'your country needs you'. If any of my grandsons ever said they were - I'd do my - no, let Mr

14:00 Bush & Co. go and do it.

Was this the focus of his 'Communist tendencies', as you put it, as you were growing up?

Yeah, you see there's a lot of talk about 'Communist tendencies'. Most people wouldn't know a Communist if they fell over one actually. I've met some very, very good ones and I tell you, without a doubt, most of them are well educated on world policies too, they are and onboard ship there were quite a few. Never once did they ever try to

14:30 you know, force me in any way to listen to what they said and I listen and if it makes sense to me, I believe it. You know, this deflagrating the Russians all the time, the Communists it's - put it this way, 22 million lost. 22 million as opposed to the Allies I think, in total about a million and a quarter. Now,

15:00 had Hitler come across the Channel, just after Dunkirk, nothing. Fortunately, he went into Russia which was the beginning of the end for us. Now he had no particular gratitude towards the so-called free rule because, a lot of people don't know this as it is never taught in the schools, how Australia sent

15:30 a contingent, America, Canada and the UK, sent a contingent into Vladivostok to overcome the Communist rise. Now, not many people know that but it is a historical fact, so then why should they be enamoured of us? A little aside but -

Well not to get too caught up in the 'Communist' side of things, what were your father's political

16:00 **involvements?**

Well, he would have been socialist plus, socialist plus.

And how did he, how did he express that? Was he a union man, was he a - ?

No, he wasn't so much a union man because the unions in the building game were very, very - the conditions were diabolical actually I mean, I can remember as a kid every Christmas they'd stand him off because they weren't going to pay him Christmas Day. Mum would have to roll her sleeves and

16:30 go down town and see if she could get a job, waitressing. So these things never left me, never. Not the good ol' days, only for some.

How did the Depression affect your family life?

The Depression was mainly from about '26 to '30. They had a hard time, they had a hard time indeed you know and the other factor was see, where we lived was a big

17:00 holiday resort you know. A really nice town and the Welsh would flock down there to get jobs and of course, that didn't please the locals, but then you try and look at it in a broader sense and say to yourself, "Those Welshmen have kids at home that are hungry," you know. The big hunger marches, terrible, terrible! This isn't so long after the First World War you know.

17:30 They said, "Well what did we fight it for?"

What memories do you have of that, scenes like that in Bournemouth as a kid?

There were some hunger marches, you probably won't remember, know this. The hunger march from Jarrow, where the miners and so on all march right the way down into London. Our end of the world once about, we had the local population was

18:00 that it was a typical Liberal town, I can tell you now. Anyone had of mentioned Labour, well they'd - you know but it wasn't good and these impressions have always stayed with me, always. There was nothing good about the old days, for some.

What kind of a place was Bournemouth in those days?

Well I'll try and use an expression used in Australia,

18:30 'Liberalism Ruled Supreme'. It was a rather classic holiday resort. It wasn't your black pool or nothing like that. It was a lovely place. It isn't today because it's lost all that but it was a lovely place but typical Liberals, you know.

As in big 'L' Liberals, conservatives?

Big 'L' plus, plus.

What did you have to do with the holidaymakers as a kid?

19:00 Sorry?

What did you have to do with that holiday resort scene, as a kid?

What did I do? I was a kid brought up, I worked for Dad for a lot of the time. Old Dad, didn't he believe in 'one up, all up' and you all work from about yay high. You weren't working light with hands with him. Yeah, I had quite a pleasant childhood and the war came along in '39, what would I have been about? '26 to '39, quick you're the mathematician.

You would have been about 13 or

19:30 **14?**

About 13 I was. Detested school, loathed it.

Tell us a bit about why you detested school, what was your school life like?

Hard, very, very hard, and we had the most sadistic bastards and even now, looking back in retrospect, they were real 'son of a - '. One occasion I always remember, I know I was certainly no angel, I mean they accused me of altering the tuckshop

20:00 sign see, I got the blame for it. No doubt - I had something to do with it as well - and he stood behind the desk and whacked hell out of my legs till they were black and blue so I thought, "I'm going to take a chance here. I'll run home," and Dad was there and normally, if you run home from school Dad would give you another hiding but he looked at my legs and he said, "Come on with me son," and he was 6' 2," I can tell you. He

20:30 said, "Tell me who done it?" I sensed it in a moment. "He's in there Dad, he's in there." The old man went in and he lifted him up like that and he said, "If you ever do that to my boy again, I'll come back for you!" and put him down. From there on in, he didn't want to know me. He didn't want to know me! So at about 13, I just decamped. Went and worked for Dad which wasn't very easy either. Sort of a

21:00 hard upbringing.

How about your other family? What siblings did you have or brothers, sisters?

One brother older than me was in the navy, joined the navy and a younger brother, he didn't join the RAF [Royal Air Force] till after the war. An older sister, she was married when I would be about 12 or 13. She was a bit older than us, you know. She's gone now, my older brother's gone. All I've

21:30 got left in the UK is one younger brother.

What kind of an influence on your - as a role model, was your older brother and sister?

Lovely girl, the oldest sister. Older brother and I didn't get on too well actually but we did in the end because he was in the same convoy as me, D-Day. I didn't know that and he seen our ship go in and getting shelled heavy and

22:00 we got laid up. We got laid up that we couldn't move for a while. He went back and I think he rang Mum and said and you know, she was surprised when I turned up. As a matter of fact, I think she'd let my room. No, that is a fact and another amazing thing about that, we were in Singapore and I can't go into lurid detail about this but we had to be put ashore there and we were in this Naval Leagues Club there and I sat down on

22:30 the bridge and I see this bloke coming up the road and I thought, "I know him!" I recognised the walk, it was my brother and he'd been out there some time and he'd seen a lot of what the Japs had done. It never left him actually. He got on the grog after that. Never lasted too long. This is some of the casualties you don't see!

23:00 What about your mother? Can you tell us a bit more about her?

Well, she was a Channel Islander, spoke good English of course. I went over there when I was a young lad, I must have been about 4 or 5 and I can remember vaguely about her home in the Channel Islands. They were loaded, by the way, because all them old Channel Island families, you cannot live there

23:30 unless you've got, you know, parents or whatever before and I can remember vaguely, my grandmother. She didn't hardly speak any English and my grandfather was a fisherman and he was - they all had inter-related business. As a matter of fact, they are all inter-related. He looked like 'Powerful Pierre', you know, with a beret on and everything.

24:00 Very vague though. I couldn't have been more than 3 or 4 I shouldn't have thought.

What was your relationship with your mum like?

So, so. So, so. We were brought up hard. I can say, you know, we were brought up hard which wasn't untypical of the times and when I went to sea school, the only purpose that served in my opinion was whatever ship I had after, had to be better. British ships are notorious for being the

24:30 worst in the world. They are hard.

When you say you were brought up hard, was that in terms of poverty or discipline or, what would you mean by that?

It was typical of the times. Now you see Dad was a brick layer and their periods of employment were very loose. Now, with three boys, if he wasn't strict he'd have gone under. I can see that, you know.

25:00 He couldn't, I've seen him come home at night and sit there. He couldn't undo his boots even, Mum would have to go and - so he couldn't afford any bad vibes in the house if you know what I mean otherwise he would have gone under.

What sort of things would you get in trouble for as a kid?

Pretty near everything. Do a little bit of poaching around the local squire's estate. Dad could be

25:30 a bit, how can I put it? Dad could be a little bit forgiving about that actually although he wouldn't actually admit it. I come home with a duck one day. He said, "Was it wild?" I said, "It was when I hit it, Dad," so he cuffed me around the ear and then went and hid the feathers. The local squire, Lord Malmsbury, you know. I remember a bit later on when I come home on leave, I didn't go home. Home was where my kit bag landed

26:00 and he said to me "Here,," he said, "I hear old Lord Malmsbury keeper's been caught up, we'll go over there tonight," you know. The local squire, when we were kids, ooh! And his bailiff! Ooh! He caught us one day throwing, we used to make up these, you know carbide? What they used in the old carbide lamps? You put it in a bottle, put some water in, put a stopper in and throw it in the salmon pool, a bit quick and WHOOMP! With

26:30 a bit of luck up they come you know and I grab it and off, quick! Mr Ponds used to chase us, the local bailiff. He had no hope of catching us. We were larrikins, don't worry about that.

What else did you do for fun as a young boy?

Oh, get up to anything, pretty near, pretty near. If Dad didn't want us during the day, we'd take off maybe Friday night with our fishing

27:00 gear, sleep in a haystack in summer and carry on right through the weekend and things like that, you know. I enjoyed it. As a matter of fact I'm going back this April all being well, just to lay the ghost. It will be my last time obviously and I wonder about them spots, they're not the same. You can't go back in time and actually most of my old ship mates are gone

27:30 too. One I sailed with for years, he oh, about 2 years ago – you know.

What was the best thing about that time, I mean it was a hard time as you say but what was it's good – ?

It was hard, very hard. What was the best parts of it? I don't know, we never had any money, you know. We'd take off fishing and if we could get away from Dad's work, you know. Take off fishing and,

28:00 I love the country like that. I go, I've been back a few times since but it's gone actually. Them times have gone. I know distance lends enchantment but in this case –

What about the sea? What sort of a relationship did you have with the sea as a young boy?

Oh look, the best seamen from the world come from the West Country down near Drake, all of them. Now your famous Australian explorer did,

28:30 Governor Phillip come from around there. Who was the chap who explored the Australian coast? You're the Australian, you tell me. I can't remember his name.

Flinders or – ?

Matthew Flinders, yeah. He was a west countryman. Bligh was a Devonian, wasn't he? They all come from around there.

How strong was that sea – ?

Very much so, very much so and they were merchant seamen. See, how can I draw a brief background

29:00 on that? You went to sea in the merchant navy, we had no shore barracks. No shore residences of any kind. You were either at sea or you were on leave, you know and it was one ship, one trip, okay? You didn't join one ship for – I mean when we marched arms that day they go "The survivors of the blah, blah, blah." If they'd had survivors in the merchant navy, we'd have took up the whole column, you know

29:30 because there were all different ships you know. One ship, one trip. Basically deep sea articles when you signed on, incidentally there were Shipping Acts there of 1864 so that'll tell you – you signed for 2 years or a complete voyage but underneath all them articles, were provisos and mostly that said, 'At Master's Discretion',

30:00 that's the captain's discretion. So what you're entitled to there, it is discretion, he could scrub I mean, i.e. 2 years, "You've been on the ship 2 years." "Yeah, well I think I'm entitled to be paid up." "Yeah, that's all right," in a little West African port. "There might be a British ship through here in 12 months time, who knows. If you want to go ashore?" You know very, very hard.

What inspired you as a boy to,

30:30 **to want to join the navy, or the merchant navy?**

I don't know, when I left school I couldn't read, by the way. Dad taught me how to read. I always had a yearning for adventure, always I wanted to get away and get to sea. I didn't know the true facts then but that was and always has been, even today if I read anything like that, you know.

31:00 **Any particular West Country role models or heroes that you might have had as a – ?**

Not really, you get the lads around the pubs. Some of them would have just come home on leave and so on and they'd be saying how they "Just come back from West Africa," or "Just come back from New Zealand," and so on and you hear these foreign sounding names you know. About 15,

31:30 16 I went to sea school you know. I found the need to go to sea. I didn't want to go in the navy because I could have been on a shore base for 6 or 8 – I didn't want that. I wanted to go to sea.

Before we get on to that, can you tell us a bit about how you worked as a brick layer with your father and what jobs you – ?

Brick layer? No, no I would just do the hard carrying for him.

So you were hard carrier?

Oh Christ yeah, I had to keep two of

32:00 'em going. Well, I was a pretty big young bloke.

Can you explain to someone in the future who might not know about hard carrying, what that involves and what you were doing?

Just plain hard work. All you'd do was you had a hard ,and you know what a hard is, don't you?

Explain it for us.

It's a box contraption that fits on your shoulder, okay? Now when you're up one storey you've got a ladder okay and it goes up like that, you've got to load that hard with bricks, you've got to keep them two brick layers going all the time with bricks and mortar, all right and it's hard,

32:30 hard work, you know. Believe you me, very hard work so I wasn't - when I went to sea it didn't come as such a hardship to me and there's a famous story about this and you can believe it, there's a Chinaman joined that war who supposedly had the record for going without food. He'd been torpedoed and he was in this life boat, you see, and they say he

33:00 hadn't eaten for, I think as long as about a fortnight. Anyhow, the convoy comes along, most ships, most convoys didn't have rescue ships because the theory being that one ship sunk, that's gone, right it off. If we stop to pick up survivors there could be two ships gone I suppose, so that consoling thought, "If we do get to the harbour, which is by the way being torpedoed well, that's it." I've seen people in the water you know,

33:30 anyway along comes this convoy and in this convoy is what they call a 'Hungry Harrison's'. Harrison's out of Liverpool and they call them Hungry Harrison's. They detached them to pick up this lost person, the Chinaman. Well the Chinaman come alongside, was going to climb up the ladder, climbed up the ladder, seen the name of the ship and climbed back in the life boat. No, they were hard,

34:00 I can tell you. They were hard and the food was diabolical. They didn't have no fridges or nothing like that and they wouldn't let us tie up alongside the Yanks neither. We went aboard there to see and oh dear, you know.

You were -

Excuse me a moment.

Yeah, keep going, have a drink. You were 13 years old when you left school; you went to work with your father,

Yeah.

That was about the

34:30 **time that the war broke out?**

Yeah, '39. I can remember it like yesterday, Dad said, "This is going to happen again, I know it," and so on and so forth. The usual propaganda, you know. Hitler's this, Hitler's that, Hitler's a - they hype it up in any war, don't they? To suit the purpose as it were. Yeah, air raids, we had air raids and

35:00 that. Even in, Southampton wasn't that far away and they come over every night you know and it didn't particularly worry me being a young bloke, you just took to the shelters. I remember one leave I come home to and I got in the little bedroom I had, this was at the end of the cul-de-sac, the house in Berkshire and Dad said, "Come on son, get down in the shelter." "I'm stopping here," and next minute coming

35:30 down is this plane all on fire, see, and it was low and I thought, "Is he going to clear this roof, or not?" You could actually hear the shouting from that plane, I kid you not. Even above the engine noise. It cleared our house and crashed just down below. It actually was a British plane that had been shot down. They did have a few raids there though. They snuck in one day. They just climbed over the cliff and come straight in and they bombed the centre of Bournemouth,

36:00 yeah. Nothing was sacred. A few casualties down there.

To someone who's never been through an air raid of any kind, can you explain a bit about what that's like and what the procedure is if you - is there a siren, what happens?

Oh yeah, the siren goes, yeah the old siren goes and then you can hear, when we were kids we could learn to distinguish between a German plane and a British plane, the different noise they made.

36:30 You'd see them coming over. "Are they going to stop here?" See, Bournemouth didn't have that much of an incentive, it was only a seaside town. They'd be going through to Taunton and whatever or somewhere around there, Southampton you know but they did drop a few there, yeah. At that age, I didn't worry too much anyway.

What would you do when you heard the air raid coming?

You were supposed to get to the shelters, you

37:00 know but being kids, if we were out fishing "Oh, bugger it!"

Apart from this burning plane, what other kind of damage or signs of the bombing could you see around where you were?

You could see Southampton. You could see the blow from there where they really plastered Southampton. You could see the blow, even from Bournemouth up there and Dad then, he was doing this war work, you know going up there every day, travelling every day. It was about 20 mile away and just

getting rooves on

37:30 houses or anything to keep the local populus going because it was pretty crook you know. There were shelters that were sealed because everyone in there had gone and they just sealed them off. Some of the worst ones I had was in London actually. I came off one ship and I come in there and they were dropping them V2s and you've never seen nothing. All you could see, and a whole

38:00 street of houses would go. They reckoned we could have carried on but I don't think they could have took a lot more of that.

What were you doing the years of the war you were still at home?

I worked for Dad and then I got him to sign this form for me to go to sea. I don't know why he signed it, I'm sure. Would you? I mean we didn't know the casualties involved at that time, that was kept very, very much

38:30 from you, I can assure you but he still signed for me to go.

Were you helping him with this war work that - ?

Yeah, I used to, I was there working in, working with him. Doing a bit of brick work here and there. Oh no, I never went out to Southampton with him, no, no. I was going to sea about that time anyway so things were slightly different.

We'll just stop there because we are out of tape so we'll change that over and we'll keep going.

How are we going anyway?

It's good, yeah,

39:00 **it's really good. This is about the pace -**

Tape 2

00:34 **You've got this piece of paper for your father to sign, how did you go about that? Can you tell us about the whole process of joining?**

Tactfully, a couple of my mates had already gone to see you know and I thought you couldn't go to sea per se, you had to go to sea school first you know and I got Dad to sign it, I don't know how but he did. My brother had already joined the navy anyhow. He was older than

01:00 me and he'd already joined the navy see and away we went.

Where did you go?

Gravesend. That's up the River Severn near Gloucester, the Vindicatrix and there's an old, there's a whole society of 'em right through the world. I belong to the local one; they've exported their pupils all over the world. It was a hell of a place, 'Hell Ship' it was.

Well just before we get there, what was it like to be leaving home? What did

01:30 **your mother and father have to say about you going off to join the merchant navy?**

We were brought up hard you see, we were brought up hard. It didn't particularly worry me.

Did it worry them?

Not that I can remember particularly although I really don't know, they might have done more than I thought, you know.

What about the scene at Gravesend, was there more - ?

Not Gravesend.

02:00 It wasn't Gravesend, no it wasn't.

Sorry, where did you - ?

It's near Gloucester, Jesus, names escape me.

That's all right.

The Vindicatrix training ship.

It was on the River Severn?

We'll get the name sometime. I can't remember it off hand.

So the sea school was on the Vindicatrix?

Yeah, ex German ship. It was a training ship.

Okay, all right. Tell us about the ship. How big was it, what kind of ship was it?

What was it? It was an ex-

02:30 sailing ship. It was just the hull anyway, tied up in one of the canals there. To my recollection there'd be 200 or 300 boys there and three tiered bunks and they treated you hard I could tell you, they treated you real hard. Your day would start with a 2 mile run along the canal bank in the winter, slippery too. The old PT [physical training] strap bloke behind you with his little short stick,

03:00 tapping you on the behind "The last one back got no breakfast," and all that. Not that you'd miss much of their breakfast come to that you know, the food was OOH! Even as I was brought up hard, it struck me really hard and they instructed you on various things which I didn't find too useful when we went to sea, life boat drill perhaps and so on but I didn't find it terribly instructive in any case. We were there about 6 or 7 weeks.

What

03:30 **kind of food are we talking about when you said - ?**

Oh, food? Even me brought up hard as I was, found it - as I say, the only useful purpose it served whatever British ship you went on after that, it had to be better. It couldn't have been worse, it was terrible.

How did they preserve things without fridges, like how did they keep their food?

On British ships, well what you had in effect was an icebox and maybe if we were going down to the

04:00 gate they'd be the last ship back to the Canary Isles and that was it. Out come the salt pork. I've seen it, oh - first stop, sir used to come down to the gully, lift the lid, turn his nose and say "There's nothing wrong with that," and then this talk on the boats they were bad, bad feeders they were and you'd get down - maybe we'd go

04:30 get down say maybe to Mombasa and we'd all stream ashore there like a hungry herd for a feed to get something to eat because they just didn't have any refrigerated food you know and even the - oh, it was bloody awful food.

So the salted pork was one thing you could eat regardless - ?

Yeah, yeah.

What other things did they have all the time?

Some of it was riddled with cockroaches and so on, you know. You just had to

05:00 eat it in the end. You couldn't go around the corner, could you? You just had to eat it. It was generally bloody awful food and I wasn't fussy in them days. I'd eat you if you stood still, you know but we just had to stick it out, didn't you?

Who was joining the merchant navy with you when you went down to the Vin - ?

My mate, my mate. He come with me, we both went down together to the old sea school near

05:30 Gloucester and I'm trying to think of the name of it, that will intrigue me. Yeah, we went down together. He went on a different ship to me and I don't think he ever went to sea again after that.

What was his name?

Bob, Bob Lasmar. He's dead now by the way.

Did you stick together during that sea school? Who else did you meet?

No, no. We more or less stuck together because you got 'em from all over,

06:00 all over England. A couple from Canada even, a couple of Channel Islanders. Well, Channel Islands were invaded then so, they would be over there anyway. My aunties and that were there right through the occupation there. By the way, they sunk this U-pack just after D-Day to see what kind of gunnery they had. Now they done it in style.

06:30 They put us down in this convoy to draw out what guns they had on the island and they very soon found out too and very, very accurate they were. The navy left us, they were over the horizon but they would actually, the whole convoy, be quite prepared to get the truth because if you remember that Enigma code. You've heard of that haven't you? Where they cracked the German naval code,

07:00 which they did and they cracked part 2 at a place called Bletchley. Now the only snag with that was this. They couldn't get too accurate, could they? They couldn't get ex-convoy suddenly turning away from that U-pack, U-Boat pack all the time. Otherwise, the Germans can say, "They must have something, mustn't they?" So occasionally although they knew it was

07:30 coming, they let you have it because as I say if they'd informed every convoy what to look for, the Germans would have immediately known we cracked the code, wouldn't they? So, occasionally a convoy had to be sacrificed and that was done a lot more than what you think, too, a lot more.

When you were at the sea school, who were the people who were instructing you?

Well, there was a

08:00 bloke called Captain Angel, if ever there was a misname it was that, he was a right so and so and four or five instructors and they were hard, they were hard. They'd clip your ear as soon as look at you. There'd be no talking back to them or anything. I'll tell you a typical example of that, onboard the ship you had three tiered bunks okay, now when they said pike down at nights, if you've got any shenanigans he'd

08:30 haul out that section, no matter who the villain was and put you up on the foxhole in your underclothes in the winter. That was typical. A lot of the local lads, I still go to the meetings of the local Vindicatrix's Association, and they look back at it with some kind of nostalgia. I certainly don't. It was nothing for me.

What were the worst punishments that they gave out?

09:00 Well, in general being there at all was bad enough but if you answered one back he'd clip, he would give you a belting. No debate about that you know so you had to be a bit wary. As regard if they took you off the food that wouldn't be no punishment at all, would it? No, it was just very, very hard. Sorry, the only purpose it served whatever ship you had after that, had to be better.

09:30 **You said there were about 300 boys, was that right?**

About 300 as I can remember.

And how old were these boys, roughly?

15, 16, somewhere around that area, 17.

You were a little bit younger than that?

No, no, no. I was about 16 or something like that, you know. 16 and a half or something like that. I got on my first ship just before I was oh, I would have been about 16

10:00 and a half, something like that because I'd come home and they shot me straight off. I'd report it to the pool, you know the British - you don't know what the pool is or - ? It's where all merchant seamen reported. You paid off a ship and you had a given amount of leave and as soon as your leave was up you received a telegram, "Report to blah, blah, blah," and they'd send you off to your next ship, there were no shore bases or nothing,

10:30 you know.

So, what did happen then at the end of that 6 or however long you were spending at sea school, what was the procedure then?

Well, you had your leave or if you had 'survivor's leave' and don't forget this, as soon as you were torpedoed your money stopped, did you know that? You never got paid and some blokes have told me and I believe it to be true, the 'survivor's leave' was even

11:00 counted whilst they were in the boats. No, we didn't have no trimmings at all. You get a given amount of leave - and I'll tell you another one that needs explaining, too. It's always irked me. This big pay the merchant navy had is a load of rubbish. For starters, as I say as soon as you were torpedoed, your money stopped. Now, for me to get from a boy to

11:30 an AB [able seaman] it took me about 4 years, now that's sea time remember, 4 years. 12 months as a boy, 2 years as a junior ordinary seaman, 1 year as a senior ordinary and then I had to go and sit the Board of Trade exam and it was a stiff one. Not one to knock my naval compatriots at all but they were made ABs in about 12 months. Mind you, there about as useless - on a merchant ship because

12:00 on a merchant ship you had the bear crew so if you couldn't do your job, someone else had to do it and in the navy there was hundreds of 'em, you know so we only had the bare necessities of the crew. So you had to be good seamen and there were pretty, you know, sometimes you'd get an Australian. Get an Australian in the crew and he's always the trouble maker, you know. Often have an Australian in the crew.

12:30 You'd get the, sometimes you'd get the odd Norwegian although mostly British seamen went onboard Norwegian ships. It was a very 'cosmopolitan' kind of thing and then you'd have the odd Falkland Islander and you'd have 'em from the Outer Hebrides and they could mostly speak Gaelic and so on, but

they were all good seamen, had to be! So -

What was the procedure for joining the ship after sea school?

13:00 **Did they send you somewhere or - ?**

Well, first of all you go home, drop your kit bag and then you get a telegram, "Proceed to Southampton." They send you a railway voucher, "Proceed to Southampton, report to the pool," see, and then the pool will say to you "Yeah, join the blah, blah, blah. Go down. Report to the first officer." I always remember a little crack I made there and I thought I was a bit of a wag, you know - "Join the

13:30 Yew Park." So I go in there and he said, "I've got a U-boat for you," and I said, "I didn't know the German navy was that short," so he said, "I'll show you who's the comic in a minute. You wait till you go down there!" About the Yew Park, talk about a comedy of errors, you've never seen nothing like it. Do you want me to elaborate on that?

Maybe we'll come to it. We'll definitely get you to elaborate on it - ?

It's one of the funniest things you've ever heard, well it wasn't funny, really.

14:00 **What was so funny about the Yew Park, maybe you can tell us now?**

Well, as I say, having got that intro from the bloke in the pool, I go down and I get down this particular berth and I'm looking all around and I looked, what's this? A little collier, wasn't it and she was carrying, as I found out later, 500 pounders in case petrol. Now case petrol, it's what they call 'flimsy' stuff, it's not the best, especially if you've got 500 pounders,

14:30 so I got us aboard and the first officer said, "Okay, stow your gear, we're going to have a boat drill." They've got this one boat and it's in the well deck. You know where the well deck is, don't you? It's laid down there in shocks. Now the theory is you've got to get that boat up and over the side with no steam on deck because in the event that you've been torpedoed perhaps you wouldn't have much steam on deck, so we put these couple of straps right around

15:00 and we plumbed the deck over and theoretically, you've got to pull that up by hand you see. We couldn't shift it, couldn't shift it, no. So we put a snatch block in and took it over the winch and started heaving away you know. Well, that was all right. The top half of the boat come out but the bottom half stuck. It had been painted in. This is how long this boat - you know. So the old captain come out, he was a Welshman, very, very lugubrious. "That's all right

15:30 lads," he says. "You won't want that. We're carrying 500 pounders in case petrol, you'll need a parachute to come down." I thought, "Ooh, what a good start," you know but from there on in, it was a series of misadventures, believe me. How we ever came out of that, I don't know?

We'll come back to the misadventures on the Yew Park, but was your first experience of a ship?

On the Isle of Guernsey.

Can you tell us about what

16:00 **it was like to join a ship for the first time?**

As I say, this telegram come home and go down there and I go into the pool office, "Yeah, you've got to join the Isle of Guernsey," now I didn't know at the time it was an LSI, landing ship infantry. They sent me down with one of the other blokes, older blokes going to join who showed me how to get down there and that and get aboard, yeah they were a nice,

16:30 nice enough crew you know, good people. Then they decided that we'd have to have some kind of uniform because if we landed on the beach D-Day, in civilian clothes, we could have easily been shot as spies, okay? So we'd wait till we got to sea and then we had to sign these special articles, okay,

17:00 in which they could send you to any ship associated with the Normandy landings, you didn't have to sign off they could just simply transfer you and that kind of thing and they give us a blazer with the combined ops [operations] logo on there and so on and then we signed another set of articles T124X, which meant to say we technically were in the navy should anything happen and we got to be

17:30 a POW, you know. It's all right getting taken POW at sea because obviously you were a merchant seaman but when you're dealing with the beach and there's a civilian wandering around, that's a different thing isn't it? So, that's what we done there and they were quite nice people on there. I was bridge boy you know and I used to have a go on the ol' - of course, she was heavily armed. She had a, let's get this right, she had a 4," aft, she had twin Oerlikons right around the boat deck and right up the,

18:00 the bows there she had a Bofors. God, when that lot opened up, OOH! You've never seen nothing like it and gunnery practise and so on, you know it was great stuff especially with me. I was acting on one of the guns crews, you know I was helping load out the Oerlikons. One day I said to this DEMS - because onboard merchant ships then you had what they called DEMS gunners, that is defensively equipped merchant ships, okay?

- 18:30 Now, he would be the gunnery then you'd have a merchant navy crew but he'd be more or less in - not always did you have a DEMS gunner but anyhow, we did on there and I had to help pass the ammo and his gun nests were tiered down like that you see and these Oerlikons do not fire on recoil. This gets a bit technical so what you had to do, you had a little wire stop and you beared down on it and the gun was cocked and ready to fire
- 19:00 and then you had these pounds of ammo that were 80 pound each. Now to get 'em up in a gun nest, it's hard and I was helping him lift it and I said to him one day, "Here, let me have a go," because they had this plane coming by towing this drogue. He got his distance, I can assure you, it had all these merchant ships firing up at it. He said, "Okay." He said, "but when I tap your shoulder, stop," he said, "because we don't want to put another pound
- 19:30 of ammo on, okay?" "Yeah, all right." He strapped me in, you know, the shoulder straps and a plane starts to come by. Now what you've got in there, I think you've got an armour piercing and about every fifth one is a tracer that shows you the trajectory of the you know, like that see and I'm going for my life, thoroughly enjoying it and he tapped me on the shoulder and instead of stopping firing, I swung around see and they reckoned the tracers went right up the wire towards the plane and the bloke wouldn't
- 20:00 come back. He said the next day he was pulling the target, not pushing it, and he ain't going to come back. You could see a convoy letting go, couldn't you? Of course the Poles and that, they don't speak any English anyway you know. They're a little bit trigger happy but the worst are the Yanks. They are terrible people. They'll let go in a convoy at anything as where they won't today. As you'll
- 20:30 appreciate. Ever heard of deflection of stuff coming off water? Nelson and them used to fire broadside like that to get more of an impact. They'd always reroute them to the back of the convoy. Didn't want nothing to do with them, I tell you.

Can you tell us in as much detail as you possibly can about the Isle of Guernsey? You've told us how heavily armed she was, can you describe - ?

Yes, first of all she was a cross-channel ship, how big would she be, let me see?

- 21:00 How big would she be? Excuse me. No size at all, actually.

Take a sip of water.

She'd be about twice as big as the Sydney Ferry, maybe a little bigger than that but all she was peace time, was a cross-channel, Southampton, Channel

- 21:30 Islands and so on. Now, what they'd done was take her and converted her into an LSI, landing ship infantry. Along the boat deck where normally your boats would be, we had three one side, we had six LCAs on that and I tell you that made her very tender too. She'd roll like, you know

What these LCAs were strung up on, can you explain what they were and how they were strung up?

Yeah, well they were strung up on the boat deck

- 22:00 and our job was to get in as near the beach as we can and lower these LCAs. Now we had naval personnel onboard who managed the LCAs, okay? We had to get in as close as they thought necessary to the beach and drop these - because they weren't no size these LCAs, they weren't all that big. They'd carry, I don't know 20, 30 blokes so you can appreciate - and D-Day it was rough, it was really rough and -

- 22:30 **We'll come to what you did with the ship in a minute but continuing the description, what did the LCAs look like?**

Well, they'd be square, oblongish. The ramp on the front dropped down. We just simply dropped them. The troops went over the side on that into the LCAs. We lost 3 of our 6 on D-Day because what happened, one of the snags was that

- 23:00 D-Day was planned for June 5, but the weather was that bad that they had to cancel it. They didn't want to because the minute that - it was getting fairly obvious what was going on in the UK and they didn't want to cancel it then but they had to and on the 5th, the tides were that much higher because they had these hedgehogs which were mines like that, just under the surface of the water.

- 23:30 Now if they'd have gone on the 5th the tide would have been that much higher and they would have gone over the top and on the 6th the tide had dropped. A lot of them had their bottoms blown straight out. We lost quite a few of the naval blokes on that that day.

Just back to the ship, the six LCAs strung up. Can you continue going through the ship for us. What else were the features of the Isle of Guernsey?

She was very, very heavily armed. Very heavily armed for a merchant ship. As I said

- 24:00 there was a Bofors firing, Oerlikons along the boat deck, about three either side on the boat deck and a

4 inch aft right on the stern there. When that lot went off altogether – dear oh dear!

Just judging by your description of size, there can't have been much room on the boat deck at all?

There wasn't.

How did you get around?

There certainly wasn't no room on the troop decks. In any case, they were that sick they never – I used to say to

24:30 'em, "I wouldn't fancy going ashore with your side, there's no way we'll come back on this." Canadians, lovely blokes they were, lovely blokes. I met them, met some of them over in Canada when I was over there. Yeah. Lovely blokes. Some of them were Indians too, but I didn't know that. I thought they'd come born with feathers in their hair if they were Indians but they didn't, you know. They had their drop of rum and the old piper was going on the boat deck all the time, so they tell me. I was

25:00 well behind the sand bags by then, when the shelling started. He was up there playing away for his life, you know.

So obviously the ship was being prepared as a landing ship, what did you know about a landing ship when you first joined it, what did you think about this?

Nothing at all, nothing at all. My primary job was bridge messenger and wherever I was required. There's another little funny there actually. When we got in close,

25:30 we were one of the first ships leading in too. We followed the minesweepers in and as we were getting nearer they were shelling us heavier and heavier and they were accurate, believe me they were accurate and as we started getting nearer and nearer, we had a balloon up and the balloon was to stop low flying aircraft, okay? It wasn't working that way, they were using that as something to drop the stuff underneath, weren't they?

26:00 So the old man, that's the captain, said to me, "Find the carpenter and get that bloody balloon cut away." So I went down, I ran down and I found the 'chippy' and he got his big bulk-cutters and we're just up there, just going to wack it off and this young naval lieutenant, a pain in the arse he was, "What are you doing, my man?" The chippy looked and said, "Why don't you f – off!" He

26:30 said, "Orders from the bridge!" BANG! Up went the balloon, you know. He was a pain in the bum, that bloke.

We'll come through and get you to tell the whole D-Day story in detail when we come to it but I want to know more about the ship, there were guns, landing craft assault.

Yeah.

There was a troop deck bridge, what else was on the ship? It was obviously pretty crowded?

Oh absolutely, yeah,

27:00 yeah.

What, where were you housed – ?

I was mostly in the wheelhouse, mostly in the wheelhouse, yeah.

Where's the 'wheelhouse' on the ship?

The same as on any other ship, a wheelhouse, isn't it? It's up on the top there, that bit that you know, they steer the ship from and so on you know, and the old man stands there and gives all his orders from and it's the nerve centre of the ship.

What about your

27:30 **own accommodation or quarters?**

Quarters, yeah. Pretty crowded, pretty crowded. Remember it was a pre-war ship. What they call an 'open foxhole'. Now an open foxhole can – they're later ships so you've got three watches haven't you. 8 till 12, 12 till 4, 4 till 8. Now they would be split into three but on the older ones, was an open foxhole so you were all in one space, see

28:00 so hard luck if you just come off watch and the other bloke's weren't and so on. Food wasn't too bad as I remember rightly, it wasn't too bad at all the food. Crew were good. The mate looked after me, being the boy you know. I had one little – perhaps I won't tell you about that, tell you later when we come to the actual detail. It

28:30 wasn't funny at the time, but in retrospect it was.

Okay, well do keep that in mind but do tell us more about the crew. To start with, the captain –

?

The crew? The captain was a nice bloke, Captain Whiting. Actually, he lived in Portsmouth for a while. He'd evacuated his family from Southampton, nice old fellow. First officer, he was a nice chap too. They looked after the boy a bit, you know. The crew per se,

29:00 the carpenter, he was a Channel Islander. Most of the other crew on deck were off the St Patrick which was a hospital ship that had been sunk and they sent the crew pretty near per se to join the Isle of Guernsey. They were all good blokes. A few Southampton lads but most merchant ships were very mixed.

29:30 **How many crew were there, roughly?**

On deck let's see, a rough guess, about 13, 14, something like that including the carpenter, the bosun and one quartermaster on there too if I remember rightly, a nice bloke.

You were the boy?

I was the ship's boy.

30:00 **Can you describe what the ship's boy does on a ship?**

He's a dogsbody. Does whatever he's told, when he's told to do it and he helps this here, this there, he's learning this trade you see, you're watching what they're doing all the time and then my job was to make the tea, keep the quarters clean, scrub the quarters and that. Onboard a merchant ship they were meticulously clean because you've got to remember that 13 or 14 blokes in one

30:30 confined space and you could have rampant disease go through, so it was spotless.

Can you describe the quarters in a bit more detail, what did they look like?

How could I describe it? It was an open space, generally up forehead and you've got bunks all around it, okay? Two tiered bunks. You'd have a small mess room. There never would be the whole crowd eating together,

31:00 never had that happen. Some were a lot worse than others, some were bloody awful as a matter of fact, you know.

What possessions did the crew members have?

Just their ordinary seagoing gear, that's all. They had to buy their own gear, by the way. Just heavy weighted gear and so on, so forth, you know. Oil skins and so on.

Were there lockers or provision to these in?

Yeah, you had a locker and this is another thing

31:30 onboard a merchant ship. Once you left port, you never locked a locker. That would have shown mistrust to your fellow members. In the navy they didn't care for that but we would never - if you locked your locker once you left port, they would rip it out and throw it over the side. Pretty quick, it's swift justice.

What was in your locker as a ship's boy?

Just a bit of gear, you know. Something

32:00 to change into and so on, you know. Very, very little. One thing you never left was your life jacket. You wore that all the time, even sleeping because if you did get in the hammock, if you were laid out and a bloke saw you there with your jacket on, he'd throw you over the side but if you didn't, he wouldn't stop because you couldn't -

What else did you learn

32:30 **on joining the Isle of Guernsey, that example 'the locker' is a good piece of merchant navy tradition, what other things were you introduced to for the first time?**

Well, you done as you're told, exactly. Exactly what you were told because what you've got to remember at sea is this. You could be caught anytime night or day, I mean the fact you were off watch didn't make no difference. I mean safety of the ship was paramount

33:00 and if you didn't respond immediately to discipline, it could have been dangerous i.e. the bosun down there doing a better job. You leave a tool down there and he'll go you savage because you get caught out in the middle of the night, the ship's cargo shifting or something, you trip on that and you're over the side. So disciplines got to be absolute for the safety of everyone concerned.

Who was

33:30 **most responsible for you? Obviously you weren't taking orders directly from the captain?**

No, no the bosun was the man, he was the foreman, if you like. He was the man. The ABs mind you,

treated them with as little respect as a boy. You never cheat them, they'll clip your ear quick smart! So, you were brought up pretty strict, see.

What can you tell us about the bosun on the Isle of Guernsey?

Nice old chap, Collins was his name. I always remember him, John Collins, nice old chap. I've got

34:00 a little incident relating to him maybe you'll want to hear later but he was a nice - he, I suppose, appeared to be uninitiated as a strict disciplinarian but he wasn't really. He secretly had your welfare at heart, "You do what I tell you!" because if you started doing - an accident can happen quick, you know. He really had your welfare at heart but was a very strict disciplinarian.

Would you

34:30 **say that the ship's crew acted a bit like a 'family'? How much does that work?**

That would be over-stressing it, personally. Yeah, you all had to get on. You couldn't afford no, you know, I mean you might get say a Welshman, a bloke from the Outer Hebrides and so on but they're pretty international. The only thing you had to watch

35:00 is, if you got a crowd of Welshmen for instance and they'd start talking Welsh and so on, then it could be a bit you know, them versus us but normally, no.

What was the mixture of nationalities like on the Isle of Guernsey mainly?

Irish, mostly. They'd come off the St Patrick, this hospital ship that had been sunk and they all come from Wexford in Ireland, see. Of course they took me home with them on leave and oh God, talk about

35:30 Irishness.

What were the Irish seamen renowned for?

Bullshit mostly I think. No, they're good blokes, they're good blokes.

I'm sure the Irish don't have a monopoly on bullshit though?

No, of course they don't, of course they don't. The Hebridians, they were just one step removed from Gaelic all the time, you know but good seamen, good seamen.

When I say 'family',

36:00 **I was sort of thinking you were the boy on the ship, you were looked after by everyone -**

I was clipped around the ear too, you got it deep wrong.

Were they looked up to by you as 'father figures' or - ?

Ah yeah, you stood in awe to an AB, you know. What he said was law.

Did you get into much trouble?

I got into the odd bit of strife, yeah, like everyone does you know but they were always pulling your leg and that you know and

36:30 I said to 'em one day, "Where's the eggs coming from?" and he said, "Well you go up there in the dummy funnel" - you know what a dummy funnel is, don't you? It's a funnel that ain't a funnel but it does that to make the lines of the ship look good, and - "We've got some chickens in there." Here's me looking for these chickens. You'd coil in the big old wire, you know the wire ropes and he's telling me how to take the turns out because if you don't take the turns

37:00 out before you coil it down, it goes - and he said, "If you go along with that you'll see them turns going down the deck there." I think they ribbed you, don't worry about that, don't worry about that.

What was the, obviously the ship was being prepared for the D-Day landings but you wouldn't have known that at the time, what was the - ?

Oh yes we did, oh yes.

What were you told?

We were doing exercises every week, weren't we?

37:30 We would go here and have a dummy landing and the other thing they never let you know is, we also practised picking 'em up in case it didn't come off. Oh yeah, we never, you just didn't, you were doing something all the time. You were picking up a crowd here, taking 'em down to there. Off they'd go, practise disembarking the troops, maybe come back, pick up that lot from there. Oh no, you were busy all the time. As a matter of fact you didn't

38:00 know when D-Day was, actually but we did know in the end because they kept us onboard for about a week, wouldn't let us go ashore or nothing so we had a shrewd idea.

What was the time on them, what was the first operational training thing that you did onboard the Isle of Guernsey?

There's a story attached to that but I'm not going into it because it's rather, it's anti-American actually.

Don't, no fear there.

Well, what happened, it's not quite the first thing that happened but -

38:30 **Well actually if this is a story, because we're about to run out of tape, maybe we'll tell that just as soon as we change.**

Yeah, keep that for later, but remind me.

You say that wasn't quite the first thing, what were your memories of the very first things you did, were there navy onboard, were there troops onboard?

Yeah, there were navy onboard to man the LCAs and they were all right, nice bunch of lads. Got on with them, no problem. They didn't come, they come under the discipline of the ship's Captain because the ship's master is the 'God'. They say he's master after God

39:00 and whatever he said, no matter who came aboard, I mean on a convoy you'd have the commodore of the convoy on a merchant ship. As far as he might be Lord Whatever, whatever - as far as that ship was concerned the old man was captain.

So how did you fit in? You were the lowest peg on the ship's crew but were you still taking orders from the navy blokes, if they asked you to do something?

No, no, no.

39:30 They had nothing to do with us. They might have had a lieutenant commander, he was nothing to do with us. We were responsible in our order of hierarchy to the bosun, to the mate and to the captain and that was it and many was a time and I could tell you of several occasions, I told 'em to "f - off," as you did. You had these rather superior types you know who thought they were talking down to the normal - we soon put them in their place.

40:00 **All right, we'll stop there because we have to change the tape and we'll get into the -**

Tape 3

00:30 They'll interview me, oh God. They're so bloody thick it isn't true. Look I expect there's going to be an area of misunderstanding but they're so - and then when they print the article it's entirely distorted, you know. If I get can get a plug in for the old MN [Merchant Navy], I will.

Well that's good, that's what we're here for today, what,

01:00 **before we go on, I'd just like to go back a little bit and try and get more of a picture of what you were like as a boy, how would you have described yourself? You were very young when you joined the MN.**

Adventurous, a yearn to travel. As soon as I learnt to read I was into all the travel books, you can imagine you know. I wanted to see the world anywhere.

01:30 Fascinated I was. Since then, I educated myself mainly and I read everything. I'm a Shakespearian addict, you know. I think he was a man 1000 years ahead of his time. I read all the good political stuff and I tape, have you heard of John Pilger? I'm a devotee of John's. I met him in London once actually and I did say to him,

02:00 "Hey John, wouldn't you be looking over your shoulder?" He said, "I've got insurance." Good man, I've got one of his latest tapes. Oh, you ought to see it. Don't he castigate those in there, doesn't he give Mr Bush & Co the stick and the thing about it is that I say, the people who watch it remember this, "If John said one thing wrong, they'd be on him like a ton of bricks," which they would, so whatever he

02:30 says is pretty right.

Was it just the adventure that you were looking for?

Was it just the adventure? You don't really know at that age, "I want to go to sea," you know and in fact 1 in 4 of you are going to get killed is - you're going to live forever at that age, aren't you? You're going to live forever.

Well, I can also imagine that

03:00 **perhaps it was the lure of a job, a secure job, was that - ?**

No, no. At that age love, you don't worry about security or a job for life or nothing. You don't think along those lines, well I certainly didn't. Most of my compatriots didn't either. No, you don't look for the long term although I never intended to give up the sea and of course when I got married it was a different kettle of fish. I got married on a Saturday

03:30 and served with the Canada on Monday. It gets in your blood but I was always a little bit, how can I say it? Far reaching in my thoughts and the old fellows that I'd been to sea with – some very, very interesting. I've been with some of the crew on the Scott of the Antarctic, we were on that, then the discovery.

04:00 Also the crew of, some of the crew off the Titanic and I can tell you it's an entirely different story to the film. These crew blokes were telling me all the – how they treated the steerage passengers and that. It's not pleasant. There is no resemblance to the film at all you know and these old fellows fascinate me, the stories they tell you know are

04:30 absolutely fascinating, you know. You see, their ages then, some of them admitted to being 65 and probably a little bit older so you can imagine how far back they went, you know. It used to frighten me some of them did you know.

You've told us that you went to sea school but I'm wondering how long did it take you to find your

05:00 **sea legs?**

I was a natural actually love. I was never sea sick in my life. I was sick of the sea sometimes but I was never sea sick. I was a natural. Some blokes never get over it you know. I remember being sick on the Mary, he had his little bucket on the wing of the bridge and darest you titter either. Some never get over it. Some we brought back from India were

05:30 that bad they've had to put 'em ashore and they're genuine, I'm not kidding you. I don't know, some say it's in the mind. I don't know but I mean I don't believe that because we used to bring some of those regimental horses back and you'd see them, their legs splayed and their head hung down, the poor old horses, really bad you know and some of them ships could roll, God. You get a tanker riding light,

06:00 nothing in there. They're supposed to ballast them, aren't they, with water but they don't because ballast means more fuel being used and so on and so forth you know, so you're in a gigantic tin can. On that cross channel boat, I could get thrown out of my bunk because we went up to go to Reykjavik, up to Iceland there, you know, and we never made it. What you used to have to do,

06:30 you'd get what you call a 'heaving line' and you'd lace it like a shoe, hop in underneath and then just pull it a bit tight otherwise you'd get thrown straight out your bunk. Some of them were really rough but it never particularly bothered me other than the fact it made hard work of everything. I mean if you were steering the ship all the time, you were constantly braced you know, well that could be exhausting. The actual sea sickness, no I never suffered with that.

And you say

07:00 **you were a natural?**

Some are, some never get over it.

Did that go for the rest of your sailing?

Yeah, yeah, even when we travel down from here by ship. The wife was bad, so were the daughters, so were most of the passengers. The only thing as far as I was concerned, I had the dining room to myself. I'd braced

07:30 myself in you know and she was doing a bit of a roll. The old waitress is looking at me, "Why don't you bugger off!" you know, he's feeling crook. Then of course a couple of days later when it's got a bit quieter they all creep back into the saloon and oh, I had a headache. I thought, "Bullshit." No, it's no special thing to me. You either have or you haven't. The same as me with

08:00 drinking, I can drink like a fish, I can drink a bottle of OP Rum but a psychologist explained it to me like this. I always understood that drinking was up there you know, your attitude but it isn't. It's the way your kidneys process alcohol and he said that's largely inherited. My Dad was the same. He could drink, never drunk but he could drink like a fish. The same as me, don't affect me.

08:30 I don't know.

Was there alcohol on the Isle of Guernsey?

Exceptional ship that. Seeing I was over on special articles we had 200 cigarettes a week, free and the rest were next to nothing. Being the boy I didn't get it but they were issued a couple of bottles a beer a day you know but not me because I was only the boy you see. I used to sneak the odd drink and that and so on you know. Normal merchant ships, yeah you

09:00 might get the odd couple of bottles, nothing in excess. On the bigger ones, especially after the war, they

had a cruise bar but mind you, you never had to shirk any duty or anything no matter what. Discipline was very, very strict. We were governed on them articles by shipping articles of 1864, one of 'em which stated, "If more than two of you go to the bridge with

09:30 a complaint, the master is at liberty to ship you." Nelsonian, but they can all be re-enacted at his pleasure, you didn't have no rights at all, really.

How did you take to the discipline?

Pretty good, it didn't particularly worry me. Now and again I got a roasting and got confined to the ship or logged so many quid and so on as I used to

10:00 try and worm my way out of it like they all do. I remember one gentleman in particular, he was a, you know very religious, actually he used to write children's religious books and quite well known for it. I know I was in Mombasa and I overstayed my leave a bit and of course, comes back and then you got to get the lecture, haven't you? "You've been ashore and you've been drinking," "Yes, Sir." "Yes, yes, yes. You've been

10:30 consorting with loose women.," "Well I don't know, Sir." You know, you're going along with everything and you're thinking, "I'm getting away with this." "Right, report for a week. Logged 10 quid." I thought, "If I'd have known all that I wouldn't have listened to you." Oh no, I had my few run ins you know.

I'm just interested to hear, as a youngster joining the Guernsey how did

11:00 **you, I guess, look after yourself?**

Pretty quickly actually. As I said, I'd led a fairly spartan life before that. You did your own washing, you washed your own gear, you mend your own gear. You soon learn because there ain't no one else that's going to do it for you and this attitude today about a chap who can iron, wash, cook and that's slightly feminine, is the furthest from the truth. It means to say

11:30 he's had to look after himself not Mum behind him. You do, you soon learn to keep yourself and if you're not kept clean they'll soon tell you too because you've got to remember as I said, in a crowded little - them quarters are spotless. The old man came around on his inspections, a pair of white gloves on, put his hand up there, come back with dust - you're in trouble. All the bunks had to be made.

12:00 Very, very much so. It was practical i.e. you couldn't have filth or you would have been diseased and whatever.

So would you describe the Guernsey as a fairly hygienic ship?

Every one was. Every ship I was ever on. Some were bloody atrocious the quarters but within the limits of your own hygiene around you, you kept

12:30 that clean.

What was the uniform of the MN?

There wasn't no uniform. All we had and all we were entitled to was a little silver badge which I'll show you later and I'm very proud of it too, very proud of it.

What would you wear then?

Just your normal seagoing gear. When you went ashore, ordinary civilians. Remembering this as well, we were in a lot of neutral

13:00 ports where you couldn't wear a uniform. Even our DEMS gunners had a change of civilian clothes. You couldn't go ashore in the South Americas, not with any kind of uniform, or Spain, see.

Can you describe your seagoing clobber?

What you'd be wearing would depend on where you were going, of course. If you were going somewhere across the Atlantic, you had plenty of thick woollen jerseys, your seagoing gear, oil skins, rubber boots - your seaboots and so on.

13:30 Anything like that because you're standing watch on Lookout there and you know it's snowing, coming in towards you, believe you me you need some good gear on or you wouldn't survive.

Who provided the gear for you?

You brought your own. You didn't get nothing provided. The only thing you got exceptional to that was I think and I can't remember the exact total,

14:00 I think they give you about 12 quid after you've been torpedoed to gear yourself up again, you know. All heart weren't they. They treated them diabolically, all the survivors. They treated them bloody awful. There's some good books on that you want to read how they'd come down, the crew would be landed there and most of them would have no gear on 'em. They'd hopped out their bunks and got into the boat as soon as they can. The

- 14:30 last thing you think of is dressing, isn't it? They'd be landed, they'd come down to pick up the naval person and leave you there and then you give X amount of fare to get back to your home port and that was it, terrible. I'm a bit bitter about that aspect of it, always have been because the ship owners – see, technically we come under Administrative Transport, but the ship owners still done a lot
- 15:00 of managing of their ships. Well what used to happen was they sent out some of the stuff that should have been scrapped years and – they would never have gone through a Board of Trade exam, I tell you but during the war they were insured by the government. They wouldn't have never passed for insurance but some of them, rust buckets! A lot of them went
- 15:30 down you know and of course they were loaded beyond all safety. You know, your water marks didn't seem to count for too much and then when you had deck cargo on as well. I mean see 'em go to put tanks down to hold, cocoon them and pour grain on that and then you'd have a deck cargo. If you are going across that wester, with the deck cargo up there it makes that ship what you call 'very light'. You get that – a lot of them went down, I'm sure
- 16:00 without being torpedoed. We were expendable.

I'm just interested to hear a bit more about your introduction to the, I guess in a way, the culture?

Did I feel strange? No, not really, I took to it like a duck to water, you know. You done as you were told, you were the butt of the jokes of the lads but that didn't worry me, that was to be expected as any

- 16:30 apprentice would be you know and I never kinda had to get used to too much at all, I was learning all the time, you know. "You go and assist the sail maker." "Is there a sail maker aboard this ship?" They're still there, they do all the hatch covers and that you know and then you'd be assisting the bosun splicing some wires tomorrow. You're learning all the time you see because you've got to pass your exams later remember so, no I found it great
- 17:00 stuff. Although they might appear to be a little bit strict disciplinarians, mostly it was for your safety although you can't see that at the time, can you, but that's what it's mostly for.

What about I guess, fights and - ?

No. Very, very seldom. You can't afford it in a close knit, like that, to be – I still adapt the same attitude today. If I

- 17:30 didn't like you or you, I wouldn't be offensive but I wouldn't have nothing to do with you. You can't afford to let personalities ruin a little tight thing like that, can you? So you, those two don't get on, accept it as a fact, that's it. Occasionally it breaks out. I'll tell you the worst, those bloody Glaswegians. Nasty when they're on the grog, really nasty. I could tell you an instance
- 18:00 about them. God, I was in Malta once and it was during the war, actually I see a bloke get killed there. A copper he was hauling this big barge and there was a couple of cake boats in there, in Malta and they're all going for their life and this copper walks in, I seen it happen, I got out a bit quick. They lift, you know
- 18:30 the old fashioned marble top tables, about that thick, CRASH! Bar emptied, didn't it? That was on one occasion. Another time, I was on the Otranto that's it, we were bringing back troops from Cyprus and this bloke they had onboard, who was an army bloke in charge of the sails, you know for the army when we bring them back,
- 19:00 blokes who have been a bit naughty over there, Rex his name was and he used to get his jollies, we knew this, the crew got to know this, how they were going down and kicking hell out of the prisoners at night. So I know the Glaswegians were having a 'hurried conference', I didn't want to get too involved, anyway he disappeared that night. Never seen him again, now the old man, he'll go and report to the bridge, he's got to make a show so there's no hope of opening it, you've got to come around you know, see if you can put it in the lock, things like that
- 19:30 you know. They're pretty, how can I say, I've seen some pretty bloody awful things like that but onboard, you've got to get on. Got to otherwise you know and remember this too, you've got a lot of different people. You've got the outer Hebridians, you've got the Welshmen there, you've got an Australian there, you've got perhaps a Norwegian there and remember this,
- 20:00 British seamen were sent to all nationalities of ships, to Norwegian, Danish and whatever, yeah so it's a pretty cosmopolitan – the best blokes I think you that you could get on was the West of England blokes. They were pretty placid, you know and seeing as how I was one, possibly – but on a tanker after the war, you'll never believe this, the Zaitun it was called,
- 20:30 never forget it, never forget it. Joined her in Fawley, just south of Southampton. This is a rundown on the crew - the old man was German and it was after the war and I tell you what he was a thorough gentleman in every sense of the word. The deck crew were from Dundee, Scotland apart for us two western England blokes, me and my mate, the engineers were American

- 21:00 and if we touched a Communist port we were going to be impounded. So we get down to as far as Aruba in the Dutch East Indies and we load with crude then they sent us down to Galveston in Texas and then they flew us home. I don't know, there was a little bit of mystery about that one but the old man was a gentleman, good seaman. I remember New Year's night in Aruba, they were all going wild ashore, all the crew were having a ball and they'd drawn knots to
- 21:30 see who'd keep the gangway watch and it was me and all the steel pans are going for their life and there's me, a picture of dejected misery on the gangway and the old man comes and he looked at me and he said, "I've never seen a more picture of misery in all my life." He said, "Just hold there a minute," so he went back in his cabin and changed out of his uniform and comes up "You go, I'll keep the watch now." What more could you have? So anyway, I ended up
- 22:00 playing the triangle in the steel band, see. He was a gentleman, good quarters on that. Cosmopolitan crew. He was a real man, very good man, good seaman too.
- Just going back to when you joined the Guernsey, what type of initiation, if any, did you go through?**
- Well, they're raggin' you all the time.
- 22:30 They're kiddin' you, you know in doing that - you've got to go along with it, don't say "Oh, I'm not going to do that," you know. No, go along with it. It's easier as it gives them a laugh, the lad's cause you're all going to do it later, aren't you? No, they're good blokes and most of the disciplinarian stuff is actually, although you might not see it at the time, was for your own safety. You got to be very rigid, safety wise, at sea. Very rigid.
- 23:00 **Just getting back to what the Isle of Guernsey was doing, it was running as you said 'cross-channel convoys'?**
- I don't think that would be quite the word, running a 'cross-channel' convoy, we used to leave in convoy from Southampton and a couple of more ports, taking troops across.
- 23:30 We ended up we took Yanks in as well, for what bloody use they were. I could tell you a little bit about that bloody beach head of theirs, too. Never mind, maybe not.
- I mean it's a good point, the war had been going on for a few years by the time you joined -**
- Mm, see the point of the matter is
- 24:00 simple. Our Canadian troops had a good seasoning of combat veterans from the St. Pierre, do you remember the big raids on St. Pierre, the Commando raids, Canadians - what was the other one, they had a fair smattering of them through their blokes. You never seen a shot fired in anger. You can't - it's bloody terrible. You've got to have a smattering of NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and whatever, who've seen combat.
- 24:30 **When you joined the Guernsey as I said, the war had been going on for a couple of years,**
- Yeah, a few years.
- What were your thoughts about the war and joining the merchant navy?**
- You don't, you see you're at that age, you don't see the bigger picture. It isn't until latter years and you start to think of how they were treated. The bloody lies they told you and things like that but you don't
- 25:00 see it at that age. You're not idealistic in any way, are you? Until latter years when you've got that experience behind you and you can think logically about a thing you know but my thoughts on the matter? I wasn't particularly opposed to Hitler, no he didn't worry me that much although every day you'd be getting propaganda and so on, you know. I wasn't particularly - anti-Jap, yes, and I will be till the day I die but I was never
- 25:30 particularly - and I admit what people done in some of these concentration camps and so on but then bear in mind, the Brits introduced concentration camps in the South African war, didn't they? They were the instigators of concentration camps and women and kids in there, so you've got to take the, you know, the broad picture.
- I'm just curious as to whether you had any thoughts**
- 26:00 **of being a little bit fearful going to sea while there was a war?**
- Well, how can I say this, when you see blokes screaming their life away in the water, yes it does at the time upset you but it never upsets you too much at the time, it's in latter years you pay and a funny thing about it is, the older you get the worse it gets. You would think distance would lend enchantment but it doesn't. It doesn't. Only the wife should know, she'll tell you. She'll go and wake me some
- 26:30 nights and I'm shaking away, especially if you've got visitors. They might think we're having an orgy up there or something, you know. She'll come around and tell 'em. It's always the same thing, "Let me out, let me out." Post-war traumatic stress, it affects you as you get older and older. I get my bad moments, I

will probably tonight but for the bigger picture and if I can get any recognition,

27:00 a little bit of suffering on my part won't - I get a post-war traumatic stress pension from the UK and I've got a good psychologist, I see her about once a month.

As a 16 year old boy you gave no thought - ?

"It's not going to happen to me." You do really think you're going to live forever at that age, don't you? You do. You see

27:30 some things that kind of scar you mentally but as I said, it isn't till latter life that you start to pay for that although in a crisis now, I'm more than good. I mean, we had an incident not too long, a couple of years ago, the write-off on a car when two cars hit us. I can behave with utter - I'm not bragging about this it's just my make-up, I go - I see cold in a crisis, "What can I do? How can

28:00 we handle it?" This, this and this. The first thing I do, the car is smashed up, the wife sat there - collapsed. Now I know the first thing you got to do is never move them from a car but there's smoke coming out of the engine and I thought, "Right, I'm going to have her because if this car goes up any minute - " you know. All perfectly calm and collected but you pay for it later, if you know what I mean. Oh no, I've got no - how can I put

28:30 it? I think I would be better than most in a crisis because I've always handled it along these lines - "Don't panic because you're not going to be any good to yourself and you're probably letting chances go and you might have done, if you give a bit of logical feeling, if you can't do nothing about it, sit, wait, listen. Some opportunity might present itself," something like that, you know and well, death doesn't

29:00 worry me too much. I've seen, 'stared the old gentleman in the face a few times', you know. If he wants me, he'll have me I suppose. I've had a triple by-pass about 6 or 7 years ago, seemed to have been all right ever since. The devil looks after his own.

All right, perhaps we'll get back to talking about D-Day and

29:30 **how - ?**

There's several, there's a couple of preludes to that. I think you ought to listen to first. It would set the picture more firmer in your mind. Now I'll tell you what happened re the Americanas. We took all Canadian troops aboard and we were going to do an exercise. Now, I can show you this in the book. It's never mentioned for obvious reasons. We went to a place down near Devon, we were going to go to a place down in Devon called 'Slapton

30:00 Sands' which is they say is an exact replica of 'Omaha Beachhead' which they eventually went to. Well, we had our Canadians onboard, I think they were going to do something like a joint exercise and we get down so far and I think we come from Cowes Roads, is just off the Isle of Wight, down towards - and we got approximately off Portsmouth, you know down in Fareham there and we got just off it there and we had the barge. The U-boats were out and you

30:30 never tangled with them gentlemen because they could do 40 knots and a heavily laden LSI wouldn't have stood it. Right, immediately round, back, get back into Portsmouth. Now our American friends must have had the same intelligence as we did and they ignored it and they got slaughtered and they ended up firing on their own ships. I think today they call it proliferal damage or something, but

31:00 the same thing, they ended up firing on their own ships but they never tell you about that, see because that's not good publicity, is it? Well that is definitely what happened because I was there and I remember as we turned around and went, going back in there, I was on the bridge and my mate was pointing out his bloody finger there and the U-boats were going around it like Indians, yeah and I ain't going to say too much about it.

31:30 It wasn't good, it wasn't good. They say they never had the seasoning of experienced troops and they will never learn. How many times have they repeated these errors from Vietnam forward? They're still doing it. I mean, if it was me I'd say, "No, look these Brits have been here and they've made several

32:00 invasions across the - let's go and learn from them, we might pick up some useful - " and along that western American coast there, when they came into the war they were sailing convoys across that coast and all the shore was fully lit up. It was the bloody German's 'second happy hunting time'. No, keep them away from me. We were down in Cowes Roads once,

32:30 we were all laid up see and we were all a big invasion fleet there, you know and every night, soon as there's a warning, this British motored torpedo boat would go right around and envelope us all over in this acrid bloody smoke and you all laid there quiet and you're listening to him going over the top of you and he's going along and you can hear his engine going and you say "Where are they? Where are

33:00 they?" And all of a sudden this bloody Yankee destroyer opened up a vicious crack, well you've never heard it. There's ship's anchor cables coming up and everything, typical! Typical! Bad to get them in a convoy with you.

You mentioned earlier you'd done a couple of like dummy runs, I guess?

Yeah, we did and we practised picking them up as well, oh yeah.

33:30 In case the invasion didn't turn out right, see.

Well, after those dummy runs and practises, how did you know that - ?

That the day was the day, didn't really. Had a good idea because they confined us to the ship for a week and that included the troops we had onboard and as I say, bear in mind that the invasion was put off for

34:00 24 hours so all them troops are stowed down in that deck and they're packed tight, an extra 24 hours isn't it?

Can you just explain that, how many troops did you have - ?

Oh, I don't know how many exactly. I suppose we had 300 or 400 on a small ship like that and I mean to confine them for an additional - and it was as rough as hell, remember. Now they're bad, they're sick them blokes are and packed down like

34:30 that, you know but on the day concerned, I had a shrewd idea but knowing me, I got in my bunk and I said, "We're a bit long at sea for this one," and I came up on deck and you ain't seen nothing like it. The sea was just one mass of ships, one mass and we're out in the front behind the mine sweepers because a lot of those cross-channel

35:00 ships and masters were conversant with the coast and everything there, you know, so you couldn't move and I thought, "Oh Christ, if we get the hammer, I can walk back aboard them," and then the Canadians at this point were onboard, up on the boat deck, playing to the lads and I thought, "Oh dear, oh dear." So I took my bunk and we could see them, we were on the real thing, you know

35:30 you could sense it and we started getting nearer the coast and the bloody gunfire started and they were accurate, believe me they were accurate. They were sending over this stuff and you could see the pillboxes ashore and so on but later in the piece, the Rodney, I don't know if you've heard of the Rodney, the 16 inch gun, British, was way out to sea behind us firing these 16 inch

36:00 shells over the top of us. Oh dear, oh dear, if she'd have dropped them one inch, we'd have been, you know - terrific flames coming out and then this roar as these shells passed over us and then you'd see a pillbox ashore - PHOOM! Disintegrating, you know and then we got in closer and we started landing our LCAs, the naval blokes took them in you know and,

36:30 I don't know, there were a few lots of bodies and that lying around. You know the frogmen, they'd been in there previous to the night before and they'd try to mark the unmined bits ashore, you know like putting down layings for them and so on, there's a lot fewer of them in the water and so on and we stopped there, we disembarked and then they

37:00 came back. We lost a few all the same, we pulled them up over the side.

What do you mean? Who did you lose?

Some of the naval blokes, when their LCAs got caught up in them hedgehog mines it blew 'em up. We didn't lose no one aboard the ship that day although there's a little, this might be a hilarious thing to you - I was up on the boat deck running around, helping here, going there, doing whatever and I used to have this tin helmet on and the bloody thing used to keep bobbing up and down while running

37:30 and I felt a little pluck on my chin and said, "What's that?" Took no notice and I stood there and the bosun came along, "What's wrong with you?" and there's a pool of blood down there. A bit of shrapnel, it just - he picked me up literally in his arms and he took me down below and the sick bay bloke took me and what annoyed me, he cut my jeans. He cut 'em up to there - and I had a little knick but it was

38:00 bleeding like hell and he looked at that. "You lazy bugger," he said, "Get back up on deck," but he carried me down there see, never forget that, do you? I said, "I'll get a Purple Heart for this." He said, "I'll give you a bloody purple heart in a minute." He was good, you know, he took me down below and everything, you know. They'd come over and

38:30 ooh, coming in.

Did you need stitches or what?

No, it was only a knick but it was one of those - I've still got the scar there. You know, certain places you hit and it bleeds like hell, don't it? Immaterial to the size of the cut, it must have just caught a vein or something, only a little PTHRIP! Like that, it must have been a bit of shrapnel come off the fish plate on the deck there. I wasn't particularly

39:00 perturbed in that, you know there was plenty of people in the water and that and some of the merchant ships were right up on the beach remember. Right on the beach. There's an item in there and it's about old King George V about what he thinks of the merchant navy on D-Day. Actually, we did meet him. I forgot to tell you that. What happened

39:30 was before -

I might just stop there because I think there's a story coming here.

Tape 4

00:35 **Okay Geoffrey, you were just about to tell us a story about meeting King George -**

Do you want to hear it?

What happened then?

What happened was old King George came down to HMS Vectis which was a shore base in Cowes, which is on the Isle of Wight as you know and they nominated so many people for every ship for this big line up for the King to

01:00 meet, okay? So obviously a couple of officers and then they had the idea, why not send the ship's boy to get a full gambit of the crew so they sent me along, didn't they? Anyhow he comes walking up and talking to this one and he's talking to that one and so on. He couldn't utter two words without stuttering. As you know, he was a big stutterer but when he done his speeches they tailored it. They cut it out and so on but not -

01:30 he looked to me to be the product of generations of inbreeding, you know. No chin and anyway. He talked to the bloke there but he didn't talk to me. I got a bit miffed about that. "Oh bugger you," I thought. "If you don't want to talk to me, you don't have to," kind of thing, you know. Anyhow, I had a day's leave out of it and he talked to all the blokes along there and so on but if you read his article about D-Day and the merchant navy, what part they played - good!

And when

02:00 **did you meet him roughly or - ?**

It would have been, if memory serves me correctly, a month or two before D-Day or something like that you know because all mass fleets drawn up there up in Cowes Roads and all that where they have the modern yacht race, don't they? So, that's all, if he said, "G'day," to the bloke next door, well - "Bugger you, if that's your

02:30 attitude."

What do you think you might have said to him?

"Good day George, how are you ?" They don't worry me one iota. I've met a couple of PMs [Prime Ministers]. I'll tell you the real nicest bloke of the lot is Gough Whitlam and I'd swear for that bloke. I'm going a little bit out of context here but I tell you what, when I went down to the Opera House to receive my medal from the French

03:00 Ambassador, he walked in. No entourage, nothing and after he - his daughter said, "Be careful, Dad. He's going to kiss you on the cheek." I said, "He's got no hope, I know the French raids," and he walks in and I said, "G'day Mr Whitlam, I consider it an honour to shake your hand." "No, Sir," he said. "I consider it an honour to shake yours!" A

03:30 gentleman got at by the system, I've got his book upstairs. I don't know how the Australians stood for that fiasco, I'll never know. Lovely man, beautiful. A rarity in politics and he spoke the truth.

Just going back

04:00 **to D-Day -**

I know that's out of context.

That's okay, so it's all 'on for young and old', could you just take us through what you were doing on that day?

D-Day, busy as hell. Carrying messages there, going down there helping with that gun crew there, a bit of a defect item, never having a minute to spare, taking Orders from the bridge you know and so on. Helping where necessary, helping

04:30 lower the LCAs and whatever, making the odd brew if we had time, keeping well down under the skyline - this bloody Scot, this piper, was out there playing in full exposure but I wasn't I can tell you. Not with that stuff whistling over and around, I've got the report in there from another ship about us. Anything I tell you I can back with data. You've got to have that when you consult with MPs [Members of Parliament], you know. Don't give

05:00 'em no scope.

You were kept very busy, what was the general kind of buzz on the ship?

Everyone's busy. Everyone's busy getting away the LCAs and then there's that crew there to man that gun and this and so on and so forth, getting rid of that balloon. You're going all the time. You don't realise there's - I think some people think when you go to sea you leave Sydney and you go to sleep till you get to the other end. Oh no, you're flat out. I can tell you, there's thousands of things to

05:30 be done, you know. Getting the stores up from a load and getting them onto the troop decks and so on. They've got to get their gear from there, their ammo from there to there and so on. No, you were busy and you didn't get much time.

And as you say, you didn't get much time to stop and have a cup of tea or - ?

Oh, Christ no. Stop and have a cup of tea! Oh no, no, no, no. You didn't have little tea parties in the interval, I can assure you. It's

06:00 survival, my love! It's survival! You've got to be on the ball all the time and if you ain't prepared yourself, you can't expect others to help you. Never let go of that life jacket.

You've described it a little bit but can you just take us through again, what the scene was when you arrived at your destination?

What was the scene like? How can I explain it? First thing that rather

06:30 takes you is the terrific noise that's going on, all this gun fire and there's, everything's going, there's gun fire here, there's a bloke come out from the shore there, he come out to tell us how are things going and so on. "Your troops are getting ready to go over the side." It's your general impression although you see you're not in a position to stand back and

07:00 survey the scene per se because you're busy. You are busy! You don't have time to you know - you go in all the time. You've got a general idea how to locate for certain things but apart from that, you just don't get time to really gather it in, if you like. You're too busy. That was on that day later when we had some nasty little incidents other than D-Day, you

07:30 know. It was worse actually afterwards when we were taking troops across.

How successful were the operations on D-Day for - ?

We were at Juno. Juno's where the Canadians landed, okay? Our operation went very well apart from a 'Rodney' taking out a lot of the beach stuff, you know? The German troops were good but never be under any illusions and their gunnery

08:00 was excellent, absolutely. No one will ever tell you otherwise about that. I think the surprise element, although had they manufactured that surprise element, I know they put out all rumours - it's going to be here, it's going to be there and everything, and of course Hitler weakened his Atlantic war, didn't he with taking troops away to Russia. By the time they'd found out that was

08:30 an event, it was too late, they'd got a bridgehead. Now the thing you've always got to remember with that is this, once your troops have got a bridgehead on the beach they do not stop and deal with them troops per se. Now the next thing to do is stop your supplies coming in, stop your reinforcements coming in, they will wither on the vine, won't they? Because that's it so they let go of everything coming

09:00 in you know.

How far out from the coast did you stop to - ?

Don't ask me how far, love, in actual mileage, I couldn't tell you. We could see the beach head quite plainly, you know because these LCAs weren't that big and bear in mind that the weather is very, very rough. You've got to get 'em as near as practical to the beach as you can otherwise they're not going to get ashore and there's quite a few wrecked there already, floating around that have gone on mines and that. You've got to be,

09:30 there's no definite figure but it would depend on circumstances. If the weather's rough and you drop them LCAs a couple of miles out, they'd never get there and bear in mind, all them troops are rampantly seasick, you know. So, I'd say, I couldn't give you an exact figure but it was quite close, close enough to see the pillboxes and all that over there and whatever.

10:00 **Were you scared at any point during that day?**

Not really, no. Not really. I had a main chance, life jacket on, "over the side I'll jolly well go," if it comes to. Always had a little escapism in your mind. First thing I do whenever I join a ship, have a look around, "Yeah that'll be all right." You wait until it's a pitch black night and she's rolling

10:30 and there's no lights on this ship, remember that, no lights. You've got to have a little escape plan up here. You take orders from the bridge, you just don't go willy nilly, they will tell you what to do, you know.

How good a swimmer were you?

Reasonable, reasonable. Not stylish but strong. We went swimming a couple of days ago over at Mingara.

- 11:00 It's part of your survival kit, isn't it? Not stylish, just enough to keep going. Mind, if you got off at Russia, it didn't matter. You were only in there about 2 minutes and that was your lot anyway and they didn't very often pick up survivors. Rescue ships were very thin on the ground. There's an item in there about it because if you think about it logically, see one ship gets torpedoed. Now he's looking at that ship, that's his decoy isn't it? If anyone's
- 11:30 bloody stupid enough to go alongside of it then that would be two ships down. Now the navy never stopped for us you know. We dropped astern, if you'd been torpedoed or whatever. I always remember, we were on an exercise, this is worth noting, and the ship behind us, we had a regular convoy, we used to go on these operations and by now we knew pretty near every ship that was coming with us and this thing was called the Maid of
- 12:00 Orleans. There's a flowery name for you, the Maid of Orleans was Joan of Arc, wasn't it? She was always astern of us in convoy, that was her position but she was always edging up, like that, you know. This particular day she went like that and like that and she hadn't sooner got there and her arse was blown straight off, BOOM! She got what was for us, it's in the book in there and of course, we went hard over and
- 12:30 straight on. Of course, all the old hands now, "Torpedoed? No, mined. No, torpedoed." I was reading the book not so long ago. It was a torpedo. So, she copped our one see. The old Maid of Orleans, I had a mate aboard there too. Blew the stern straight off.

Was that a story from the Guernsey or a later ship or - ?

No, that was when I was on the Isle of Guernsey. She

- 13:00 followed us, that was her position when we used to do these exercises and as I say, she was always inching up trying to get around us and she did happen to do it this day and she copped what we should have had. That was fairly common place anyway.

You were close enough to the action to have received a wound yourself -

You wouldn't hardly call it a wound, love, would you? A little shrapnel prick, I mean I'm

- 13:30 not an American, I'm don't go looking for a Purple Heart. Everyone thought it was hilarious on the ship and "I'll get you a bloody Purple Heart, Maidment," you know, "It'll be all right," Of course they took it out of me for weeks after that. "Are you sure you don't want an amputation there?" and the bosun, he was the worst of the bloody lot. "If you think I'm going to bloody well carry you everywhere, you can think again." They exploited that.

Not much sympathy?

- 14:00 No, them lads - the crew there had just come off a torpedoed ship, hadn't they? They took me once to, where'd they come from? Wexford in Ireland, oh God almighty. Talk about Irish humour in this pub, you know. The way they were carrying - and they were talking seriously about some little mundane subject. You could cry with laughing. It's subconscious
- 14:30 humour with them, you know.

I was just wondering whether any of the other sailors onboard got any injuries or - ?

Oh yeah, most of 'em had had a torpedo and the older hands, as I say,

On D-Day I'm talking about.

Oh, D-Day. Was there any other injuries aboard? No, not so far as I know, not so far as I know, no, no. no. The casualties were the naval blokes who drove the LCAs ashore. Later on, I

- 15:00 don't know because I left that ship not too many trips after and I joined this little ammo ship taking ammo to the beachheads.

Well on D-Day, what did you see of the casualties that the navy men - ?

They didn't come back love, they didn't come back because these LCAs were only what? From here to that garage door and once they got their behind blown off, that was it. The troops are poured out to swim for it and

- 15:30 the crew, I know the blokes, right aft they had a round manhole thing and they used to get down this little engine room. They copped it all the time. They had no hope there and so on but they weren't the worst casualties I've seen, not by a long way.

I'm sure it wasn't but we'll just stick with D-Day for the moment, so I'm just wondering out of those LCAs that you lowered and sent off - ?

We lost three out of the six.

16:00 **Were you watching them go?**

No.

Could you see them?

No, no. You can't imagine the scene, it's one vast malaise, if you like. There's ships going everywhere, there's guns being fired there. There's a ship blown up there, there's blokes in the water. It's not an orderly thing. You can't - "Oh there's Harris, there's - " You can't say that. Once they leave the ship and that and in general there appears to be chaos. There's

16:30 the beach master ashore, he's shouting out all these orders. He's supposed to be onshore and then they got these, oh what did they call 'em? The Brits were very well prepared, very well prepared. They had these, I think they were like, thresher tanks, I don't know if you've ever heard of 'em? Well what they had in the front was like a vast spool if you like and on there they had long chains, flails,

17:00 and they were going along up the beach blowing up the mines and that, see. All the gear up people did, and of course the Yanks don't listen to us and the flails went up and they were clearing away through the mine paths and the mine fields and so on and the other ones they had there, oh yeah they were going ashore and these bloody - what did they call 'em? The Russians had a name for 'em, didn't they, these rockets? Or what did they call 'em?

17:30 Oh something that's - as the Russians used to call it - and I remember them distinctly. They'd go up on the beach and the whole of the forehead part was rocket tubes pointing like that and they were letting them go and they were making a hell of a noise but they reckoned very effective too but the Brits see, they had so much experience. They'd done a couple or three of these raids, they knew what they were doing. The Yanks didn't know nothing like that. They'd hold up on the beach

18:00 and wouldn't move. Now if you lay on that beach, that's where they're going to have you. Get up and get out, you know but they were making a hell of a noise they were but you can't - I don't think anyone can say to you, there's so much going on and you're busy yourself. You ain't got time to stand, "Oh, look at that there." You haven't got time for anything like that and then you've got big air crews. They've got a bloke on the aircraft

18:30 all the time and they reckon they were sending their midget subs down through too. So there was all that to consider. You can't concentrate on that, you've got to keep your eye open in general. They sunk a few there see with their midget subs.

And on that day, could you see yourself, any bodies in the water or - ?

Oh, yeah, yeah. There was a few floating around. They reckon they had this special crew, the navy did, of these

19:00 frogmen who went ashore and they were sighting out all these hedgehogs and that, but it was a bit of a fiasco as I say in so much as that the tide had dropped that much instead of rising over the top, it just hit 'em and blew 'em up see. As I say, we lost three out of our six.

Was that the first time in your fairly young life that you had come across - ?

Bodies and that? Not really,

19:30 no because amusingly - well I wouldn't say amusing, nothing I'd say was amusing, we had one bloke died onboard and on ship, even though it's an oil burner, they carry fire bars. Now the reason they carry a fire bar is they've got these coffins, not coffins, they're a canvas bag, okay? They always put the fire bar down the bottom, this gives it weight. So when

20:00 you push it over the side, it goes down not like that, see.

So when you say a 'fire bar' you mean like a hot piece of - ?

It's hard to describe, it's like a lump of iron they put in the bottom of, when there's a coal burner, the grating in the bottom if you like. So, it sends it straight down like that you see. What they've got, is these prepared canvas bags and they slide the corps in or the bits of him or whatever, you

20:30 know, and the sail maker's job is to go and stitch up the last few stitches so they said to me "We've got a job for you. You've got to go and help the sail maker." So I go down and a tough old bastard, he buried his mother and it didn't worry him. I get down there and I'm handling the needle for him and it belched. Well my little legs went like that, "Come back here," he said

21:00 "You silly bugger," he said, "It's the live 'uns that will hurt you, not the dead 'uns." It didn't particularly perturb me. You get a bit immune to that as long as it ain't you. Yeah, he would have sown his own mother up, didn't worry him.

And this death onboard the Guernsey happened before D-Day?

Yeah, normally being so close there, a little combined op [operation] like that,

- 21:30 we would have taken him ashore but we didn't on this occasion, I don't know why. Maybe to give us a bit of practise, I don't know. A lot of them things, I don't know but it never bothered me after that as long as it ain't me. I didn't like hearing them in the water. That used to put me off a bit, you know, shouting out and that, you couldn't stop for 'em and that I get a nightmare about because -
- 22:00 sorry,
- That's okay. Do you want a sip of water or - ?**
- No, I'll be right. It comes and goes, love. You never forgive yourself. You think "I should have stopped 'em," but you couldn't.
- 22:30 **Sorry, I'm not quite with you, what - ?**
- Although the ship is passing the people in the water screaming out, you can't do nothing to stop it but you're still attached to a little of the blame, it sticks.
- Is that something you felt happened on D-Day?**
- No, no, no, subsequently, yeah. You do, you -
- 23:00 I don't know why you accept some of the blame for it but I couldn't have done nothing. There you are, one of them things. I try not to dwell on it.
- Was there much of a funeral for the man who died that you'd sowed up his bag?**
- No, they had a short service aft, put him on a hatch board and slid him over the side and then
- 23:30 they auctioned his gear, didn't they?
- They what?**
- They had a cruise auction on his gear. A pair of socks, half a crown in them days. About ten times worth more than it is to give to his widow, cause bearing in mind his pay's stopped now, hasn't it? You think about it, wife ashore maybe with a couple of kids, how bloody humane of 'em, what if she had to go on welfare or something?
- 24:00 Stinks, doesn't it!
- So your Isle of Guernsey operation on D-Day was reasonably successful - ?**
- Yeah, we lost them three LCAs, it's true. The main enemy, apart from the obvious, was the weather. It was diabolical. They put it
- 24:30 off for 24 hours but they couldn't afford to do it any more because they'd blown the gaffe. Everyone would have known we were coming, see so we had to do it that day.
- Well, you've mentioned the HMS Rodney was in there - ?**
- Firing over the top of us? Yeah.
- I'm wondering if you were aware of any other MN ships - ?**
- Oh yeah, yeah, I could see 'em. When I had a chance, the old boys onboard would recognise them in a minute because remember we were all painted in grey
- 25:00 camouflage now, there was no peace time colours, they were all painted in - the old boys would recognise that one, that one and that one. I wouldn't but they would know 'em from peace time, see. Quite a few cross-channel boats involved in that. A hell of a lot, the Isle of Thanet, the Ile de France - she was a French ship and all of them there and Isle of Guernsey, Isle of Jersey,
- 25:30 the Maid of Orleans, they were all cross-channel stuff see, good stuff because it was there, you know. It wasn't as though you were carrying a vast amount of troops a long distance. A little ship could be doing a shuttle service and most of them people knew the coast, didn't they? See.
- On D-Day did you, did the Guernsey, how many trips did the Guernsey make, just the one or - ?**
- We only done the one that day but dates
- 26:00 after that, but we went back oh, I don't know, half a dozen times at different times. We took Yanks to Omaha, what a fiasco that was but I don't dwell on that. We took British troops everything, you know, over to the various beachheads and then we had a bit of a fiasco. They fitted us up with more LCAs but one trip, it got so bad the
- 26:30 LCAs swung over the side. You lifted 'em up like that and kept dropping 'em, the sea was so bad and davits that thick, bent and we had to go into Arromanches, do you know where Arromanches was? Where the, what's-a-name, they built the Mulberry Harbour, that was at Arromanches, do you know where the Mulberry Harbour was there? You don't know where that was. Well what happened in a fit,

was they had to work

- 27:00 out a way to get bigger ships in to get these supplies aboard and what they'd done, they'd made this Mulberry Harbour. Now what it was, about from here to the curb out there, like a big table if you like with the legs sticking up and they were towed across by tugs and when they got in their position, the legs went down to the sea bottom and then they formed alignment and these things used to
- 27:30 come up and down with the tide on these legs and outside of that, they dropped all these ships just to make a breakwater or so, emergency had to go in there because we were over like that. All the troops were screaming their bloody heads off, it was really over because you lose that amount of weight on one side, you know, oh, it was rough too. I went aboard one of them
- 28:00 things that night. It was interested to see it going up and down like that and he took me into, like the wheel station, and there's all this, going up and down and stuff we unloaded on there, it was fabulous and then they had 'Fido' - oh, 'Pluto', my mistake - pipeline under the ocean and that was a vast great drum of - I suppose your nearest equivalent you might say is hose but,
- 28:30 and that fell direct from Fawley onto the beach ahead of us and they're towing us along and paying it out, dropping it on the ocean floor. I think that went into, I think they went into Arromanches there, and fuel piped direct to there.

Sorry, could you just explain Pluto in a bit more detail, what was - ?

Pipeline under the ocean and what they done is they had this vast great

- 29:00 drum if you like with these miles and miles of this pipe onboard. Now, I don't know how big it was because I didn't get that close and a big tug was towing it and paying it off as it went till it got to the other end and then they sent fuel straight through to there, good idea. That's Pluto and I don't know, I went there and we
- 29:30 done a visit to the beach there once, my wife and I, we were in the UK and we went over there and we landed in Cherbourg and I said to the, I went up to see the tour operator to see if we could get a tour of the beachheads and she said, "No, unfortunately it finished yesterday." So I said, "Okay," and I went down another place there and I said, "How much - " and there was an American lady there and
- 30:00 she said, "I've come all this way to visit the beach." I said, "Well look, I'll try something," so I went around there to see this cabbie, see we got an English speaking cabbie there and I said, "How much is it going to cost the three of us to go - ?" It would take pretty near as close to what the tour would've been so we had the cab there and we went around to all the beachheads but I didn't recognise too much to tell you the truth but we did go to
- 30:30 the Arromanches there, they did have a big museum and I went and had a look around there but I didn't recognise too much ashore.

After D-Day, what type of shore leave did you get?

We were on, didn't have any shore leave. I've done about, must have had 4 or 5, 6 trips there carrying troops across and then I joined the Yew Park, the

- 31:00 biggest fiasco of my life, dear oh dear.

So you had no rest after - ?

I didn't have any leave, no I think they transferred me straight to the Yew Park. Oh Christ, what a debacle that was. As I was saying, we were carrying these 500 pounders in case petrol and that - now there's a story there, I can't go into it cause I don't the statute of the limitation as to how we acquired

- 31:30 some American PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit] stores so anyhow, we get off there. We went in convoy anyhow, with this bloody Yew Park. We're carrying these 500 pounders in case petrol on the most decrepit ship you've ever seen. How it ever got to sea, I'll never know. Water coming down through the deck and everything in the bloody quarters, anyhow we're going along there and in the middle there, they've got this pot bellied
- 32:00 stove and we started loading it up with coal and then this bloody destroyer comes alongside and lets go a rifle shot at us. What had happened, the red had gone up the pipe and gone up on deck. It's like a big neon light going along. He let go - his rifle warned us about it. Anyhow, eventually we gets down to this little place called St. Vast, I'll never forget it - S
- 32:30 T, V, A, double S, T. It's down south from Cherbourg and this is an eye opener, the Americans got it, the Americans got it. They came out and looked at our cargo and took one look and were horrified and ordered us straight out. They said, "Look at that, there's a pile of it - ." All this case petrol, so out we goes, we drops the hook, we're all on our lonesome now
- 33:00 and this naval bloke came out in this boat, 'full as a boot' he is, "Here lads, d'you want some souvenirs?" "Yeah, yeah, all right." "Five quid for a German tin helmet and over there is an island," he said, "and that is a big German arsenal and they've bypassed it." He said, "I'll come back tonight." "Okay." He comes back that night, creep into his little boat and he takes us over

- 33:30 to this little island, see and he said, "Whatever you do, walk behind me because this place is mined," he said. "Don't step where I don't." So we hop out of the boat and we go into this big fortress place and it is stacked with every kind of hammer you've ever seen. There's shelves this big and all that's written on these cases is 'Mortar Bombs', with German instructions. "That would fetch a quid." He said, "Be careful there, the fifth one might
- 34:00 be putty," – booby trapped! We all come out of there and one of 'em got a shell about this long on his shoulder. I don't know what he thought he was going to do with it and we get down onto this little beach and the tide had gone out and here's our boots stranded and of course, the hard part is, "This is where the mines are, isn't it? On the beach." So I was walking very slowly down and put my foot exactly there and we crept aboard that night
- 34:30 and we hid all this stuff away forever. We've got 500 pounders on board in case petrol and I takes one of these mortar bombs, I'll tell you how naïve and silly but I take it right out and there's a vice and I'm trying to unscrew the threads to empty it out and the first officer, well he went bloody ballistic. He raided our quarters, he's chucking bloody shells over the side, mortar bombs, the lot
- 35:00 and that wasn't the first of it either and then next night, they wouldn't let us in, not with that lot, no way. Next night, this Yank comes along towing this 'lighter' which is like a big barge, isn't it? He shouted out if it be all right if he tied up alongside us over night because he wanted to get ashore and we weren't going nowhere. Anyhow, as soon as he departed, we're over the side and lifted the tarps,
- 35:30 PABX stores, you know it's like that navy stuff, isn't it? You know the PABX, where they go for their stuff and our eyes lit up, didn't they? Ooh. Of course the old man disappears, he don't want nothing to do with this. Don't want to know officially so we thought we'd do it in style, we flipped the tarps back, rigged over the side and had some good stuff out in the middle, see. We didn't want to disturb the shape of the square, did we?
- 36:00 Put the tarps back down. Now that anchor, I looked at it and said, "Christ, that's come up in the water a bit." We lived like bloody kings but then they eventually let us go in and the Yanks wouldn't touch us so we had to go down the holes and put this stuff in slings and there were black Americans ashore driving the lorries away from us, but the Yanks wouldn't touch us
- 36:30 because if we'd have gone up it would have been a domino effect, you see that big German ammo dump over there and so on but I don't know, we were pretty naïve. We must have been because this mate of mine from Southampton, he said, "Here," he said, "Let's go ashore and have a bit of an explore around." I said, "Yeah, all right," so we go ashore and I'm
- 37:00 walking up this road and this bloody American's going back and forward so we get on the verge, there was like a verge in the centre. I looked at all these signs, but they were facing the other way so once we got around, we had a look and they had on 'em 'Acton Mining', so we got off there a bit quick and back on the road and I said to this bloke, "Now what ever you do, don't go shouting out in English," I said, "because
- 37:30 these French here," I said, "a lot of them are from the Maquis," you know, that's the French Resistance and they don't know you from a bar of soap. If you're not speaking French you could be in big trouble and he did, he opened his mouth. Christ, these blokes were surrounding us and I've never more glad to see a Yank in all my life. He come along with a jeep. "Where the bloody hell do you think you're going?" and he took us back to the ship but there were more debacles after that, I can tell you.

And where was this taking place?

- 38:00 St. Vasst. I remember it well, I went there. I can remember the café on the quay and everything because I flogged the girls there red lead and told 'em it was nail varnish. Never one to – and they were drinking this, what's that fortified stuff that – calvados, they were drinking this calvados. OOH!
- 38:30 I've got a big bottle of it up there because when I went over to the beachhead, they had an announcement "Any veterans of D-Day, to come to the bridge," and they were presenting this big bottle of calvados. I sent instructions to the kids, there's no need to be drunk at my funeral, you know, but going home was the worst. You've seen nothing like it, we'd left there
- 39:00 eventually when we'd been offloaded to head up to Cherbourg to join a convoy to go back and we get up there, big American Liberty ships and there we are, this little old decrepit coaster and then, what they call the storm cone got put up Cherbourg, you know the cone they put up a big storm warning. The Americans turned around and went into Cherbourg but not us because we're British, you see. We proceeded
- 39:30 with the rest, oh dear oh dear. It got rough, it really got rough and they put me on the wheel, see but around a lot of them ships they built a concrete wall you see, to protect the bridge so I'm steering by the ship ahead see, the line ahead, the convoy because going up through them straights is very narrow, you've got to hug the English shore and it's hard
- 40:00 work. You're looking, your craning over the top like this all the time, see and I spot a star, right up in the fore, straight line, "Oh beauty," I said, "That'll do fine," and the next minute the bloody mate out on the bridge, "Where the bloody hell are you going?" The convoy done a hard to starboard but we hadn't,

we'd gone straight up and we eventually

40:30 I kid you not, it was a question of pure survival, we ran over mine fields and every bloody thing.

All right, I'm going to have to stop you because our tape is just about to run out, so -

Oh, the next part is even funnier but it is all true, I can tell you, talk about a comedy of errors.

Tape 5

00:48 **You were about to finish that story off, maybe you could just recap what had happened to that point for us, like the story so far and then finish off where you were, so where were you and what were you doing?**

01:00 Well, as I said, the original convoy ended in chaos so, my fault I suppose, I was behind the wheel but the first officer should have been keeping a watch as well which he obviously wasn't and we ended up going over bloody mine fields and everything and we get off at Dover. We're about to go into Dover, there's a Yankee destroyer waiting outside there and hails us. "What ship are you?"

01:30 and of course, the wag aboard said the Altmark, which was the German raider. Well, with that he fired a shell, straight over the bloody foxhole head, didn't he? Oh dear, what a comedy of errors it was and eventually we get up to Gravesend, up there up the Thames and all hands were paid off, the bloody thing was a wreck. I don't think they could even let it go to sea any more and that briefly, is what happened

02:00 on the Yew Park.

It wasn't just the ship that was a bit of a mess, the crew seemed to be a little bit motley as well, could you tell us about that?

No, no. The old man was a bit shell shocked. Apparently he'd been blown off the bridge on his trip before and he was a little bit, you know, you can't - the first officer was all right. The deck crew, there was only four of us, two ABs and two ordinary seamen. They were Londoners. No, they were quite good but the

02:30 whole ship was a bloody travesty, it should never have gone to sea. It was rusted to bloody hell, no life boat worth mentioning. Water coming in through the deck here onto your bunks and that. I think that they thought to themselves that they couldn't even allow it to go to sea any more.

How close does a merchant navy crew come to mutiny?

Never had nothing like that. I

03:00 know the Australians did, unfortunately. They did have a strike once, didn't they? The merchant seamen and the British never stopped at one any time. They never had any - although another known fact, the navy, the Royal Navy did mutiny up in Scarpa Flow, didn't they? That isn't generally released either.

I mean it's a fair question, why not? If conditions were so bad, what stopped you from - ?

Well, you've got

03:30 to remember this. You see you're taking it out of context i.e. the seaman's life was always hard, previous to the war was even harder. Apart from the added dangers, they never see the actual hardship part of it, the fact they were losing one in four and that, remember is deaths and there's casualties among the other three. British seamen have always been very tenacious and so on of

04:00 of the sea. It's in their blood, isn't it? No, never had any signs of refusing to sail or nothing like that, you know.

What was the captain's view of this ship he'd been given?

Well, he was an old Company man for starters. See there were several - there were Welsh crowds, there were Welsh ships, there were Welsh - there was the Yew Park, the Utree, Uglen and he was an old Company

04:30 man, you see but he was getting on a bit then, see he must have been 60's plus and I think the last time he'd been torpedoed, he'd been blown straight off the bridge more or less. That was him for age whatever, I think he was more or less finished anyway and I think and this is only a summation on my part possibly, that they had to put the old man ashore. They might have said, "Well, bloody ship ain't no good either," although they kept 'em -

05:00 if they could get one trip out of that ship, no matter if it was bloody near sinking, the crew were expendable. That's a fact.

What was the symptoms of the old man's problem?

Well he was a bit erratic and that you know. He always had this bloody great corked life jacket on that wasn't an issue, you know.

05:30 I wouldn't say he wasn't doing his job but there were certain - you will know when a bloke is getting like that, you will know. I've met 'em. I mean we took one bloke back from New York once. What they called DBS distressed British seaman, and what had happened, he'd been torpedoed on his way out, took to New York, taken back on another ship DBS, torpedoed again, twice.

06:00 Picked up and then heard his wife had been killed in Liverpool with a bomb. Now you don't know - what you don't see in the good pictures and that, is when the ship comes in, the warehouses, there's a little van that slips out around the back for blokes who've flipped. They don't show you that because it's not good you know, it don't look good but it's a fact.

How?

For those who've just snapped.

How common was it to snap onboard

06:30 **ship?**

I've seen a couple of occasions, I've seen a couple of occasions when they've been put ashore you know because as I say, our range went from 15 to some blokes admitted to being 65. So, at the latter end of that, you know, they'd just had enough.

It must be not in the ship's interest

07:00 **to have a man who's snapped onboard, what happened to him?**

It's quite common place actually, in the navy and everything. It's, in any action, it's not generally publicised but it happens, it does happen. Different blokes, different make ups.

If it is that common, there must be procedures that deal with it?

Absolutely, yeah. Absolutely. It's quite common place, even in the front, isn't it?

So what are the procedures

07:30 **that, what happens when somebody loses it - ?**

You probably have to restrain him for his own good, you know, because you don't know what he's going to do. He might jump over the side or some such thing. They restrain him, every ship, has got somewhere they can put a bloke like that, you know and then of course when he goes to go ashore they come and pick him up discretely because they don't like it to spread among the ships anyway, if you know what I mean?

I just want to go back before the Yew Park, you

08:00 **mentioned, actually I would like to just go back to D-Day one more time, I know we keep harping on this but it's very important -**

No, no, by all means.

You mentioned that there were so many ships you could have almost jumped ship and gone back across -

I could have nearly walked back ashore, yes.

To someone who's never seen that scene and people will never see that scene again -

Never again, no.

Could you describe it for us in as much detail as you could, the scene on that day?

Well,

08:30 I suppose it imprinted on me more because I come up on deck, I'd had a sleep that night and to see all this suddenly hit you, d'you know what I mean? It forms a lasting impression, I'll never forget it. Hundreds and hundreds of ships, all steaming ahead you know. Never leaves you. Troop carriers,

09:00 destroyers, everything known to man, you know. Never leaves you that kind of scene. Of course, as you get closer in, they thin out a bit and they spread to various, you know, beaches but I could only tell you about Juno on that day because it was the only beach that we were on and we had Canadians, good blokes! Good blokes!

With that many ships in

09:30 **the water, how important were communications between them?**

Oh, there were signals going up all over the place.

Can you explain how that works, to someone who's never - ?

You know, the old flags. Although you've all been rehearsed on your position, of course obviously circumstances alter cases, you might have to move and do this and do that, d'you know what I mean? That was a pretty orderly malaise, if you like, pretty orderly. We went in

- 10:00 exactly where we were, you all had your destinations to drop their - the Yanks didn't, they made a stuff up actually. They dropped their troops in the wrong place, I could say typical!

Which beachhead was this?

That was at Omaha, wasn't it? A lot of their troops were dropped in the wrong place, they'll tell you that themselves.

With the communication between ships, how much information goes each way?

Well, you're

- 10:30 already designated your position, if you know what I mean? You're designated your position and should any alterations go in place, it's all pre-planned if we've got to alter blah, blah, blah and then the signal will go up and you will know that signal means over there, you see and we've got a naval intelligence bloke aboard per chance it gets beyond our, the bridge and that's his specialty, so it all worked out

- 11:00 pretty good. I don't know about the other beachheads, I was only on the one and that went very well.

You mentioned being fired on from pillboxes on the beach?

Yeah.

Can you describe that scene for us and what you saw of the beachheads?

Well, you could see the smoke coming up from them and the flashes and that, you obviously assumed - because there's stuff bursting all around you anyway. You can't see that one from there and that one from there and so on, it doesn't work like that. They're just coming out in general but I can always remember the

- 11:30 Rodney. I can almost hear him saying "We'll have that one over there," and the next minute there's this terrific, how can I describe it? ROAR, if you like, flames shooting out a mile and then it goes over the ship like a vast gale, this 16 inch shell passing over the top. You see that old pillbox go VOOM! It's gone!

How heavily fortified were the beaches?

- 12:00 Very well fortified, very well.

Can you describe how much concrete or - ?

Absolutely and I tell you what, we went ashore some time later and looked at their concrete, immaculate. Immaculate but one thing if you've ever seen that film, Private Ryan - have you ever seen it? You remember that scene where they're laying on the beach and they've got to get up this cliff? Well, we went down and watched that and that bloody hypothetical

- 12:30 cliff is about as high as this ceiling, actually. It's nowhere near, you know, 30 or 40 foot. Nowhere near it. It's the biggest bloody travesty I've ever heard of. The thing was, when they opened that film they opened it in the local cinemas see, so they'd done a prelude to it and they said to me, "Would you come along and do a brief speech on the stage?" I thought, "I don't know about that, I

- 13:00 can't say - well I better, I better go." So I go along there you know and I try to avoid slander and I thought, "Well they've asked me and I'm a guest here. I can't say too much," kind of thing so I went along and I had a brief speech from the stage and that, but that bloody film was a travesty. I remember that scene where they're all in this village, you

- 13:30 remember the German tanks are over there so they hide and kind of envelope them into the village, don't they? I thought, "You'd have to be bloody nuts, the best tank people in the world. Do you think they're going to come in there and let you fire on them? They're going to stand off over there and shell this till it's bloody flat." That Spielberg? Well, it's purely for effect, isn't it?

In the interests of correcting these mistakes, can you tell us what the beachhead looked like?

What did they look

- 14:00 like? Bits and pieces of ships hurrying here and there and there's LCAs going up on the beach, some are afire and just a general malaise you know and then I remember on one occasion, a bloke came out from the beach and he's giving us a report on what happened just, you know, general info and so on and it's just a malaise but it's got an overall purpose and there are blokes up on the beach there

- 14:30 with these flails, as I say, going along and exploding all these mines and there's blokes there with them rocket firing' bloody things. They're firing them in around, you know. It looks like a stuff up but it isn't,

it's all taken place.

What was the terrain that met the soldiers at Juno?

On our beach, was beach, it was beach but it was heavily fortified just beyond that but we

15:00 didn't have no cliffs or nothing, just straight beach and the Canadians were good! You could see that, we disembarked Americans later but you could see that, in their attitude and everything with the Canadians, quiet, no shouting, no hollering, just getting in the LCAs and going ashore. Not shouting and bloody screaming at each other and -

15:30 **One image I remember from Saving Private Ryan - whether or not this is true or not -**

Yeah.

- is the sheer fear on those men's faces, how frightened were those men?

Well I mean, I'm going to be maybe a bit critical here - once you've bogged down on the beach you've had it, you've got to go forward because the minute they've got you on that beachhead, they've got your range, they've got everything and they are expert

16:00 gunners, I can assure you. You've got to move inland otherwise you're gone! So the first thing they do, they try and cut off your supplies. They try and sink them ships out there and any reinforcements that may go in and by the way, they landed the second lot of reinforcements miles away from Omaha Beach, didn't they? D'you remember that? So, that was a complete and utter and, they never had any seasoned troops there to, you know, the

16:30 NCOs and that who know what they're doing, the officers. You've got to have a hard corps of seasoned troops. It would be like me going aboard a ship who's never seen a shot fired in anger, wouldn't it? Same thing, you couldn't do it but no, I've heard and this is only hear-say that they froze on the beach and they wouldn't move and that bullshit about it being a 20 foot cliff, is nowhere near it.

What about from what you

17:00 **saw from the ship of them climbing into the LCAs, what was the attitude and moral like there?**

They were quite determined, no sign of panic or nothing. They would rather got off there than come back with us. They were as sick as dogs, I can tell you. They were a pale shade of green and there was no way they would have come back with us which I say, a couple of 'em you know, as you were taking 'em ashore " - and I won't be coming back

17:30 with you either." We took a few wounded back with us and so on.

What contact did you have with the troops onboard?

I used to have a yarn with them, of course I did. I was fascinated by the Indians being a young bloke. I thought, "Christ, he's going to put his feathers on any minute," and they fed 'em rum too, don't worry about that. You know what an Indian is once he gets rum, don't you? He won't wait for the RCA, he'll swim ashore.

When you say they fed them rum, were they drunk?

No,

18:00 No. They weren't drunk, it just gets 'em going, doesn't it? You know in Canada, at that time they couldn't drink. They used to have to get a liquor license, didn't they and a lot of English girls who married Canadians didn't know they were Indians so when they got over there, they couldn't drink. True. Yeah, I don't know if they do now. I've got a lot of Indian mates there myself. I'd go ashore there, I know all the locals.

How much were these Canadian troops carrying?

18:30 Oh, bloody great packs on here, you know and all their bits and pieces and so on. Oh yeah, quite a bigish pack on their shoulder you know. There's no way that you could bring their stuff ashore later, is there? If they've got to move inland quick, they've got to have everything there.

What difficulties were there getting them over the side into the LCAs?

She's rolling like this. One minute the ladder's out there and then it's swung back again into the ship's side and so on.

19:00 It's not good, not good and they're well loaded, see and the old piper's going for his life.

What was the piper playing?

Buggered if I know, I was too busy - too busy hiding myself.

It was a Canadian -

Canadian piper.

- tradition?

Yeah, yeah. He was playing away there, you know.

As this went on, you mentioned somebody came back and was informing you about the progress?

Yeah, yeah. One of the blokes, one of the beach master's blokes

19:30 came out and he was giving us the guts, yeah.

What did he tell you?

We landed, we made a beachhead and it seems to be going all right, blah, blah, blah and so on. Just general info, you know. We'd established a beachhead and so on.

Once you had dropped your troops off, what was the trip back like?

We would wait then you see, to see if we had any wounded to take back or any whatever

20:00 and the trip back, you'd have to go and join a convoy even though you were going across, what? I don't know, a couple of hundred mile - you still had to join a convoy because by then they'd got them bloody midget subs out as well, see and they could pick off any individuals and then back in, load up as soon as possible. We went into Newhaven once, down there. Don't know why we went there instead of straight across to Southampton but

20:30 we got back and loaded up. We did load Yanks from Omaha.

You have said that Omaha was a bit of a fiasco, with the Americans?

I know, but I'm not going to verify it, if you know what I mean? I've heard very good reports then, put it that way, from people who know a lot more than I do about beachheads.

What was your experience of the American soldiers? Can you tell us a bit more about

21:00 **how they differed from the Canadians, in a bit more detail?**

Rubbish. Look your Canadian is, how can I say? No bull. Not to say, how can I say? Pigheaded about that, it's very much that British attitude, you know? You see a British regiment come aboard, there's no "Hey man, do this," you know, like in the film, everyone shouting.

21:30 Very quiet, "Sergeant do that," that's all it is, you know. The whole attitude is different, they're determined you know but with the Yanks they're shouting and bloody hollering. They can't seem to, how can I say - they've got to shout and holler so everyone notices but the Brits are quietly

22:00 quietly determined, they don't say too much. The officers only say about two words then they do it and so on. Far better, far better.

Obviously, through your war experience, you came to form an opinion of the Americans -

Oh, it isn't just my opinion.

It's shared by a lot of people. What did you know of them at this stage in your merchant navy career, you might not have seen too many of them?

22:30 No, I'd met a few ashore, mind you and I'd already formed a bit of an opinion on it and it was strengthened that day later, I can tell you. I never cared too much for them. The fact that see, 'our gallant American allies' - where were there from '39 to nearly '42, 'our gallant American allies'? Where were they? Busy selling the old country Lease Lend, weren't they? Battering them and they would never have come into

23:00 the war if Mr Tojo hadn't given 'em a battering, would they? Even after Pearl Harbour, they had a job to declare war on Germany. The German bond in America was very strong and that is a fact. It didn't want an automatic - "Oh no, the Japs have bombed us, we'll declare war on Germany automatically." No sir, it was not.

Apart from

23:30 **their undisciplined nature or what you were describing a moment ago, what other events were there that formed your opinion against the Americans?**

They're trigger happy, they're trigger happy. Never let them in a convoy with you, for Christ's sake, they'll fire at anything. Not with any accuracy in mind but they'll just let go at anything. I think the modern terminology is 'proliferal damage', isn't it? Look at their track record ever since. No, I wouldn't trust 'em. It's,

24:00 let go with everything, don't matter women and kids in the way, don't matter. Just obliterate it.

When you were dropping troops at Omaha, was a bit later on in the whole proceedings but what was different about that than the landings you'd done at Juno?

Different as chalk and cheese. For a start, it wasn't D-Day and they had a bit of a beachhead there, one time we got there otherwise we wouldn't have been dropping troops, would we? No, they

- 24:30 come aboard full of bullshit you know, as if they're going to eliminate the Krauts [Germans] and that. I thought, "They're bloody better men than you are, mate. You wait till you get a dose of them." Very good, very good troops the Germans. Their sailors are good, very good. Their merchant seamen were good too, very disciplined, you know. We used to meet them in neutral ports, didn't we?

You mentioned the terrain was different as to how it was

- 25:00 **portrayed in that Spielberg film,**

Yeah.

What was that terrain like at Omaha Beach, from your point of view?

Well the wife and I went there and we were looking specifically at that one scene, where they're all landing on the beach and they put that Bangalore torpedo at the cliff, do you remember that? The pillbox is there but I reckon it wouldn't be no higher than that ceiling but in the film, OOH! Way up there.

At the time you were unloading troops, how far established were the Americans?

There was a

- 25:30 beachhead, there wasn't a lot more, there wasn't a lot more. It wouldn't have been that long after, they could have really taken the beach I suppose, at any time but the crunch come when they got into Cherbourg. That more or less established them permanently, you know.

What other beachheads did you unload troops or - ?

Oh, I went to the British one. I can't remember exactly but we done half a dozen, well three or four at least beachheads we

- 26:00 done. Omaha then we came back and we had British troops after that. Now they were on the next beachhead to us, I can't remember the name of it, I've got it in there but I can't remember it. We dropped British troops there always at the beachheads but nothing's definite on a beachhead. A sudden turn around, you know and the Germans had mustered enough troops to repel them, so be it.

You've talked a bit about the Canadians and the Americans, how did the British troops hold up in that

- 26:30 **situation?**

Good, real good. A good smattering of veterans among them, see to show the young blokes. I can always remember later on, this is for instance when we got sunk on that Llangibby Castle, I got stuck up in the foxhole and I couldn't get out and it shook me a bit and I remember the bloody thing went over like that, right over on her beam

- 27:00 ends, no lights, nothing and I got out eventually and got up onto the boat deck, waiting for boat stations and this couple of good old ABs, "All right, son?" "Yeah, I'll be all right later." Now that calms you right down by their example if you know what I mean, just waiting there from the bridge ready to lower the boats or whatever they tell you, no panic you know and the old

- 27:30 man said, "Go down the troop decks and make sure they're clear," because there's Yanks, hundreds of Yanks and we managed to trans-ship 'em over onto the 'Antoniou' the blue funnel boat that had rammed us actually but being a little bit avaricious and not see all this money they left there when that crap came, I thought, "I can't waste that." Small change, if I'd have gone over the side I'd have gone straight down.

Well, we'll talk about that experience in a bit of detail maybe after lunch,

- 28:00 **while we're still talking about the convoys you did on the original landings, on D-Day and after, did you go to Cherbourg at that time?**

Eventually, on the old Llangibby I done a couple of trips before we got around into Cherbourg with American troops straight into Cherbourg.

And that was a little while later?

That was a little while later, yes. That could

- 28:30 possibly have been my last trip to the beachheads because they took us in tow fortunately. We went to the bottom, we were actually on the bottom. The water was up near, bloody near the boat deck and they pumped us out somehow and put a, what they call a selfrigie over the, it went from the bilge keel to the boat deck and we got towed back to Southampton and I think they scrapped it after that and I went,

from there we went straight out

29:00 to Bombay then and started on that area.

The other thing I'm interested in on the original D-Day situation was the Isle of Guernsey had a barrage balloon?

Yeah.

How common was that in the convoy?

Quite common, quite common in a convoy. The idea was simple. It was to stop low flying aircraft going over the convoy. Then we had another guard ship. You'll laugh at this actually.

29:30 I've spoken to a gunner since and he's given the proper name for it and what it is, it's like a mortar and it's out on the wing of the bridge, it fires up in the air and at a predetermined height, a parachute comes out and then underneath that is a long thin wire with an explosive charge at the end and the theory being, the plane coming swooping over the convoy, wraps around the wing and blows the wing off, see, that's the theory. So, we're all waiting in the wheelhouse

30:00 for this DEMS gun to start, didn't we, looking at it, and this so called cadet fired it up and guess what happened? It wrapped straight around the fore stay, didn't it? There it is swinging, swinging in the wind literally. Immediately detached from the convoy, you know. I think we went into - I don't know, one of the ports there and this bomb disposal bloke,

30:30 we took him alongside with a crane and they loaded him on a basket and he gingerly cut it off because it's a contact thing, see. That was our experience with that so never had any more of that but this DEMS gunner, did tell me the proper name of it but that's right, you usually see them in a big convoy, especially up the English Channel, they've all got their barrage balloons. It saves them coming straight in, see.

What was the aircraft situation?

Pretty grim.

There were allied aircraft

31:00 **in the sky, wasn't there?**

Yeah, these Stukas were the bloody, ooh, they were the savage beasts. Savage they were when they come down on you, oh dear oh dear. I remember I was on a gunnery course and the instructor said to us, he said, "When he comes down like that," because they've got what they called on the wheel spats, these dihedral things that make that horrible screaming noise, he said, "When he gets to the bottom of

31:30 the dive and he pulls out, he's temporarily - ,," he said, " - unconscious," and I said, "Well I won't bloody know about that I shall be well behind the sand bags," by the time he screamed up again, you know. Savage beasts, they were. See onboard a ship you can't go nowhere. You can't run and hide anywhere, can you?

What did you see of Stukas and - ?

Yeah, we had a few attacks off them blokes, yeah, yeah, on the convoy in general,

32:00 yeah. They'd come out, they were sauncy buggers and they'd come run out at you and some of them you'd see - I remember laying on the beachhead one day and it was a lovely day and I was looking around and I see this plane come sauntering over, so casually, and all of a sudden he turned and he let go a bloody lot of ammo, about 5 or 6 bombs straight out of him and everyone opens up, you know. You know them, what

32:30 do they call 'em now, them, if I could remember what the name of them was, them buzz bombs, have you ever heard of them? You know, they fly along and automatically you can throw 'em. We were down in Portsmouth and the first ones come over in the old country and we let go at 'em and we were told to stop and these Spitfires, this is true, they were coming out and trying to nudge the wing around to send it back out to sea.

33:00 Them buzz bomb things, yeah. Like a motor bike engine it was. It wasn't very high and of course when that engine stopped, you knew you were in for trouble, didn't you?

Talking about the sound of things, what did the Stuka sound like, can you describe that?

The most horrific bloody noise and this horrible scream with the engine going flat out and these special things they fitted to the wheel spats, God, enough to

33:30 you know and I'd done a gunnery course down at Barton-on-Sea, but quite frankly I couldn't have hit that wall from here because I had a few days Leave out of it, go down to Barton-on-Sea and it gives you all the guts of it. You've seen them, spider web sites, like it's got like a spider's web and then there's circles well that is the angle of descent and these little gaps represent how many miles so then what you've got to do is estimate how many miles

34:00 in front of the plane you've got to fire and on the angle, see? I used to do all that, this gunnery business you know. I had a gunnery ticket out of it, very sparse I suppose but in any case, we'd just get in with the gunnery crew anyway, assist where necessary, you know.

What would you do on the ship when an air raid was sighted or there's torpedoes coming over - ?

You go to where you're stationed,

34:30 don't you? You go to where you are designated. You say, you're on number 1 gun, you're there, you're on the bridge, you're on lookout. You've all got your battle stations.

As ship's boy, did you have an action station yourself?

Oh yeah, my bloody word I did.

What was it?

I was bridge messenger for a bit and then I assisted on the 4 inch, on the phone and so on. Oh yeah, I was part of the crew. When I was designated they would say, "Now today, if in the event of - you're going to be on the 4 inch," or

35:00 "You'll assist Oerlikons on the - " You know or "You'll be bridge messenger, you've got to run aft and get hold of this one, get hold of that one," and so on.

What did you do on the 4 inch? I know you talked a little bit about it before but maybe you can take us through the operation of this gun?

Well, the 4 inch, there was a DEMS gunner there, gun layer you know and there was a couple of AB merchant seamen who were in the proper gun crew, I

35:30 was on the phone for a bit you know taking the phone messengers from the bridge to stop firing and so on, you know. If I see anything that wanted helping, I'd help and load the ammo or something because they're not a 'crack' naval crew, remember, they were just you know, didn't have a hundred blokes there. Onboard merchant ships you had the bare amount and I might have had to run in and go and help there, see. We didn't have a thousand ABs

36:00 running around like on a naval ship, see.

And what was the procedure for firing a 4 inch gun, what had to be done to get it ready to fire?

They get the gunnery to give the range, they do this and then all the orders that come through the phone, "Range so and so -" whatever, whatever, whatever and then you've got to withhold fire until you're absolutely sure of identifying the plane too. Don't want no Americanisms here, ID [identify] the plane and so on and then they got the range and they

36:30 let go. We'd done gunnery practise obviously before and they used to drop a tea chest or something astern and then, let go at it, you know.

How much success did you have?

I don't know, I think it was more volume than anything. We weren't notoriously accurate, you know. Then again, neither were a lot of the ships. You would see a barrage go up and you would swear there were that much in between it and they'd come flying straight through it, yeah.

37:00 It's amazing that, you see tracers going up and you see it and they just fly straight through it.

What else were you firing at apart from planes, did you fire the guns on other occasions?

You had a U-Boat scare a couple of times and let go with it and they used to come alongside when they used to depth charge along near us, you know. They'd make a horrible bloody noise that would, dropping depth charges near us

37:30 but I never actually seen a U-Boat, they were too cute for that. You wouldn't even see a periscope, the next thing you'd know was BANG! They were good! They were good, don't make no mistake about that, very, very good.

How much rest did you get in those first days?

Well technically, the normal routine on them was 4 on, 8 off but not during the war, mate, it was 4 on and stay on. You might be there

38:00 12, 14 hours depending - you just couldn't say, "My watch is over, I'm going below." That was it, you were stuck there till such time it was safe to get down. Simple as that.

Was that, in the complete action that was D-Day, how long do you think you were - ?

I must have been, I don't know, 14 or 15

38:30 hours something like that, busy all the time. Doing this, doing that. You'd be surprised what wants doing and helping this, helping that, you know. Make yourself generally useful or the bosun would grab you. "Do this, do this, do that," you know.

What was the general feeling like at the end of that Day knowing that you'd been somewhat successful?

I suppose a little bit of elation but there are no definites

39:00 in these kind of things. You know that you've done your bit and it looks good but you can never be sure. The next day we might be going off to take them off, there's no tangible moments in a war, you can't say "That's it!" It doesn't work like that. You might have won a victory but you haven't won the war.

Obviously though, the size of the action made you kind of aware of how this was -

Yeah, it was big, it was big, I grant you that. Yeah, it was

39:30 big but you know, not so spectacular as I thought maybe but it was well done because as I say, we were on the Canadian sector and they don't do a lot of 'bally hoo' on that.

All right, thank you for that, we'll stop there. We'll take a break.

We're going to have a spot of lunch, are we?

We've had a lot of information -

Tape 6

00:32 **Okay Geoffrey, you did tell me earlier a couple of stories off the Yew Park but why did you leave the Isle of Guernsey?**

I had a choice then, they periodically - but I had to stick within them special articles I signed, if you know what I mean. I could go to another ship but it would have to be of that kind of work if you get my meaning. The articles

01:00 you sign normally on one ship are for one ship, right? These special articles are for a range of ships doing the invasion work, okay? It's a little bit complicated but that's basically how it worked. Now I wanted to change so I said, "Yeah, right." "We'll give you a change," you'll get over to the Yew Park. If I'd have known what I know now of course I wouldn't have done but there you are.

Well why did you want, why did you want to leave the Isle of Guernsey?

I don't know, I'm a free man, I'm a sailor, ain't I?

01:30 One ship, one trip if I could get away with it. That is the merchant navy attitude, one ship, one trip. We were never, apart from Company men, they were different. Company men, they laid the keel down, put the crew on and built the ship around them and they never left it. They were Company men. I wasn't one of those.

And where does that culture, 'one ship one trip', come from?

It's typical merchant seamen.

02:00 They're very, 'free spirits' if you like. They get in and out of their own problems. They've got no backup of any kind, if you know what I mean. Like the navy, there's always "You go there, you go there. You do this, you do that," and so on but we didn't, we went, we had to go to whatever ship we were sent to during the war, don't misunderstand - but we're very 'free spirits' apart from that. That is in the very nature of the 'calling'. Apart

02:30 from Company men. Now they stuck to one ship in one Company. The Cunarders were typical. 'Cunard cables', they called them, they never left the Cunarders if they could help it, but that wasn't my bag. I wanted to, go with the flow.

And how did you feel leaving the Isle of Guernsey did you - ?

A part of the

03:00 game, you never formed any real attachments cause you never knew. You might meet someone on the next ship that was on the last ship and so on. You may not. Free spirits.

Who went with you or did anybody leave with you?

No, no. What happened, you had the option to pay off that ship, okay you paid off that ship, you took your Leave. It might be a week it might not, whatever. So you went home or

03:30 wherever you were going for that week then they had to contact, then you'd get a telegram with a

railway voucher, "Join blah, blah, blah or report to the pool in Bristol, Liverpool, Glasgow. Report there." And then they give you your next ship and so on.

Well, what would you get up to on shore leave?

In that week.

Yeah.

Various goings on, no doubt. That is being rather,

04:00 I've got a wife now you know. Shhh! I'll leave it to your dire imagination then, put it that way. Anything, anything. Don't forget the first turn of the propeller, cancels all debts.

Well, I'm a little bit curious about your tattoos and,

Yeah.

and whether you spent any time on shore leave -

That was in India, when we were running out of

04:30 Bombay. I was out there for about 12 months, running out of Bombay, then we went down to Marmagoa. That's the Portuguese India, down the road a bit, d'you know where that is? Coming out of there,

Well, we might come back to that story.

Yeah.

So you had shore leave for a week or so and,

Yeah, whatever you were entitled to, you know. No shore bases,

05:00 see. That was it.

Did you manage to catch up with your family or - ?

Oh yeah, I popped down to see them now and again but I wasn't a big family man. If I was paid off in Scotland, I might stop there, you know. It just depended.

And what would you do with your pay?

Squander it.

05:30 Squander it. I wasn't happy till the last pound had gone. Actually I think I might have got the message in the end because I looked around and see these blokes who've been to sea 30 or 40 years and they end up in a sailor's home. Not for me mate, not for me because it gets in your blood. The mere

06:00 thought of an 8 to 5 job. Oooh! Not for me, no, no till I got married then I didn't have a lot of choice but you can appreciate that. A little mundane job somewhere where your mates said, "Sailing tomorrow on the Akoria. We're going down to New Zealand." Your ears would prick up and "Do I have to go to this bloody job tomorrow," no, not for me.

06:30 There you are, that's the nature of the beast. Of course the longer you're at it, the more dependent you get, see.

Well, as you say you reported to the pool and got a posting to the U- -

Yew Park.

The Yew Park. What class of ship was it?

In peace time it was a collier. You know what a collier is? One that carried coal around Britain. Some of the best seamen in the world come from

07:00 around the British Coast. Cook, he served his time on the British Coast, old Cookie! He come from Whitby in Yorkshire and the best training for seaman in the world is around the British Coast. That's why the Norwegians and the Scandinavians are extra good seamen.

Can you describe the ship, how big was it and -

How big was it? Oh, I couldn't give you an accurate

07:30 tonnage on it.

Or compared to the Isle of Guernsey?

Oh, a quarter of the size, a quarter of the size. Only had two blokes on deck, two ABs and two ordinary seamen. I was one of the ordinary seamen, see. That's about the size of it and you had the captain, you only had one officer. Normally you carry three, you get the captain, first, second and third officer. That's the first mate, second and third mate, that's normally on a ship.

08:00 **Who was the captain or can you just - ?**

Oh, I can't remember,

Maybe not his name but what kind of fellow?

He was a Welshman, I can tell you that. Now having said that speaks volumes, doesn't it? You never seen him a lot, no more than you had to. I don't think he was drinking. I never seen him a lot but whenever he appeared, he always come up with some wisecrack or other, you know.

08:30 **Did you know anything about the U-, or what did you know about the Yew Park before you**

Nothing. If I had have done I might have tried to take evasive action but too late! You could generally like be able to fiddle something sideways or something, if I knew but I didn't know, did I?

And what was your contract that you signed to - ?

You signed ships out of course.

09:00 **So it was just one trip only or - ?**

No, coastal articles are different to deep sea articles. Coastal articles are generally on about a monthly basis. Deep sea is for 2 years or the maximum of 2 years but again as I say, if you're assigned to deep sea articles you could end up the 2 year period in some little remote place in West Africa or the old man would simply say to you "Well, there you go son,

09:30 go ashore, be a British ship through here in 6 months. Now what you gonna do? All them articles was biased one way because at the end of every entitlement as you must say, it would say in the fine print, 'At Master's Discretion', cause technically the ship's captain in the merchant navy is the master and he had, that was down - now some of them Shipping Acts were 1864.

10:00 You didn't have no hope. They reckoned if he could give you a child, he couldn't make you love it. You were literally at his mercy, I kid you not and you never got a decent captain and a decent first officer, either one or the other was, you know and they could do what they liked with you.

So given that you'd signed a coastal articles - ?

10:30 Yeah, I'd signed I think but see that was superseded by the fact that I'd signed these special Articles for the liberation of Europe as in my discharge book, so that superseded that. The fact that we all got paid off in London, I think the ship got scrapped but they had me next time cause they put me on a coastal tanker going across the - I couldn't get out of it, see. I didn't want to - I'd seen the invasion. I didn't want

11:00 to be plodding across the Channel all the time.

Well what was your first impressions of the Yew Park?

Bloody awful. A little old, dirty old coaster down there, collier down there, you know. Decrepit, you could see rust all over the joint and underneath its camouflage paint. The accommodation was diabolical, the food

11:30 was even worse but that was it. I couldn't do nothing about it.

Can you describe your sleeping quarters, where - ?

Well, you had a foxhole. What they call a foxhole. It's always called the foxhole, whether its forehead or aft because the foxhole's right up the pointed end, isn't it? Even if the crew's quarters are aft, they still refer to it as the foxhole. What was it? Four bunks, two that side, two that side.

12:00 Oh, I don't know how big? You'd just about get the bunks in there and then a small table in the middle.

How did you cope with the, I guess, that small, cramped - ?

You just had to make do, I think. You couldn't do much about it. Terrible quarters they were and then of course, when we got them heavy seas, there's water coming in through the deck straight onto the bunks and you had to throw your oil skins over it. Terrible!

12:30 **And where would you eat your meals?**

You had a little mess room there you could hardly swing a cat in. No shower, you had to take a bucket, I can't describe this to you, how can I? You don't know the engine room, do you? It's what they call the fiddley, it's like a grate on top, you took a bucket and showered in that. That's all you got. Mind you, at sea you didn't undress too much anyway because you never

13:00 knew it you had to go over the side a bit quick, did you? You didn't leave that to the end, you know. Always ready to move at a minute's notice. Only two kinds there, the quick and the dead. Or the quick and the hungry, too.

What type of captain was this Welshman?

It's a job to describe him really. I don't think he was at times the full quid, I didn't think. You know he was always

- 13:30 coming out with some caustic comment or other, you know but I think that was his last trip anyway. His mate told me one day he'd been blown off the bridge on his last run and as I say, he wasn't no spring chicken, so I think he, like the ship, was due for retirement but as I say, with that kind of cargo we were expendable anyway, weren't we? If they'd have got us when we got that one cargo across, so?

14:00 And how did your duties differ from the Guernsey to the Yew Park?

Oh much more, much more. There was only four of us on deck there so, steering the ship, general maintenance on the ship and so on and so on. More intensive, put it that way. It wasn't so varied seeing as it was such a small ship and so on.

14:30 Was she a difficult ship to steer?

Pathetic. Pathetic. It come out of the arc, see if I explained to you, I don't really know why - first, it's what they called a cross-chain job and they're running down the sides of the ship, their channels with big chains going to the steering flap. Well the firemen used to come up and empty

- 15:00 their ashes and drop some in there and then the wheel would seize up and things like that, you've got no idea. Archaic! It would certainly have been First World War stuff. "Send 'em to sea," said the old minister for transport. "If we get one load, don't matter about the blokes, if we get one cargo out of it that would be all right."

What was the routine, what was the boat drill?

Boat

- 15:30 drill? You always had to practise boat drills as soon as you come aboard. Every ship was different in their warning system. First of all, you had to work on the premise, all the tannoys and that had gone, you had to work on that, didn't you? There might be one blast, right boat drill; two, standby; action stations might be three, you know. Something like that, every ship had its own

- 16:00 various little codes. As I say, you couldn't say you were going to get a warning by tannoy because that could be gone. The first whack, out go the lights, out go everything on it.

Can you describe the first boat drill on the Yew Park?

What I didn't tell you was when we tried to hoist the boat and it come in half, didn't it? There was only one boat there too, only one life boat, you know.

- 16:30 So you didn't have much hope anyhow. If you'd have got torpedoed and that like the man said, you'd have wanted a parachute more than anything else to come down on. A lot of them, there weren't - you imagine a tanker carrying high octane, you know, aviation fuel. All there is is a terrific blue flash, like the mate said to me one day "They're lucky," he said, "We're carrying crude, we'll fry." That's logic, isn't it? I saw a big Norwegian go up one day, a Skandi, oh she went up, Oooh! Wouldn't be no bits bigger than my hand. There you go.

Can you just tell us where the Yew Park travelled to and from, where did it carry its - ?

In peace time?

- 17:30 I should imagine, I wouldn't know its -

When you were aboard?

No, she never done any peace time runs when I, never carried no coal or nothing there. We were simply carrying ammunition and that to the other side. There weren't many ships doing their peace time routine at all. It was just commandeered and that's the way they went. Peace time routines were completely gone.

Well, what was the routine, where would you pick up your cargo and - ?

I don't know what they done in peace time

- 18:00 love, what their routine was. I know they were up in the Bristol Channel so it might have been carrying coal from Welsh coal fields down across the Channel or something like that, colliers see, they didn't go no farther than - I think the odd one went down to Spain because during the Spanish Civil War a bloke called 'Potato' Jones was busy running ammo down to the what's-a-names down there, wasn't he? To Franco & Co.
- 18:30 The Brits supplied Franco, don't worry about that, because they put him in through the Canary Isles and there was a lot of merchant seamen went on the other side, too you know. The International Brigade, have you heard of them? They went on with them. A lot of blokes I spoke to - I never went to sea you

know, and I never met one who's anything near a capitalist. Now,

19:00 there was a few Communist among them too. I can say this to you, you see these people have been around the world and they could see, perhaps a lot more than the 'ordinary' man, about conditions in this world if you know what I mean and they were socialists plus and Russians in convoy were greatly admired, I can tell you. Greatly admired!

19:30 Good men and you see their women on board, ooh, like that! See them up on the bridge, one of them was an engineer, I said, "If she breaks down, she can row that back. Look at the size of her." Great, great people.

What were the crew like on the Yew Park?

They were Londoners, Londoners and there was another lad and me come from Southampton. That was two of us and two Londoners.

20:00 That's on the deck crew. The firemen, I didn't have a lot to do with. There were a couple of odd characters there, I don't really know too much about them. The old man was Welsh. I don't know the first officer, I think he was a Scot. Well, that bit pretty near covers the crew. It was only a tiny collier, see.

How long would it take to do one of the trips?

20:30 What? Across the channel? It varies, it varies greatly, it varies greatly. Normally you don't go - in peace time you'd go from A to B, wouldn't you? From Southampton to Cherbourg, whatever, I've done that trip on the ferry, 6 or 7 hours but if you had to join a convoy, see you'd have to go out and the convoy would all meet up and then you take a zigzag course see, you wouldn't be going straight there. It could

21:00 take you 14, 15 hours, something like that, depending. You know, there weren't no specific routine in war time to get anywhere.

What did you know about the cargo that you were carrying?

The old man told me for starters and you only had to stick your nose down the hatch to smell that petrol had leaked and I didn't investigate too much closer. They all knew, this flimsy stuff they used

21:30 to use, terrible. It would break lose down there. Coal is one of the worst to carry too. That gets combustion and you can't, see you've got no fire brigade out there or nothing. You're between the devil and the deep blue with that because you've got to have open hatch covers to get at it and the minute you open the hatch covers, in goes the oxygen and what was smouldering, goes immediately up into flames, see.

22:00 It's one of the big worries at sea, is fire. What can you do about it? The same as anyone gets injured, ain't no doctor. The old man's got a big book, like that. It's that big with 'what to do', you know. He's looking at the book and looking at you, "Now what kind of a scalpel shall I use there?" Oh dear, it's

22:30 not funny when you're on the receiving end. We had a DEMS gunner, he got a bullet straight through the cheeks of his behind. Of course the old man's got the big book out and of course all the lads are giving it "You watch out, you haven't got both hands on your shoulder," and things like that. It was funny for all the lads but it wasn't funny for him. Never had no doctor, see and another time we had a big Scot, he had an

23:00 impounded wisdom. He was in agony, he was in agony, he was! So out comes the book. "Yes, yes. We want that tool there and that there and - " he said to me, "Will you help and kind of hold his shoulders a bit," and he went in. Well, I don't know if you know this but when you draw a tooth, you push down to take the gum off the shoulder of the tooth, don't you? Then the forceps meet under the shoulder and you can - but he didn't do that. He went in

23:30 and grabbed and he took a strip of gum off from there to there. Well the bloke passed out. A big Scot he was too, so he gave him some rum and he came too and he very nearly went out again when the rum hit there, by which time I took off. I weren't going to be around when he came too properly. Yeah, it's typical though. You ain't got nothing else, have you? So, what are you going to do?

Well, I guess. I'm just wondering how much you and the crew

24:00 **felt like the Yew Park was a bit of a sitting target?**

Well you've always got that impression, you're always wary; you're always on your guard. You never leave that life jacket alone, never. I suppose up to a point you come in yearn of it, you're snatching sleep where you can and so on. See, a convoy - a lot of people thinks it's a load of ships but it isn't. That one can be way over on the

24:30 horizon, you see a puff of smoke going up over there and the old men are "That's the so and so, she's gone." They knew them all, they did because the profile of the ship, the old peace time blokes and so on but you never know and when it comes sudden, well there you are. I tell you a good book to read on that and this isn't fiction but you'll love it, it embraces that famous Russian

- 25:00 convoy, PQ17. It's been written several times. It's not fiction, it's about that famous Russian convoy that went up through to, no they went up Murmansk and they got so far along and the admiralty said, "The Tirpitz is out." That was a German pocket battleship that was laying in the Norwegian fields,
- 25:30 scattered the convoy. Well, the navy hoofed it over the horizon, wasn't there fault mind you, they'd been told and left the convoy and then they come in and they slaughtered 'em. I think it was about 9 or 10 ships, subsequently the Tirpitz never came out but that has never been forgotten by merchant seamen because see, they could do 18, 19, 20 knots. We'd be plodding along in some cases, 5 or 6 knots. We'd have no
- 26:00 hope.

And how fast did the Yew Park go?

All depends, do 8 knots with a 7 knot tide behind her that was about - she plodded on and always getting into trouble for making smoke. She couldn't make smoke, see. There was an illustration in the seamen's pool there and it's a round earth like that you see and there's a U-Boat here see and you're over that other side, in short you're

- 26:30 out of the horizon, okay? He sees this plume of smoke go up, "There's - ." No, you daren't make smoke. Not even smoke on deck. They were quick. I think they said about 2 or 3 minutes to get your estimated speed range and everything, mind you it was zigzagging all the time. The whole convoy would be - you know.

Were there any occasions that the Yew Park came under

- 27:00 **fire at all on any of those trips?**

Not as such, no, no. Plenty of danger but not under active fire. I think any respecting U-Boat wouldn't have wasted a torpedo on it, personally. They still like to make everyone count, see.

How many trips did you make across the Channel with the Yew Park?

On the Yew Park? Just the one love, they scrapped it. And near the crew with it, I think.

- 27:30 **Where did you, what was the routine to unload the cargo off?**

Well, we got over there and first of all the Yanks came out and looked at it. They stripped the hatch covers back, put their noses down, smelt, knew what we had in there and wouldn't have a bar of us. So they anchored us out at St. Vasst there and then one day, we had the warning to come in. The Yanks had disappeared and they had all black Americans there but we had to load down the hold. They wouldn't go down - normally,

- 28:00 once we'd get a cargo to port we'd have nothing more to do with it. The steamer boys come aboard and they, but in this case, they wouldn't go down in the hold so we had to go down there and attach all the various slings to the bombs. And bloody petrol sloshing around down there and you can imagine one spark and we'd have all gone to St Peter, wouldn't we? A bit quick but they loaded it straight on lorries and took it straight away from the dock area and that's what happened to that little

- 28:30 collier.

What was the turnaround, how many days - ?

We were in there, we were laid off for about a week. They wouldn't have anything to do with us. Then the turnover alongside, I think 4 or 5 days. All that had to be unloaded manually, see. Well, we were down in the holds unloading it and they were - it wasn't a question of putting it on the quay and that was it, no. It had to be taken right away from the port

- 29:00 area so where it went from there, I don't know. Most of the petrol was wasted anyway.

Any other stories from that - ?

That particular ship?

That particular ship?

Not really, no I don't think so. It was generally a fiasco, from beginning to end as a matter of fact. I suppose it served that one purpose, it did

- 29:30 get a cargo across there. I don't know, the funny thing about that is, I was going through my discharge book one day and it was never entered in my discharge book and I don't know the reason why for that. I rung Cardiff which is where all the archives of the British merchant seamen are kept, and they didn't know. They were kind of evasive so I think there's a little bit - perhaps it wasn't quite kosher there

- 30:00 somehow. Never had it entered in my discharge book which is - that is your Bible. You can't move, you wouldn't go to sea without it. You wouldn't go nowhere without that and it's also, by the way, a valid passport so, I don't know. A lot of mysteries went on like that, a hell of a lot.

What did you know about what was going on in the war at this point?

30:30 Basically, what you were told.

Did you pay much attention to it or - ?

No, I wouldn't, no I wasn't a great - didn't think a lot too much about it in general terms. I thought I'd be glad when it was over, obviously but apart from that no, I wasn't hankering every day for it or something. As a young chap, the bigger issue doesn't concern you. All you're concerned with is the next

31:00 port with a quid in your pocket.

I'm just wondering how the war, by now the war had progressed and was starting to approach the end, how - ?

No, it - you can say that in retrospect but you couldn't have said it at the time. You've had all these about-turns before. You know, you're not saying, "Oh, that's it. They're on the beachhead. They've made a landing."

31:30 That didn't signify the end's insight at all. Do you remember the battle of the bulge there, where he towed the Yanks again, didn't he? What was his name? Skortsksy, wasn't it? The big German general. How he put, I thought, damn good, he put these German Americans, they were German but they had an American accent being there, he disguised them as American MPs [Military Police] and put 'em on all

32:00 all the salient points and he redirected all the American troops back to where they'd come from and things like that. Now the bulge, I know this for a fact because a mate of mine was a sergeant and he had to go out and relieve the Yanks, what happened he sent these German Divisions and the Yanks up and ran for their bloody life, didn't they? They ran for their life so they had to send up

32:30 some British regiments to stiffen them up, didn't they? So, you can get that kind of turnabout, that's what I'm saying.

How affected were your family by the war, at this point in time?

Well my brother was safe, my younger brother was too young anyway. Dad was flat out working, Mum was. Got the occasional bombing but it didn't seem to - not

33:00 all that much or perturbed to any extent. Carried on much the same you know. If they seen me on leave I was there, if not they wouldn't worry. They knew, I, you know the older brother was the same, he was in the navy. I think we were probably a very independent family. We weren't the close family unit, anyway that's for sure.

What, I'm just wondering whether

33:30 **your father wanted to join the forces or - ?**

No, he was too old for that. In any case, he'd had enough of the first one. They never give him his just desserts from that even. Now you wouldn't have dragged him there a second time, no.

Did you have any other relatives that were in the war or - ?

I'm just trying to think. Did I have any cousins and so on?

34:00 No, no, I don't think so, no. There might have been but we're all distantly related so I wouldn't know anyhow because I was mostly at sea, so I wouldn't know anyway.

Did, I'm just curious as to whether you had any trips up to London at all or if you - ?

Got paid off in London, didn't I a couple of times. Paid off in Glasgow a couple of times. Paid off in Bristol a couple of times. My home port was Southampton but wherever the ship was diverted to, that's where

34:30 you were paid off and they didn't say, "Your hometown is Bournemouth, we'll go to Southampton for you," nothing like that.

Well London was fairly intensely bombed, what were your impressions?

Terrible, terrible. My sister lived there and I come home from one trip and we went up there, up the Thames there,

35:00 King George V dock or something and I thought to myself, "I'll pop in and see my sister," and the bloody V2's were coming down. "Oh, God!" you've never seen nothing like it. No sound, nothing. All of a sudden, a whole street would disintegrate. I kid you not, it would - them V2's were savage. They reckoned that the Brits could have carried on mate but I tell you what, if a lot more had happened they couldn't have done,

35:30 terrible! Whole streets just simply disintegrating. Terrible! So, I hop footed it out of there and went down to Bournemouth for a few days, didn't I? Had to leave an address where they could send a wire to

for the next ship and so on. I think I joined the next one in Bristol I think. Avonmouth to be precise, so

36:00 you were all over the place. No such thing as a contingent being sent there like in a lorry or something like that. We were free spirits, if you like.

What about blackouts and food shortages and - ?

Bloody awful, food rations were awful. Whenever I went down there and tried to get something off the ship and take it down, if I brought something abroad or anything, I'd take it down or something.

36:30 If I'd brought something aboard or anything, I'd take it down to them - food rations were awful. Everything was, you couldn't get nothing. We had it hard, don't worry, really hard. Getting bombed and nothing, there'd be no food, you know.

When you, I mean you've just described a raid when you went to visit your sister

37:00 **but what, were there other raids or what did you - ?**

Oh Christ, yeah there were raids every night.

That you experienced yourself?

Yeah, when I was ashore, there were raids every night. They were all sleeping down in the underground railways, weren't they? Shelters. Yeah, I heard it stunk down there, people had been down there for blinking weeks you know and trains were very erratic. You didn't know if they were going to run or not.

37:30 It was not a very pleasant place.

And what about the air raid shelters, did you go down to - ?

No, I didn't like 'em to be quite honest. I'd seen too many with the entrances sealed off, where they got a bomb in the entrance and killed all the inhabitants. I thought, "If I'm going to go, I want to be up here." I wasn't keen on getting down there. Again, I couldn't see a way out, you see.

38:00 **Okay, well we might stop there. Our tape -**

Tape 7

00:31 **So what was the most mischief you got up to on shore leave?**

I can't go into lurid detail about that, can I?

Give us a bit of un-lurid detail then?

I don't know where to start with that. The wife might watch this in a few years time and I convinced her I went to the seaman's missions every night and stood there with them praying. Now are you going to make me out to be a complete - ?

I'm sure she doesn't believe that

01:00 **anyway.**

I don't know, she's pretty naïve, my missus actually, yeah. Is that my daughter out there?

I don't know, is it?

No, it's next door. I don't think I could, put it this way, I was typical of my ilk.

What was the reputation then of the merchant navy in general when they were on shore leave?

Savage, savage. Besides having the highest casualty rate in the world, they had

01:30 had the highest VD [venereal disease] rate, too. So you can draw your own conclusions. Well, if you think of it logically a bloke got a week's leave, he ain't got time for no prolonged courtship, has he?

They actually let the blokes off the boat for that very reason, did they not?

I don't know, you're given shore leave, what you done with it was your fault. I mean, if you weren't exactly queer, you were cruising, weren't you? You were looking around.

02:00 **What about drinking?**

Oh yeah, oh yeah. They could drink, they could drink believe me. Always find the nearest grog, wouldn't they?

Were there any particular places that were merchant navy haunts?

Oh yeah, all over the world. Some were banned to all other forces, too. Yeah, all over the world they were.

And what was your most - ?

My most famous favourite spot?

Yeah,

02:30 **your favourite place to take leave?**

I liked Tahiti. There were some good runs ashore there. Around the Cape was good, around Cape Town, Durban. That was good. Canada was so, so. I don't know. Australia, oh dear, they used to warn us about Australia, they did. Sometimes you used to get these little pre-shore lectures. They said

03:00 "Sydney you ought to watch," and we'd just come down from South America so it rated against the South Americans as pretty high, Sydney was. The spot there used to be Luna Park then. Yeah.

Sailors on leave, merchant navy on leave still probably run amok in Sydney.

The police used to come down to the ship and they were the peace time police and they had these big white pith helmets on, if you remember and they were all about 6' 2" and they'd come down and say, "Now, I want

03:30 you boys to behave yourselves when you go ashore, if not, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," you know and so on. "Yes, yeah, that will be all right," water off a duck's back, whatever and a lot of blokes jumped ship here, you see. After the war because, after the war if you jumped ship here all you had to do was get well away from the ship till it sailed, go and report to the local police station and that was it. You stopped. Yeah, a lot of them

04:00 jumped ship here until it got to the stage there were ships being left with no crew, so they stopped it. New Zealand was another one too. That's what the boys used to head for. Well they'd been around the world, they knew the pick of places, didn't they?

What you said about the VD rate may not be strictly true.

That was the highest in all the services.

Quite seriously, that's a problem for the

04:30 **service to have in a way, did they look into that at any time? Were you told about precautions and that kind of thing?**

Well, you were but you know, what things happened. It was pretty rife in all the services I think.

It was a real problem. I know it was a problem in the navy for instance.

Yeah, yeah.

They had education of a sort.

Oh yeah, they give you pep talks. That was water off a duck's back, wasn't it? You'd get told these other few and whatever.

What about condoms?

05:00 I was going to say, d'you expect me to believe that? No, I don't know. No, you get all the usual lectures, put it that way. One of the officers would come out and give the lads a lecture and they'd all nod like that. "What a bloody load of rubbish!" Off you'd go.

Would blokes need to be put ashore, ever for the sickness?

No, they had that penicillin and that, then they'd give 'em a few jabs of that. I think in a bad case of syphilis or anything,

05:30 you wouldn't want to get to that stage, would you? You'd be - you know. There you are, that's the world. Didn't know if you were going to be alive the next day, did you?

Well that's part of the reason all crews went crazy when they came into - in war time. I'll leave that, I might come back to it if we get the chance but you moved from the Yew Park onto the

06:00 **Llangibby Castle - ?**

No, no, no.

No? What was the next ship?

I joined a small coastal tanker after that called the 'CHANT 43', Churchill's Auxiliary Naval Tankers, and all we'd do, we'd load up just up from Southampton there, Frawley, where the big oil refinery is and we'd go over, lay off and refuel the fleet as they come in, you know.

06:30 That was our primary function, the only trouble was we had the anchor down and we couldn't move quick enough in an air raid, see we couldn't move. The navy would come alongside and we'd fuel them.

Was that a dangerous position to be in, how did that make you feel?

Well, if you can envisage the situation, there's all coastal traffic moving and there's constant air raids, if you've got

07:00 the anchor down by the time you've got it up, it's a bit late, isn't it? You've got to be mobile, if you know what I mean and the navy used to come alongside and we'd have many a row with them because we only had onboard, again two ABs and two ordinary seamen and they'd come up to tie up alongside of us see and instead of coming up like thus, this bloke kept coming in like that, dropped his headlines

07:30 over for me to take forehead to put - and I'd have to pass them around stays and I was on deck on my own. So he done it this once and I threw the bloody line back, I said, "Come alongside, proper." This naval lieutenant was up there with about 20 naval blokes and there's me on my own, trying to take his lines. He said, "I want to see your captain." I said, "Just hang on, I'll get him." I went up to see the old man and I said, "Look, he keeps doing his bit," I said, "I can't take them - "

08:00 He said, "No, leave it to me." "Come alongside properly," he said, "We ain't got the man power to do what you're doing," and of course, this whole crowd of ABs behind are laughing and hugging themselves and he looked a right bloody dill, didn't he but you know, you can't keep doing things like that.

How did the procedure for refuelling work?

Well, they'd come alongside and we'd send our

08:30 hose over, a big hose over you know and we'd signal the engine room and they'd start the pump and we'd pump so much diesel over to 'em and off they'd go again, you know, diesel or whatever the fuel that was appropriate at that time. Some sly French fishermen would come out too and we'd take the odd bucketful, didn't we, for fish.

What protection did you have from any - ?

I think we had one DEMS gunner and

09:00 one strip Lewis on board the bloody U-Boat. Peanuts, wasn't it?

What was the closest call you had on that ship?

We were constantly getting air raids but by the time we got the hook up it was too late, they were gone. They were bombing us short quite frequently. So it wasn't a very envious position to be in, I can tell you. We were out there a couple of months like that, laid up out there. We'd move now and again

09:30 till the cargo was gone, like a floating service station, if you like.

How much fuel did you have on board?

I couldn't really tell you, they weren't all that big. They weren't all that big.

How long would it take you to unload your cargo then, I mean what are we talking here?

Depending on how many come to take off, you know, take cargo off of us. There was no specific times.

10:00 **You must have felt a bit like a sitting duck at times?**

Well you were, precisely so because I mean not only couldn't we get the anchor up quick enough but we were carrying blinking fuel don't forget.

I think I mentioned somewhere that you may have been on the Isle of Guernsey and were accompanying fuel tankers as well, is that something - ?

Yeah, there'd be some over there off the beachhead, yeah. There were all kinds of ships there. There were

10:30 Cargo ships right up on the beach, merchant ships, cargo ships right up on the beach unloading their stuff, yeah.

What were they called, they were called Cats or CATS or - ?

No,

No?

Just ordinary cargo ships.

I've just got a note about that, I'll just cross it off. At the end of that stint, how long did it last that you were on the tanker for?

Two or three months. Come back to the UK, paid us

11:00 off. They paid the whole crew off, I don't know, maybe the ship went in. See they never kept a crew on if it went in for protracted repair. That was it, they you all off. Off to the next ship and that ship went in for repair and so on and then I got to join the old Llangibby Castle and I done about three trips to Cherbourg on that with the Yanks and then we came back to Southampton. We

11:30 picked up these load of Yanks and we were going to do Cherbourg and take some walking wounded onto New York but we never got there because we got rammed off the Isle of Wight and we sunk!

We'll talk about that sinking in just a second, but firstly tell us a bit about the ship.

It was a cape boat, how can I describe a cape boat to you?

Well they were ships that did the Cape run for a start.

They were the ships that done the Cape run, yeah. There was

12:00 a load of them, wasn't there? Now what was the proper name for the damn things. My memory's going. There were dozens of them. The old Llangibby was one of the oldies, a two funnel job. Big open foxhole, pretty prehistoric, would have been due for the scrap yard I would've imagined but don't think they ever repaired it after that. It was too far gone. Union Castle

12:30 Line, that's what it was, Union Castle Line.

What was the complement of crew on the Llangibby?

On deck I couldn't tell you, on deck was 30 or 40. I don't know what there was in the engine room. The usual complement of officers and the captain. Quite a good crowd you know. Quite lax because it was a very old ship. No problems there. Open foxhole is a bit of a bore but

13:00 there you are, you had to make do with that.

By this time, what position had you risen to?

I was ordinary seaman, I was ordinary seaman. I'd done my 12 months as a boy, I was a junior ordinary seaman, no holding me then. What I dished out, what I got dished out when I was a boy then, see.

Can you tell us about who was unlucky enough to be at the end of your dishing out?

Well actually, on them cape boats they always carried a load of boys for some reason I can't

13:30 think of and of course you lorded over them wouldn't you, something rotten, "Don't do that, do as your told." You were about 19 see, a 'know it all'. They were quite a good bunch of lads actually I suppose, some of them 15, 16 you know. The old man did make sure though when he thought we were going straight down, he made sure we got the boys up together and put 'em in one boat, yeah.

How did you give them hell or what

14:00 **did you do?**

Well, you know, you generally come the raw prawn with 'em. You tell 'em what to do all the time and all that like you used to have to have it, didn't you? It's like an apprentice, isn't it? You give 'em a bit of a roasting now and then.

What about your own job? How had that changed as an ordinary seaman?

Just do your various duties. You had three watches and I'd do my job as the watch pertained to. It might be splicing rope, it might be doing this, it might be doing that,

14:30 it might be scrubbing deck, it might be anything. It was various. I might do a stent and go on patrol, on the guns, you know cause there's only one gun there and the crew and that was the DEMS gunner, if we had one at all and all the rest were merchant seamen see. The trouble with that is, you done your four on and then you stopped on and done an extra hour's gun watch, see so there was that

15:00 snag about it.

And what did the routine for trips to Cherbourg consist of?

We'd pick up troops in Southampton, they'd be all mustered down, then they'd march them all aboard and at the appropriate time we'd set off and sail into Cherbourg and unload the troops there and come back again and so on.

How many troops are you roughly talking about this?

I don't know, about a thousand or something like that, 700 or 800. I never really

15:30 counted them at any time.

And how were they accommodated on board?

Troop decks down below. All troop decks.

In hammocks or - ?

Yeah, just hammocks slung up and some slept on table tops. Nothing very luxurious, I can assure you, no.

What about on your own open foxhole?

The troops quarters? On that particular cape boat, very rough because it was one of the very oldies, you know. What they call an open foxhole, normal ships quarters would be the three watches,

16:00 we'd have about 6 or 7 in each so that when you come off watch you didn't disturb A and B and so on. When in an open foxhole, you slept how you could.

How had the scene changed in the Channel since D-Day?

Still pretty hectic actually, they'd get their second wind and they started putting a lot of these miniature submarines down

16:30 through there and they started to get reorganised a bit down through the Channel and they had quite a few go up then. The English Channel was always very, very dodgy, because you've got the E-Boats there all the time see and one of their lurks was, you can believe it or believe it not, they used to tie up off the buoys off of Dover where the Channel's very narrow and you're going up there in a fog, well the convoy's all singled up and it's hugging the English side and they'd come out in perfect

17:00 English, "What ship are you and where are you bound for? Blah, blah, blah." BANG! And off he'd go, they'd tied up on the buoys overnight in the fog, see. Clever blokes, yeah.

What would happen if an E-Boat attacked, would it hit and run? What did it do?

Oh yeah, they were gone again. Forty knot jobs, God! Made our blinking torpedo boats look sick, I reckon. They can travel.

What experience did you

17:30 **have of seeing these?**

I seen a few of them attacking the convoy. First of all before they'd got wide out they'd go down through the lanes of the convoy because they couldn't depress their guns low enough see and then they started putting what they called 'submarine chasers' right on the bows that could point down but they were quick. They'd let one go - and the thing about them too, their torpedo tubes were pointing forward like that

18:00 so that they'd aim at you, let go their torpedoes but the British, their torpedo tubes faced us so they went for the ship, dropped the torpedoes and went off quick so the torpedoes - it was bloody archaic, wasn't it? Much better they were. I seen one tied up in Southampton and all the foxhole and all was all whaleback like that so it deflected any, you know - oh, good they were. Why our people didn't take a leaf from their book, I don't know.

18:30 **What damage did they do on the convoy?**

Well a torpedo, you can imagine what they could do. The biggest torpedo too, they carried and couldn't they go. You had no hope of getting out of their way.

Were the E-Boats your worst fear in crossing the Channel?

None of it in per se was. I mean they mightn't have done as much damage in some cases, the torpedo and the end result was the same, wasn't it? A torpedo from an E-Boat, a torpedo from a U-

19:00 Boat what's the difference? I mean, it just depends again on where they hit you. If they get you right in the Engine Room, you've got no hope anyway.

How would you look out for submarines?

How would you look out? You just keep a general lookout. They tell me it's about 2 minutes to get your speed estimated, steerage and everything and all you've got is a little tiny periscope but very, very seldom they were seen. Very seldom.

19:30 You might catch them if they come up in a crash dive in an emergency but I don't think you'd have much hope otherwise.

Can you give us a bit more of an idea about the convoys you were with? How big were they and who were they made up of?

When I was going out to the East, ooh big, ooh!

In just the run across the Channel?

How big were they? 20, 30 ships I suppose at a time and we disassembled there either off Cowes Roads or

just off

20:00 Southampton there and then we'd pick up the whole convoy and off we'd go and take us depending on the day and what invasive action we took, 15, 16, 20 hours. You couldn't say, there's no definite -

How is a convoy like that organised in terms of, is there a command ship or - ?

Yeah, you've got the commodore, he is the man. He's the naval man. He doesn't dictate the ship's

20:30 mind, he dictates the strategy of the convoy. He's got no power at all, even on the ship he's on. He is there to advise on the overall formation of the convoy and what - but he cannot tell the captain of that ship how to run his ship. He is in supreme command there. That's not to say they're at loggerheads with each other all the time but that is a fact.

What was the overall formation of a convoy like that? How would

21:00 **they - ?**

Well, I mean it could be various. I mean you could be four columns of line astern. The commodore would be probably in the centre column. They generally have tankers into the centre more and put the slowies right at the back and so on cause they all used to lie. Joining a 6 knot, 7 knot convoy, they'd all swear they could do 7 knots. They've never done 7 knots in their bloody life, next minute they're lagging full astern, aren't they?

21:30 So, various formations and you always zigzagged together. You had that little telltale in the wheelhouse. You went so long by that and you never went on a proper zigzag. You went say, 20 mile that way, 5 that way and so on and never had a predictable pattern although I don't think that fooled them all that much.

In what ways did the pattern of the convoy help protect it?

22:00 Well, if you can imagine the ships steering all a straight line, he could pick 'em off. I reckon it would be like a shooting gallery, wouldn't it? At least they had that area of having to keep abreast of the convoy and anticipate their change of course and if you just sat there doing a straight line, easy.

When you were on the Isle of Guernsey you were often in the wheelhouse,

Yeah.

Were you in the wheelhouse of the Llangibby?

Yeah, yeah. I done relieving quarter master. Now

22:30 in the merchant navy, they only had quarter masters on the big ships. On any ordinary ship, all ABs had their stint on the wheel unlike the navy. We had to be able to steer, we had to do everything pertaining to that ship, you know and that used to be on a four hour watch, two on the wheel, one standby and one lookout. Your mate then would do his second two on the wheel and so on. You only had two of you, see.

23:00 **How did you get on with that job on the wheel?**

Again, some people are born to it, they are. I could explain the rudiments in five minutes but some are good, I learned as a boy because now and again if you were in the wheelhouse - on that Isle of Guernsey if we'd had a straight run that day and there wasn't much doing, I'd look at him, this old

23:30 boy, nice old fellow, "Here," Toby they used to call him I think, "Hold the wheel for me son, will you?" "Yeah, right, yeah." "Give her a little bit of port, that's it - " See, it's hard to describe how you steer a ship because 90% is anticipation. What you do, say you want to go over to port, you put a little bit of port on and she starts to swing. Before she gets over there, you've got to put the opposite helm on to bring her back.

24:00 In short, if you go - not like a car, you turn the wheel that way, the car goes that way. But it doesn't, it's a big delayed action and on the Mary and that, well you've got to be well over before you start moving. You've got to put the opposite helm on. It's hard to describe, it's a knack and some are born to do it well and some never do and of course, the course recorder is going in the back there and you can see him like that and he's not looking very pleased, is

24:30 he?

More than upsetting the course recorder, you're actually endangering a convoy, are you not if you steer the wrong path - ?

They're not all that close, you're not all that close normally. The only trouble comes at night cause you're not allowed any riding lights, you're not allowed any navigation lights and the worst part is fog and then you use what they call 'fog buoys' and that is, you pass over the stern - it's like a big wooden cross

25:00 and on the end it's got like two shutes like that and you are towing it and as you tow it, it sends up two big fountains of water, if you know what I mean and that's what you've got to keep your eye on. It is

bloody murder in a convoy because you can hear them going all around you.

It must have been a frightening thing and the fogs on the English Channel were not uncommon.

Oh my word, it is one of the worst places and the Channel, see it's,

25:30 not only was it busy but you were confined, you were pushed right over to the English shore because they were shelling Dover, shelling Dover quite often you know. When they see a convoy coming up there "Oh yeah, we'll give them some stick."

What was the scene in Cherbourg, once the Allies had taken hold of it?

It was quite an important port actually, Cherbourg, quite an important port. They blew a lot of it up mind but it was quite useful apart from

26:00 that. We used to pull in there on the old Llangibby and disembark our troops, quite a big port.

And what were the dangers of pulling in there?

If you were tied up alongside and they had a big air raid, you had no room to manoeuvre, absolutely none. There was that aspect of it. The convoy used to muster just outside of Cherbourg there and go back across the Channel.

26:30 **I can imagine when you're in a convoy of quite a few ships; they can't all land at the same time -**

Can't all what?

All the ships can't land at the same time?

No, no, no.

- so they muster, can you - ?

For instance, we'd say we're mustering a convoy off Liverpool, well ships would be coming around from Bristol from there and "Okay, we're going across to the Atlantic. Oh, this part will go off and form another convoy up to Iceland - " and

27:00 so on and so on. You get over to the States, "Oh, this is going over to New York." "This is going down the coast - " and so on. It all works like that, you know. They just don't all go into one port obviously, 20 or 30 ships.

What did you see of the troops you were delivering to France?

The Americans? I didn't have much to do with them to tell you the truth. They were there or going home or

27:30 something I thought. Some of them were going over there and beat them hard. I thought, "You wait till you meet a few, my lovely. You just wait a while. You might retract that statement. They ain't no pushover!" We had a load of German POWs too at one time. They were all right. The old fellows were good. The young blokes were "You wait till we get you the second time!" but the old chaps were good.

What did you have to do with them?

They come aboard, they were POWs. We used to talk to them and that, yeah. They were all right.

28:00 As I say, the young blokes were still full of venom but the older fellows were glad to be out of it.

You weren't personally but was there hatred towards the Germans?

No, no, never. I'm not going to say if I'd have seen ducko or something in them particular people but even their own kind didn't like them, you know. They weren't - they're two distinct people in that respect. The

28:30 Gestapo and that, they were different to the ordinary blokes in the field. I never had any particular antipathy towards the Germans myself.

Can you tell us about the particular duties you were on when you were rammed, can you take us through that from the very beginning?

I was in the foxhole.

What was the ship doing for a start, can you tell us?

What were we doing? Well we'd just picked up a full load

29:00 in Southampton and we'd taken them to Cherbourg and from Cherbourg we were going on to New York. Now you never knew officially where you were going but unofficially, you had a pretty good idea. You weren't allowed to know where you were going once you left port but we generally had a good idea and we were going over to there and we'd just go off Southampton there and forming up with the convoy

there was a bit of a, and

29:30 this bloody Antenor she went whack right in mid ship, split us right down, you know. And what was I doing? I'd just come off letting go and, you know, letting the ship go from Southampton and that and the next minute – I heard this cry, funnily enough I did. A bloke from pool it was. He shouts down. "Clear the foxhole!" Well, they tell me that after, I never heard it and

30:00 I was there I don't know, I was a bit slow on the uptake in them days and I thought, I looked around and out of ten blokes, I was on my own. I thought, "Oh, this won't do, this won't do at all." So I tore out in the alleyway and this alleyway had a dog-leg in it, like that and there was about 10 or 12 blokes all on that corner so they reckon I come down there like a flying rugby tackle, straight over their heads and lands on the wheel deck. Just as I got there she went right over

30:30 like that. I never thought she was coming back. Horrible crashing, screaming going on. So she gradually came back and there was all this grinding of metal and her anchor was on our boat deck because just before she hit us, she let go her hook and it flew out. It flew out like that and oh. I got up on the boat deck ready to receive orders what to do and as I said to

31:00 your young lady there, there was an old AB and I was only a young lad and he said, "All right son, just take it easy. We'll wait for orders from the bridge," and surprising how that calms you down, isn't it? "Okay," I said. So then there was being various orders issued you know, "Standby to do this. Get the troops off, that's our first priority," so then there was orders down from the bridge, "Get down and clear

31:30 the troop decks. Make sure there's none left. We were passing them over to the Antenor that had rammed us because we were going down a bit rapid by then and I'd get down there clearing the troop decks to make sure there was none there and they had all this money left there, where they'd been playing crap, so I couldn't waste that, could I? I had to kind of rescue that a bit quick. If I'd have gone over the side, I'd have gone straight down with all that loose change. Back up on deck and we're still

32:00 mustering all these Americans over onto to this Antenor, a blue funnelled boat it was and then distress calls had gone out all over the place to do something you know, we were lucky. They got a deep sea tug for us and that was very, very lucky because we were down, we were on the bottom but if the tide had come up while we were on the bottom well – and somehow, you don't know what a selfrigie is, do you? It's a, how can I explain it to you. You've

32:30 got a big hole in the side and this was a biggie, you get big hatch covers, you get lines down and pass them over the foxhole and you go right opposite the hole and you drag this sheet down over the side and the influx of water pushes it against the hole, d'you see what I mean? And that's what we tried to do but they had these big deep sea tugs with terrific pumps and they were pumping and packing and everything and they managed to get us back into

33:00 Southampton and that was the end of the poor old Llangibby. Never got over that, she took a terrific hit. We got all our troops off, we lost a few of the firemen and that, you know. They didn't have a hope.

How were they lost?

Well they were down below, weren't they? In the engine room. To get that coming through the side of the ship you ain't got much hope have you? So, that was that.

33:30 **When you look back at that experience now, what is the most shocking or frightening moment within that?**

It's not as you may think in direct relation to the biggest danger. That doesn't seem to stick in my mind. The most things I get in my reoccurring nightmares are coming to in that foxhole on my own and not seeing a way out, if you know what I mean.

34:00 I couldn't see a way out. I did scare then for a while and that's always returned to me but I've been in fact, bigger situations later but that one sticks with me. My wife could tell you now, I won't go nowhere unless I can leave a door open or I can see that I can get out that way. It sticks with me. I was saying to your associate there, Post war traumatic is worse as you get older and no debating about that. It doesn't die with

34:30 distance and time, it doesn't. It gets worse.

What are the other images that stand out in your mind from that event?

Well after that, again I was very, very busy. Very busy helping the chippy. We'd let go our anchor, we'd lost all steam on deck and we couldn't hoist the anchor up again, could we? We had to get away

35:00 so, it's a bit hard to explain the technicalities on this but on every anchor cable there's a shackle at 5 fathoms apart and that's what they call, how many shackles on the anchor cable. Now the shackle has got the link in it, there's a pin goes through on a shackle as you know but at the end is a wooden or lead plug

35:30 that goes through and secures the shackle pin to the shackle. Now you've got to get that out. You're looking at something this big. I was out there with two carpenters trying to knock this shackle pin out. You've got to be careful too because once that flies – anyhow, we managed to get the shackle pins out

and she went. Took all the foxhole rails and everything with it, you know, and I think they tried to buoy it off because it was a hazard to shipping and maybe pick it up

- 36:00 later or something, I don't know. We had all these tugs gather around us and pulled us straight back into Southampton. They managed to get us into dry dock, pumped the dry dock and we promptly filled it up again with all the water in the ship so they pumped us out again. Then obviously we were paid off that ship.

What did you see of the Antenor?

She was the blue funnelled one, she was the one who rammed us.

- 36:30 **And what was, you were unloading troops onto her, what did she do after ramming you?**

Well she was like that and her pointed end was right deeply embedded in our side so we passed them straight over onto her foxhole head, if you know what I mean. We're grinding and roaring and jumping but we never had no choice. Getting the troops off first was our priority and we passed them all over onto the foxhole of the Antenor and so on. What happened and who got the blame

- 37:00 and whatever, I don't know but assembling convoys was always a dodgy business anyway.

For a moment there you panicked -

No, I didn't panic, I wasn't going to say I panicked, no. Somehow it hit me all at once, you're on your own and everyone's gone. "I ain't gonna have that," I said. My instant reaction, "There's a little bit of self preservation here." If you panic, you're gone anyway. You've got

- 37:30 to think "What can I do?," which I immediately did, straight into the alleyway, woofed down there, straight over their heads out onto the wheel deck and that's it.

What about the rest of the crew and the troops? What panic was there amongst them?

No, none among the crew, I can assure you. The troops weren't too happy but they're out, see they're out of their element. Anything happens on board ship with the troops they get - because they're taken right out of their environment. We don't, we wouldn't even

- 38:00 notice some of the things they get worried about, you know.

Were there, in that situation, particular parties that stood out in terms of bravery?

They were all pretty responsible, there was no panic merchants among them because you won't get nowhere by doing that. You've got to wait for orders from the bridge, that's your first thing you do

- 38:30 and then there's always the bosun and that "Righto, you stand there. You wait there. Wait for orders from the bridge," and so on and so on. There's always the old, again like I'm telling you, some seasoned blokes there so you know in part, for the younger blokes, "Just wait there and do as your told," and so on, you know and that gives you a hell of a lot of confidence, actually.

Were there any individual acts that went beyond the normal call of duty at that time?

Not that I can recollect,

- 39:00 they were all, everyone done their job admirably. No panic.

How did that experience season you, as it were, I mean the seasoned chaps helped you in that time but afterwards how were you helped by this?

It just gives you that little air of, "You'll be all right, don't worry, you're all right." You're not panicking but you're a little bit wondering, aren't you? To someone who's, I don't know, 20 years older than you and

- 39:30 "Oh, okay," it eases your mind, doesn't it? If you panic you're lost anyway. You've got no hope.

And what did you see of the ship boys?

They were all right, the boys were good. They were all mustered up on the bridge. The old man had them on the bridge. He could direct them from there quick wherever he wanted them to go. He had about 4 or 5 of the boys up in the wheelhouse. He wanted to keep his eye on them because the old man is directly responsible for the ship's boys.

- 40:00 If he comes to a port and he don't think it's right for them to go ashore, he'll keep them aboard, yeah.

We'd better stop because we're out of tape again. Do you want to take a break, have a cup of tea or something?

00:37 **So, just going back to your story Geoffrey, after Flangiby Castle -**

Llangibby, yeah.

Llangibby Castle, what happened? Where did you go?

Well of course obviously, we were paid off out of ships' articles because the ship was laid up in dry dock and wasn't going to be ready for years, if ever

01:00 and the next one they sent me up - let me get this right. There was two or three, they sent me on the Arundel Castle, that's right, and she was doing a run from Southampton to Bombay and we were taking troops out to India in convoy, as usual and of course, we were in Japanese hands then

01:30 and I didn't like that one iota. I wouldn't have minded so much being a German POW, but not with them. They had a special dispensation for merchant seamen, they did. I've got it in there too. A special - oh, the way they treated them was abominable, you know. Picking them up out of the water, running them on empty, casing the submarine, bayoneting them and throwing them back in and things like that, you know. At the very worst, you say "If they've got to dispose of a crew,

02:00 so be it but not like that." I'll never forgive 'em if I live to be 1000 and what hurts me even more is, they've never yet apologised, they've never paid out to all the ex-POWs, like the Germans had to, remember? They've never done that, they've never admitted their guilt, even to this day. There was an item the other day in which this

02:30 Japanese Memorial Garden they've got in Gosford and the rate people complain about paying so much towards it. I know I wrote a letter along these lines, "How good would it make you feel to know that you've got ex-Jap POWs and part of their rates are going towards a Japanese Memorial Garden, does that strike you as - ?" No reply of course,

03:00 you know. Then, the present generation of the RSL [Returned and Services League] are a little bit light on this, you see and they had something one day where they were talking about the Japs and I got really irate about that and I got up and I said, "Well perhaps we'd better alter the odes, and not 'Lest We Forget' to 'Best We Forget'," and I was really -

03:30 it's wrong to me, they've never admitted their guilt in any way and they are now at the moment sending them into Iraq, aren't they? Of token force. It's so wrong, see they've never admitted their guilt. The kids are not, it's even erased completely from their schooling.

What was the mood amongst the Brit troops on your ship going out?

Now you've got to remember we were taking out blokes who had never been out East

04:00 before in their life and they were as green as grass and so on and whatever and going through the Canal they're getting ribald remarks like, "Get your knees brown," and all that. Going through the old Suez Canal there and so on, and we get 'em into India and then we land them there and then they go ashore if it's raining and whatever and whatever and I think we done that about 4 or 5 times. On the 5th time Singapore

04:30 surrendered to Mountbatten and we immediately took off from Bombay straight into Singapore and they'd just let out the POWs from Changi there. It was horrific the sights you seen, horrific. The Aussies there were running around demented, that's the word, you know, like bloody skeletons. It was a terrible thing to see, it never left me and on the quay,

05:00 now one always has the impression about 4 foot high, buck teeth and glasses, don't you? Japs. No, this was the Japanese Imperial Guard, all about 6' 2", you know. Big blokes they were. They give 'em a hard time, the old Brits did there. They really - and why wouldn't they, you know? Terrible.

Can you just, that first trip out to the East that you did?

Mm.

It's quite a long

05:30 **trip, what would you be doing onboard?**

There was bags to do, bags to do. Keeping the ship clean and everything, there's a ton of work to do. No lazing or nothing like that, your washing done in the mornings, keeping everything going and so on. So many various duties, getting the awnings up, d'you know the awnings? To keep the sun off. We put the awnings up after a while when you start to get used to it a bit, maybe

06:00 you've gone through the canal or something and then you start to put all the awnings up to keep the shade off and so on, all various duties.

Well how did this ship that you were on differ from say the other - ?

Well, first of all you're going out East, aren't you? That's the main thing and you're going to various ports and so on out to India and so and then another one we went around to East Africa, took some East

Africans home and then down to

06:30 Mombasa, Durban, Cape Town and out that way and I come home on the last convoy from the East, just when the war was finished, I come home on the last convoy there and I've got a poem about it somewhere and then we were about half way home in convoy and the word went out and the convoy dispersed, you know and we come home then from

07:00 Bombay to Southampton, I always remember it, in 13 days and 4 hours. We really steamed, no convoy discipline or nothing like that. We went through the canal, got through there real quick, 13 days and 4 hours when we got back there. On VJ Day we were in Bombay and the word went out the Japs had surrendered and he wouldn't let us ashore. No, the

07:30 old man would not let us ashore.

And which ship were you on - ?

I think I was on the Cape Town Castle then. I was on 2 or 3 cape boats and I always get them a little bit mixed up, but we done the East Africa/South Africa route and then we done the Indian route and so on but I always remember that because as I say, peace was declared on VJ Day and we were laying off at Bombay there, ready to go in and the old man wouldn't let us ashore. He reckoned he wouldn't have

08:00 seen us for a week. He was probably right too and then we picked up a load of Japanese women actually from Bombay and took 'em into Kobe but we weren't even allowed ashore there. There was a lot going on there, a lot going on but they'd dropped the bomb by then, see.

On these trips east on

08:30 **several ships, 2 or 3 ships, what would you do when you weren't working?**

I'd get paid off one, I'd maybe have a week's leave and go back on another one.

I mean when you weren't on watch, like - ?

Oh, you'd have your leisure time down below. You'd have four on and eight off. You'd have your meals, you'd do your bit of washing, you'd do your bit of mending, maybe play a bit of cards or something, still have your lookouts and everything mind, you know and you're

09:00 still a bit weary because I didn't want to get captured by them little yellow sods, I didn't fancy that at all. Never had any real apprehension about the Germans, they were pretty good but you see, the Yanks stuffed that up too you know because I'll tell you the name of the ship, no I can't remember it but I can tell you it was when they had a load of Italian POWs onboard and this German U-Boat sunk this ship, you see.

09:30 When they realised they were Italian POWs, which of course were their allies, they came up and started to take the life boats in tow, okay. I think they were going to tow them back to North Africa or to that direction. What happened? Mr America comes up and bombed them straight like a submarine, didn't he? Didn't he know? Didn't he see them boats he was towing? From there on in it was no more

10:00 helped. I've got the name of the ship, I can give it to you but that is a fact. They never found out who the pilot was or they didn't want to know I think more to the point, that would be typical. The German was doing a chivalrous act and that's what - well from there on in of course, no more helping survivors.

Perhaps I'll just go back a little bit, what did you know about the Japanese before you made these trips East?

10:30 Oh, fellow merchant seamen had told me all about them. Some of them had had ships sunk by them because they'd been over in that neck of the world just when they came into the war so they knew all about it, the Highland Chief, didn't it come out of Singapore, remember? They bombed and scraped that and everything but they had a nasty reputation among merchant seamen I can tell you, particularly so. No one wanted to know them.

11:00 Germany was a little bit, you know, apathetic maybe is the word.

And the cape boats running to the East, what kind of arms were they carrying?

Passenger ships. Union Castle Line to be precise. Their usual peace time trip was Southampton, Mombasa,

11:30 Durban, Cape Town, East London and back. That's where they done the Cape run all the time and they went via, what's the name of them islands? Via there, he made the first stop there, it was a good run but the ship itself, the food was diabolical on them cape boats, they were renowned for it. The food was atrocious. Oh, down to the Canaries we used to go and then straight on through to,

12:00 through the Canal down to Mombasa and then down to Durbin, Cape Town, East London. It was a good run.

And what type of weapons or - ?

Oh she was well armed. All along the boat deck they were terrifically well armed, no debate about that and they were biggies you see. Cape Town was 27,000 ton. That's what I mean, today that's a life boat but then it was quite big. I got on all right with them, the

- 12:30 run was good, the food was diabolical but you know, I don't fancy them Atlantic cold runs at all. I'm a warm person myself, they can have it.

Whose responsibility was it to look after the arms on board?

On a big ship like that you'd have a load of DEMS gunners see and they'd have a CO [Commanding Officer] kind of bloke but we supplemented the crew. They didn't have enough to man the whole weaponry. There would be one gun layer on that one, one gun layer on - and we would supplement

- 13:00 them with the crew because we had gunnery tickets, see. He was in charge of the guns, so be it. That's as simple as that.

And were there any incidents of having to fire those guns on - ?

Oh yeah, quite a few times we let go at something, you know, planes and that coming over. I don't think there was any Japanese submarine action but it was there, it was still there, you know, I

- 13:30 mean, you had to be a bit wary, always sailed in convoy. Big convoys they were too. There were cape boats there, there were the mail boats, the Pacific Steam Navigation, all the biggies going out east taking all troops out and taking some back too. Those who had got heat exhaustion and all that kind of thing and of course we took Jap POWs back then didn't we, after that it was a bit you know - we took some back to

- 14:00 Sydney actually.

We'll come back to talk about that but I'm just interested to hear your first trip to Bombay, when you got on shore, what were your first impressions, what did you do?

I can't really go into that, you've got a list. On that Arundel Castle there was 13 boys, believe it or not. They seem to specialise, the old cape boats,

- 14:30 in a load of boys and they always used to approach me a little bit diligently, "Could you take us ashore and show us around?" "I know what you mean, you dirty little sod," but I want go into detail.

Well, you don't have to go into very specific details but we have spoken to quite a few navy men and merchant navy men and quite often the conversation

- 15:00 **does get around to brothels and I'm just wondering if - ?**

No, not me, mate. I could get plenty of that without that, I can tell you. I knew my way around Bombay because my ship mate on there was an Anglo-Indian wasn't he? Mm, we knew our way around. We used to go swimming a lot as well. We used to go out to beach, Kandi at the swimming pool there and go swimming but I knew my way around there. I could speak a bit of Hindu anyway and he was my mentor, as you

- 15:30 like in that port of Bombay but we had a good time.

If you can't tell me about - ?

Specifics.

The specifics, maybe then you can tell me how you got your tattoos?

In Bombay actually, most of them. I wasn't full of a boot or nothing. I done it quite deliberately.

Why did you want to get tattoos?

It was the done thing then, it would seem, wouldn't it? All British seamen had a

- 16:00 tattoo, didn't they? Well you won't find hardly one that isn't. It's never bothered me over the years quite frankly. A lot of them "Oh, I wish I hadn't done it." It never bothered me one iota.

Why was it a badge of honour for you to get the tattoo?

I suppose going along, going with the flow I suppose if you really think of it that way, going with the flow, you know, they were all tattooed on the ship and so on.

- 16:30 Oh no, the team would be, British Seamen were known for their tattooing, weren't they? Just par for the course I suppose. As I say, I never regretted it, it never bothered me in anyway.

Well it is interesting, it's about I guess being able to be identified as a sailor or as a seaman?

No, no, nothing like that. They could tell who you are, don't you worry about that. You didn't have to roll up your sleeves. They could tell at a glance who you were, especially in Sydney.

17:00 They knew who you were all right, don't worry about that. I suppose it was going with the flow with the lads, you know it was just one of those things, wasn't it? It never bothered me. They done it by hand then by the way. No machines then, I can assure you. They used to have the old needle and Indian ink there and prod frequently, no, no

17:30 BZZZ then! There you go.

Well I imagine that must have hurt?

It brought tears to your eyes, I can tell you especially if some of them had it on delicate parts. I thought, "Not for me, mate!" Yeah, certainly bring the tears to your eyes and they weren't fussy either.

Do you remember the day or the night you got your first tattoo, like what

18:00 **was happening?**

I can't remember and I wasn't full as a boot either. Now that's the general - "I was drunk, I didn't know what I was doing." I wasn't drunk. I'd never hardly, I can't say I ever get to the stage that I don't know what I'm doing. Grog doesn't affect me at all. As a matter of a fact, as I said to your mate, it makes me even meaner, it does. I never get, "Yeah, here, have a drink," I never get like that. You tell the boys, they all think, "We'll get the old man full tonight."

Well, what about the sights of

18:30 **Bombay in the mid forties when you were there, what - ?**

It always strikes me as a place, every continent to me gives me a different impression and India per se always struck me as a land of great mystery, now don't ask me why, there's a lot of mystery about it, do you know what I mean? Hidden debts that you can't see, India, you know? There was Indian navy mutiny too after the war, oh dear

19:00 oh dear but I knew my way around Bombay by then see, I was right over the other side of the city in a cinema called the New Metro, and it went berserk, the whole city but I knew my way around and I managed to get back to the ship but it was a scary night.

And Bombay back then, was it, how easy was it to get around and - ?

You had to know your way, you had to know your way.

19:30 **Well how did you find your way around?**

Well I knew, I'd been there so many times I did know my way and this Anglo-Indian mate of mine, he knew his way from A to Z. He showed me, he rattled off in their do to the bloke, you know, pulling the gharrys, he'd rattle off to them and off we'd go, end up in some hotel or somewhere, not for us, the common seaman's haunts, yeah. There's a lot of lurks there too but I won't go into them.

A bit of black

20:00 **market trading?**

No, not exactly, quite the reverse.

What do you mean?

Well, with the female of the species you had to know your way around. You couldn't pick up ordinary Indian girls. It's like most countries. Your South Americas, you would not approach a normal girl there, you'd be in big trouble.

So you would rely on introductions or - ?

That's right, yeah. The Parsi, d'you know the Parsis

20:30 there? They're the Indian Jews, they're the educated ones. They're the Jews, if you like, of India. If you get in with that crowd, you're all right, I tell you.

What about dancers and going to dances, did you go to any dances?

Didn't have time for that. At South America we used to. I always remember down there, we were down in Buenos Aires there and we all goes up that night, all hopped up to the mission and there was a big dance

21:00 there and out the front, there was a German ship tied up behind us, see and after exchanging the usual ribald remarks to one another we met them up the mission that night and I tell you what, made us look like tramps. They're all immaculately turned out, spoke nicely, all good dancers. I took a lesson from that. I thought, "Right, dance lessons for me, mate. That's it." Yeah, they were good, very well

21:30 behaved and they'd come back and then we got yarning to 'em because seamen are seamen, whatever and they come down and they looked in our quarters and they said, "No way we'd sail in that." Yeah, very efficient they were, very nice blokes. Deported themselves ashore very nicely. You remember when they sunk the Graf Spee don't you? Down at Montevideo, there. Have you heard of that? Hans

Langsdorff, the captain?

22:00 No, well what happened, he was a German raider, wasn't he? He was down at South Atlantic and he sunk all these merchant ships. Actually, I knew the captain of one of them and eventually he got bottled up in Montevideo, didn't he, with the three British cruisers outside, the Ajax, Achilles and the Exeter and they had him bottled up in Montevideo? Well, he come out of there and went out into the river plate

22:30 and he scuttled his ship, if you've ever seen that film, then he went back ashore and he committed suicide but what they never told you, at his funeral courtage all the merchant seamen, as captives he had aboard, marched behind his funeral cortege. Lovely man and I knew Captain Dove off the Africa Shell that they feature in the film.

23:00 A gentleman from the old school, Hans Langsdorff.

And how did you know him?

How did I know of Captain Dove? I met him once. We were, I don't know, I think it was in Halifax in Canada. We were all at this big social there, someone told me who he was and I went over and I - lovely man too, lovely man, yeah. You don't get

23:30 that strict class barrier, onboard ship you do but not ashore. You don't get that strict 'them and us' if you know what I mean. You generally socialise a bit, not fully in their company but it wouldn't be amiss for you to have a conversation with him, put it that way and being forever nosey, I wanted to know about it and he told me. Yeah, if you ever read the story it's good about the, there's a good

24:00 film on it, Peter Finch played Langsdorff, didn't he? Don't you remember seeing the film? Yeah, Peter Finch played that part. We digress.

We do, so back to the cape boat runs that you were doing East?

Out from Southampton, Bombay and after the fall of Singapore we were doing Singapore picking up POWs, some we brought

24:30 back to Sydney. There was a bit of a mishap there, we come up to Sydney, never believed it in my life, off Sydney Heads, out come the pilot to pilot us through up the harbour and they're rowing. I thought, "Christ almighty." There'd be big sweeps out and there was a big swell out there "I can't believe this." Anyhow, up they come with the pilot, I was on the wheel actually and we were coming up through Sydney

25:00 Heads, now you might finish your stint at the wheel at that time but the pilot will often refuse to let you leave the wheel because you've got the feel of the ship coming up there and the old man will say, "Look, just stop on the wheel," which I did. Now we're coming up Sydney Harbour there and the word had got around that we had all these Australian POWs aboard, okay? We had very tall masts on there and it was reckoned we were going to clear the

25:30 bridge by 5 or 6 foot, it was very little and the pilot's looking apprehensive and remember this, the pilot advises the ship's captain, it's the pilot's advice and master's responsibility so at any time, the captain can take over from the pilot. If he does, he's in dire straits, mind if anything goes wrong but in the ultimate, he is responsible for what the pilot does you see. So, we're coming

26:00 up there and out come all these boats to meet these POWs, didn't they? Well what that had the effect of it was creating a swell and you can imagine that mast going like that with the bridge and I could see the old man getting more worried and worried and looking up and looking - he stopped like that to the pilot, "Full astern!" he shouts out to the bloke on the telegraph and I said, "She's not answering," because once the ship's engine stop, you've got no way on it, you

26:30 can't steer the ship see, then we are stuck right out in the middle of the road. The biggest ship about 19,000 tons and what could we do? Fortunately, there was a tug there and he grabbed us quick and pulled us into Woolloomooloo but I'll never forget that. It was the only time I've ever seen the old man take over from the pilot.

And what ship was that on?

On the El Kantara, mail boat.

27:00 Good ship that, we used to do that run right down from Rio, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, up the plate to Rosario, come down through there and we used to go down through the Straits of Magellan, you know the Straits of Magellan, right off the tip there. Come through there, go up to the Pacific Islands, down to New Zealand, down to Sydney. Good run, beautiful run,

27:30 good ship that.

Well, I might come back to talking about that ship but before we do, I'd just like to go back to the first time you laid eyes on Australian POWs, can you tell me about that experience and - ?

It was horrifying.

What did you see?

Emaciated people that were, some of them were running around in a,

- 28:00 how could I describe it? It wasn't in an offensive way at all but so glad to be out and to see them would have turned your stomach, skeletons and that they were. I didn't like to see it to be honest. I know the poor buggers couldn't help it, I know that but it's not a nice sight, I can assure you.

Where were you the first time you saw them?

Singapore.

- 28:30 They had a load of Jap prisoners there but they tell us, they said, "Don't go ashore at night, there's still a lot of them lingering around," and they were on the quay working and these guards had 'em up on this tin roof. Bloody Singapore, it was frying and I said, "Oh well, I want some of those Japanese boots for souvenirs," because they had these boots with a separate big toe in 'em, see. "Right,"
- 29:00 he said, "Don't get between me and them, go around in a circle so that you leave my line of fire open," so I nicked a pair of boots, didn't I? Flogged them to the Yanks for dollars, for Malayan Straits dollars then, wasn't it? Then there were thousands of bills that Japanese had printed, hundred dollars, thousand dollars, they weren't worth nothing, you
- 29:30 know, but thousands of that. I met my brother out there too, just recognised him one day when I sat on this bridge and thought, "Somehow that bloke - recognise the walk." It was my brother out there. He'd been out there for some little while, yeah, right out in Singapore.

And what did you sit down and talk with him about?

Oh, we got together and we had a quick yarn. He had to go back to his ship and

- 30:00 there's a little story attached to this. We were stopping in the, oh what's the name of the club there? We'd been paid off the ship temporary. There'd been a little bit of shenanigans going on I believe in Port Swettenham with some cargo that went missing. It was nothing to do with the crew down there, it was up there. Some of the cargo disappeared. You'd be surprised how much of that went on, too.

Off your ship?

Yeah and they put us ashore there temporary while they

- 30:30 got to the bottom of this, you know. It didn't worry us. We were staying in this club there and I don't know why they impounded the ship like that in Singapore.

And that was on your first run?

No, no, sometime after. I stopped out there then for, I don't know, 6 or 7 months just doing that run, Bombay, Singapore. Then after a while then to Japan, then

- 31:00 back to Sydney.

I'm just curious about what type of shore leave you might have got in Singapore?

I used to go up to the New World, didn't I? The New World, the Happy World and so on. See, you wouldn't know those places, would you? With my dollars in my hand, big dance halls they were.

What was Happy World like?

You got happy if you were lucky, didn't you? There was all Chinese girls in there, all Chinese girls in there. If you got lucky,

- 31:30 well you got lucky. That's it. I don't want to go into any detail.

I'm just trying to paint a picture of what Singapore was like at that time and - ?

What was it like? Very, I don't know, rowdy, dirty, remember it just come from being occupied by the Japs for how many years? Two or three years, wasn't it? It wasn't nice.

- 32:00 You had to be careful where you went, you know. I got to know my way around there a bit especially when we were put ashore. I think it was the Navy Leagues Club we stopped at when we went ashore there. I didn't dislike it myself. We used to call in at Colombo on the way out. That was a nice stopping place.

Well, you've mentioned VJ-Day,

- 32:30 **I'm just wondering, do you recall getting news of the atomic bomb being dropped or - ?**

No, no. All we got, see we always got, we never had no wireless news or nothing like that, was the bare mention the Japs had surrendered and we knew it to be true because the whole of the city while we were anchored off at sea was going into pure bedlam if you know what I mean and there we were,

33:00 stuck out there. I suppose, up to a point the old man was right. He wouldn't let us ashore because we'd have disappeared for a week I suppose and he probably knew by then we had to do an emergency ration to Singapore, too. He was boss and that was the end of it.

Was there any way or - any kind of

33:30 **celebration at all on your - ?**

No, just remorse mostly, just remorse. Just pure anger. "Look at them buggers over there having a good time while we're stuck here." That's the way it goes.

It's an interesting point. Out of all the ships that you were on, were they mostly happy ships do you think or - ?

Every ship had an

34:00 atmosphere love, now I don't know if you believe in atmosphere cause I believe in 'em implicitly. You can go into some houses and you can feel the vibes, right? It's got nothing to do with the furnishings, the opulence, there's a certain ambience about a house and its more so on a ship, much more so. The minute you walk up that gangway, you know, "I'm not going to like this," or - and it's got

34:30 nothing to do with the material side of the equation at all. It's just ships more than ever, take on an ambience and that is true. Some are happy ships, some aren't and it's nothing to do with the individual either, it's just the way things are. I know that them coffin shops they had after, when France had been liberated, they couldn't get a crew for them for love nor money. Blokes would not just -

35:00 and they're not afraid of death per se, it was just the atmosphere parading on them ships, you know. A whole cargo of coffins.

How did you or what did you use as markers of a good ship or a happy ship?

It's indefinable, really. You can be, the run makes a lot of difference. If you're going down the Cape, that's a nice run, good weather,

35:30 warm, blah, blah, blah. Not too hot. If you're going up the Persian Gulf it's nasty, mind. That gets really steamy. The crew certainly - that helps but there is a certain indefinable 'I like this ship'. As you probably know, there are certain factors in life you can't put a tangible answer on, isn't there? It's just one of them things.

36:00 **What about your relationship to the sea? You've talked a bit about it but, and you didn't get seasick - ?**

Never did in my life.

What about I guess, memories of the sea being completely magic and - ?

I've seen all its moods, all its moods. You're on lookout on a beautiful, the moon is shining right across the water and other times, she's rolling on her beam end and

36:30 the water's coming up over the bridge and so on and everything is latched down. It's all got it's various moods, I was never afraid, it never particularly bothered me at all. All the passengers, if you've got any, were as sick as a dog. I remember the time we had all these ATS we were bringing home from just over India there and they were hanging over the ship's rail and they were that helpless

37:00 they couldn't move, we had to go and drag them off the ships side, they were that bad and they didn't look pretty, I can tell you. We just laid them out on the hatch there because they'd have gone over the side you know. A lot of the troops got terribly seasick, terrible. The Italian POWs were the worst, they wouldn't move. They'd lay in their own vomit there and we'd have to put the hose on them. They'd give up the

37:30 ghost, they did, completely.

And when did you come into contact with the Italian POWs?

We brought Italian POWs, let me think, we brought some from Sydney actually, we did indeed. We brought back some from Sydney. There'd been a lot, you know POWs, we brought some back from Sydney. We took a load

38:00 once from Australia, troops, Australians and we were taking 'em back to the UK. Now don't ask me why, but we got as far, getting into the Mediterranean, we had a flash message - "Go out quick, get into Haifa. Big trouble there," which there was then with the Palestine Police. These Palestine Police, they'd been sat on

38:30 the jetty for about 2 days, on their gear because they didn't want it booby trapped and then we had to get the Australian troops off. Gee, there was a row that day. This CO of troops, as he was, aboard there he had these Aussies lined up and said, "You've got to be disembarked here." Well, you should have heard the language and we were laughing our head off at Mr Pompous there addressing these Australian

- 39:00 troops and we disembarked them at Haifa and then we were trying to take these Palestine Police aboard because you wouldn't remember the Stern Gang would you? Or the Haganah? You know, the instigator of terrorism don't you? It was the Jews and that is a fact. They'd hung three British sergeants and blown up the Prince David Hotel and they reckoned we weren't going to leave Haifa.
- 39:30 So we then brought all these Palestine Police, they were British probably and we had to keep a 24 hour watch. They reckoned our ship wasn't going to leave Haifa because they'd been known to be bunging bombs through port holes on different ships and that. Anyhow, we were up all night watching everything, seeing they weren't putting limpets on and we had frogmen swimming around the ship all
- 40:00 the time and just before we left, with a ship like that, you always try the main engines before you leave and we were just about to switch over to the main engines, I was in the wheelhouse and this bloke comes running up, this frogmen bloke and he said, "Don't do that, we've got a bloke sat on the propeller," but no, I didn't care for them gentleman after that what they done. We were completely indifferent and yet they were going to - and
- 40:30 they believe it or not, look back at history with a star of terrorism. I've never had much time for them since. There was - Piggins was one, wasn't he? They were all part of this 'Stern Gang' and they all turned into - Who was the woman there? The big woman, that Jewish leader? I can't think of her name, she was in it too. Killed these bloody three British sergeants, all they were doing was trying to police the joint, you know,
- 41:00 to stop the Arabs getting at them.
- Okay, our tape's just about to run out so we'll just quickly -**

Tape 9

- 00:33 **You mentioned the day they had VJ-Day but where were you earlier on when Victory in Europe was announced?**
- Where was I when Victory in Europe? I was in the Channel somewhere I think, somewhere in the Channel if I seem to remember rightly. In the English Channel doing one of our little trips across and then, that's right, I can't be precise about
- 01:00 exact dates, it was never my strong point. Figures mean nothing to me, they're completely emotive things. Give me an event and I could tell you when I was 3 years old but figures - I was not at home, I can tell.
- So there were no memorable events or celebrations that stand out?**
- They went mad everywhere. The British went berserk. When we heard the announcement, everyone was very, very happy onboard, but the ship's still got to be run, hasn't it?
- 01:30 You couldn't break into some riotous parties. I think by the time we got back the most of it was over but even then, even then, you couldn't rely on the fact that there was nothing there that couldn't happen to you. There was always the odd rogue - and plenty of mines around. They didn't just switch off like that.
- 02:00 **The other couple of things I wanted to pick up on, well they're not necessarily in order but, the SS Sandra?**
- Mm.
- What can you tell us about her?**
- It was the usual routine, she's a Panamanian. That means a flag of convenience, doesn't it? A very motley crew. The old man was the owner and captain on there. Message - "Go to the assistance of the Sandra." Bearing in mind this was pretty near
- 02:30 war zone, there's not a lot happening there otherwise we wouldn't have gone nowhere near it. Now again, we come to this intangible question, you could say to me, "Was she torpedoed or was she mined?" You can't tell.
- Well firstly, to people who may not have any idea what we're talking about, can you explain the situation of what happened?**
- She was sunk by enemy action and I can't be no more precise about that. As I said to your companion there that I was on a ship
- 03:00 that sunk right in front of us and I didn't know the actual cause until I read a book about 3 years ago, and it had all the statistics there, so.
- Well leaving all those statistics, which someone could read the book themselves, what did you see of the Sandra?**

She was going down pretty fast and she was going down straight. Now we found out later she had a bolt cargo of cement. Now when you get bolt cargoes, iron ore is the worst. There's no buoyancy in it. You get timber or anything like

03:30 that, you get a fair bit of buoyancy in it but once, you used to come into port at Durbin and we used to pick up iron ore there, they'll only put about a third of the hull's capacity down there and that is it, tonnage wise and you're down in your marks but there's no buoyancy in it so if you get torpedoed it goes WHOOPH! Doesn't it, and that's what happened to her, she was sinking fast. They got a boat away, we never really hung around too long and we picked up the

04:00 survivors and one interesting factor, the old man I didn't know who he was at the moment, dropped a briefcase, he came up over the side. I found out later it was loaded with money, I was very distraught about that.

Where were you?

Somewhere off, between Cape Town and Durban.

And this was while you were on the Cape Town Castle?

Yeah.

Can you explain what the survivors, what condition they were in?

Pretty poor,

04:30 pretty poor but see, when you get a ship of convenience, as is that one, they're all the dregs. They're paying nothing and so on which is happening today by the way and in the event of them ever wanting a merchant fleet they will regret it. As that happened, in the Falklands not that long ago, they had to pay for foreign shipping. Now if in the event again this ever happens and if you're going to hire 'flags of convenience', they're not concerned

05:00 with Australia, no patriotism. It's who can pay the biggest dollar and that's what will happen again?

What condition were the survivors in?

Pretty ropey, pretty bad, pretty bad. We took them aboard and gave 'em a good old feed, showered 'em and whatever, they weren't too bad. Where did we drop 'em off? Port Said I think we dropped 'em because 'flags of

05:30 convenience' really, they've got no backup see, no shipping company or nothing like that that's going to - you're obliged to pick them up as a rule of the sea. You're obliged to get them safely ashore but you're not obliged from there on and about there. Repatriation if you like.

It sounds very much as though they were slightly suspicious? What was your attitude towards them?

They might have had something on there we didn't know about too, I don't know. It could

06:00 be, I don't know.

Given that you didn't know exactly what had happened, the assumption must have been, this ship had been sunk by enemy action - ?

Yeah.

And how did that make, what was the response from your ship?

See, you can't make a clear definition on this. It could have been torpedoed, it could have been mined, he could have done something and sunk the bloody thing himself for insurance because it was a wreck. That I don't know and you never will know either but I suspect

06:30 it was mined. I didn't have the intelligence, if it had been a U-Boat attack per se and they proved it, I don't think they would have let us near them anyway. They're never going to risk one ship for that, I can assure you. You know the old U-Boat tactic, they'll sink one and just hover around until another comes to pick 'em up, won't they? They use it as a decoy see so I suspect from that, the logic being, it was not a

07:00 U-Boat attack but I don't know.

What sort of damage did you see, was it on fire, was it burning?

It was smoking from the foxhole, smoke pouring out the foxhole and she was settling bodily so you conclude from that, all the hatches were bolted right across. You'd get it up one end and then she'll go up like that so, that's what we suspect but they came onboard, we treated them well. We put 'em up as it

07:30 were and then we landed them in Port Said, our duty done.

What other times in your career did you have to pick up survivors?

Mostly we didn't, this is a fact, we didn't and that's been to my eternal regret too. I never sleep well over that but I couldn't have done nothing about it but it still, how can I put it? You never feel happy about it. To hear

08:00 blokes in the water and you can't stop it. If you stop, there'll be someone there waiting to pick you off as well. The navy sometimes came to the rescue but not often. It makes you think, "Well that's the fate I've got," but if you're going to be perfectly - how can I say? - logical about it, "One ship's gone, one crews gone. Shall we risk

08:30 another crew and ship?" because they will lie and wait. Perfect target, isn't it? It never leaves you, believe me, that feeling of guilt about it. I couldn't have done nothing about it obviously and that's why I don't sleep at night, some nights.

You mentioned that feeling of guilt and the image of people screaming for help, can you

09:00 **give us an idea of where that was and what situation you were in?**

One time was in the Channel, we passed one coaster that had really got the WHACK. Now that's in the Channel and you'd think a ship was passing fairly close but there wasn't at this time and it gets very, very cold in that Channel so your survival is not very good. Even in the English Channel, a couple of hours and you're gone. Of course up near Russia, it's only

09:30 a couple of minutes, isn't it? You're gone.

And what could you see or hear of these people in the water?

Just shouting out and that in the distance and, look it upsets me too much. I don't like to think about it even but you've always, as I say, got that feeling of guilt. Why? I don't know but it's just one of them things.

10:00 I shall dwell on that tonight I expect. It hits you at different times, you get your off moments. The wife quietens me down but the older you get, the worse it gets too. I see all these bastards like Bush and Co, glorifying something they don't know nothing about.

10:30 **I certainly don't wish to make your nightmares worse but I think that's a very valuable topic for us to talk about, is how all this has affected you, and if you would be willing to share with us what effect and what symptoms that effect has on you, not to know what you mean when you say, "you'll be dwelling on that tonight"?**

There's no positive trigger, there's no trigger. My psych - well,

11:00 psychologist tells me that there is no - the brain's a funny thing. You can have a remote something there and it will trigger it off. There's no definite key, "If I do this, I'll do that and I'll do that." It doesn't work that way at all. Something you can't see will trigger it off and then I'll be hollering and shouting and apart from that, I manage to keep it under control. I don't take

11:30 any tablets or nothing. I take maybe the odd sleeper but apart from that, no. I go to regular visits to the old psycho, she's a lovely lady. We talk, I can open my heart to her and that's good but as I say, I never at any time had any feelings re panic, even the other - about 12 months ago we had a write-off on a brand new car, icy cold. I

12:00 would say, without trying to brag about this, I would be probably better in an incident of that kind than anyone else. My first reaction is icy cold, "What can I do?" That's the first thing, "What can I do? We'll deal with the emotions later." You can't all go running around, can you? Like a headless chicken. The first thing I do, I see the wife's there, collapsed

12:30 like that. No, she hadn't been hit. Car was stowed in just behind her, she sat, on the passenger's side behind was stowed right in. Smoke coming out the dashboard. Now I thought, "The normal procedure is you do not move anyone out of a car unless you've got to, because you can do more harm than good." So I thought, "Right." I made sure that door was openable, no one around for the minute. Hops out on my side, rushes around,

13:00 pulls the door open and she come to a bit. I said, "Are you feeling all right? Nothing - " so and so and I just gently let her out and the car started burning, so I done the right thing but that's the way you've got to feel. You've got to do that in an accident. If everyone panics, you're going to get nowhere.

When you told us that story before you said, " - but that will come back to you later"?

I never had any reaction from that somehow. That maybe in 20

13:30 years when I'm not here, I don't know. I've never had any reaction on the road or nothing, extra cautious and it wasn't my fault really. What happened, I come to this halt sign, cruises gently down the road and you know the white line that demarcates the road? That was worn out, wasn't it? So I eased out of there a bit, couldn't see no white line next minute, WHACK! Someone had

- 14:00 hit me behind and the next thing, another car hit me right on the side and spun me right across the road. As I say, I was temporarily out, very temporarily and then I came to and I said, "Right, let's get the wife out of there because this car's going go up." You've got to take the lesser of the two evils then, haven't you? If you leave her in there, she's gonna fry. I should have done and I didn't, I should have gone to the DMR [Department of Main Roads]
- 14:30 and took a photo of that white line that wasn't there and then the police told me after, there'd been about 7 or 8 accidents there and I said, "Then why the bloody hell hasn't someone done something about it?" But, there you are. That's life.

You say you might get something 20 years on, is that your reaction to the war?

I never suffered nothing for years after but I was always a bit wary of being penned in somewhere, I never liked that.

- 15:00 I always wanted to say "I can go out that door, I can go out - " that was always with me but over the years, worse. My doctor in the end, my doctor down there said, "Look, I know you don't like talking about it but it may just ease your mind a little to go and see a psychiatrist." So I see old Brian Thompson, marvellous man, marvellous bloke, you know. You just talk it over with him and he helps you along and he sees some logic,
- 15:30 just talking to him alone but apart from that, I'm as lucid as ever.

Are there any other images that you find difficult, for whatever reason, to deal with apart from that feeling of 'locked up' and the idea of 'guilt' from the people you saw?

Yeah, they're the principal ones. They are the principle ones. I can't think of, I was pretty gung-ho at the time, you

- 16:00 know, if it was on the cards well, it was on the cards. At that age, you generally are, aren't you? Mind you, no idea of the actual figures, don't think that you know that one in four of you is going to go, they're not going to tell you that, I can assure you. Perhaps if you knew that you'd be a lot more apprehensive, wouldn't you?

How did it affect you to see the condition of the prisoners of war that you were picking up?

POWs picking

- 16:30 up? We didn't pick 'em up, mate. That was on the, I think you've got your facts wrong there.

I was led to believe you took them from Singapore to Sydney?

Ah yeah, yeah, yeah. Singapore to Sydney, yeah. Picking up in the land sense, you mean?

I'm sorry, taking onboard.

Taking onboard, yeah. You've got to be a little bit more specific.

My sea vocabulary is not up to scratch?

You got me going for a minute. I thought Jeez, is my memory that bad?

- 17:00 Now how did that affect us? A profound hatred that I've never lost of all things Japanese and I'll never get over it, never.

What are the images in your mind that inspired that hatred, what did you see that inspired that?

Well apart from that, some of the older hands who'd done runs out that way, obviously not in Singapore because the Japanese occupied out that

- 17:30 way and I've got a load of stuff in there. Read their 'Special Dispensation for Merchant Seamen', which was pretty bloody horrific, believe me! Picking up the survivors, running them along the submarine case, bayoneting them and throwing them back in the water. At the very best, if they just shot 'em in the water but not that extra touch like that and things like that. Nasty buggers
- 18:00 and they got away with it. That's the thing that constantly gripes me, they've never apologised, they've never paid recompense.

What opportunity did you have to interact with the prisoners of war and what were they - ?

They were mostly like that. When you get a major catastrophe like they'd been through, they do tend to focus in on themselves.

- 18:30 Don't go up to 'em saying, "Are you feeling better now, mate?" Don't say that because you don't know what you're talking about, that kind of thing see so, they're mostly focus in on themselves you'll find and you'll help 'em in anyway without getting anything personally involved because they don't like that. In fact we found that out pretty quick.

And what did you see of their homecoming? You mentioned before the waves in Sydney

Harbour - ?

Oh look didn't they have a terrific homecoming.

- 19:00 Sydney Harbour was solid with ships coming out to meet them. Little pleasure boats and whatever. Oh yeah, they had an outstanding welcome, no debate.

What did they think about that though, if turned inward as they were?

Well some of them were crying obviously. They grouped together a lot and I didn't like to, you didn't want to interfere with that camaraderie if you like, you didn't want to do

- 19:30 that. You've got to trust your feelings sometimes. Certainly quite of the merchant seamen were POWs. Bluey Waterace was one. I think they were glad to get rid of Bluey, actually. I think he talked them to death.

He had a German experience rather than a Japanese?

Yeah, he was all right. They treated him rather well. He told me once, "They had a better ship on there, better food - on there than I did on my

- 20:00 own ship," and that carpenter on there, he was a lovely bloke, I met him.

Now that the war was over,

Yeah.

You were still in the merchant navy?

Yeah.

Yet you've never been in the merchant navy while the war wasn't on, how did the job change and what differences did it take on, for you?

You could choose your own ship for number one.

- 20:30 You were now demobbed [demobilised]. I had a demob number and everything, now I'm demobbed, I am a free agent, okay? Now the first one I done was that big tanker. I done that, that was a lovely job. Then I was thinking of getting married so I had to take shorter trips so I joined the Aquitania. Southampton, Halifax, all right, nice job. I got
- 21:00 some, when you get on them Cunards there's a very close knit crowd they are, the Cunard cable boys and an intruder like me and I'll tell you this story, I goes aboard and I meet the bosun and he said, "How would you like to be leading hand on the watch?" I very near fell over cause that's Cunard, you know, you get that bloke who's been on that ship 20 years. Am I hearing this right?
- 21:30 I found out later he was using me for internal politics, wasn't he? Anyhow, one of the jobs of the leading hand when we were getting rough weather going across to Halifax, was to go, my special job was to go up into the first class deck and check all the dead lights are down. You know the big iron things that come down because we were going to get a blow. So what you do, you go up there, you knock on the door and you walk in, there might be a good sort in there, I don't know. So anyhow,
- 22:00 drops and I'm spiking it up and this voice behind, I'll never forget it. I can't go verbatim and he said, "What are you doing, my man?" And I thought, "Oh, we've got one of those, have we?" I said, "Orders from the bridge, baton down dead lights and expect some rough weather." "Do you know who I am?" I said, "No." He said, "I've crossed this Western Ocean many a time, I'm Commodore Hope." I said, "I don't give an f - if you're Bob Hope, I'm still going to baton this
- 22:30 down." In two minutes the phone rings, doesn't it? "Report to the bridge." Short duration of leading hand over. Anyhow, on the Cunards they have a little bit of a court martial procedure. The old man with gold braid up here and the staff captain and he reads this out verbatim see and he said, "- to which you replied, 'I don't give an f - if you're Bob Hope'," and the old man's head went down on his shoulders and he was shaking with laughter. End of
- 23:00 my short duration of leading hand but you can't resist something like that, can you? You only get a chance like that once in a lifetime.

What ambitions did you have? Where did you want to go at that time?

Well I left there and I went ashore and I went rigging for the Gas Co. for a bit. It wasn't a bad job. Good pay and for some reason, a mate of mine worked at Telecom, he said, "It's a good job. There's plenty of travelling in it. You won't be - " and I went for them.

- 23:30 The wages weren't that good but there were bags of perks, overtime and they selected me to do a lot of broad stuff, you see. I went to the Channel Islands, I used to go to France and I worked my way up and in about 5 years I was the youngest line foreman in the area. I liked it, it was good money. Not basic but good money with all the, you know, which was tax free remember. I done very well there and I worked for

24:00 Telecom out here for a bit. I did a brief stint for Telecom for telephones in Canada. It's right around the world so if I like it see - but I couldn't stand the English winters. That got me down. I could manage to about January and then it got me down physically and mentally. Oh God, not another day like this! Snow up to your behind and so on and you had to get out and work in it and

24:30 that determined me, I wasn't going to stay in that for the rest of my life.

When you first went back to shore jobs -

It's hard.

How did you adapt, tell us about that?

It's hard, it's hard. You've got an 8 to 5 and my mates still going to sea "Yeah, there's a good trip going soon. Going back down, going to New Zealand again." "Want some good ABs? I'm tempted -" And the missus looks at you.

25:00 That's it. It is hard to adapt. You only remember the good times when you're ashore, don't you? You think "Oh, lovely trip down to New Zealand. Great," but I've adapted ever since but I've never, I don't know, I've always had the wander lust a bit, you know. I think if I

25:30 really had to, I wouldn't stop anywhere, I'd be across to Canada right away. Up The Rockies, that's my spiritual home there, The Rockies. I love it there but the winters, ooh no. You've got to strike that medium, haven't you? You've got to say "Oh yeah, I love Canada," but what's the living like? We're confined in a sense, aren't we? I've

26:00 got to bring up a family and I'm not going to do that in the winter there. So that comes into the equation, doesn't it?

What else do you miss about your life at sea apart from the wander lust?

It's that, I've always been a romantic in that sense. "Oh, we're going down to Hawaii," or "We're going down through the Straits of Magellan again," or "We're going to Cape Town," you know that's

26:30 always there, isn't it? That's the good parts you see. Not 8 to 5 and do this for the rest of my life, God! But, the bottom line is you get blokes who've been to sea for 30 or 40 years and can't do nothing else and you'll see 'em outside the sailor's home, just sitting there, boozed up invariably and that.

27:00 That is the end result invariably. I didn't want to have nothing to do with that.

You went into the merchant navy as a young man, as a very young man and you came out after 6 years or - ?

No, I came out in '47, so about 7 years or something like that. Something like that, I can't remember.

27:30 **How had you changed since the time you went in?**

It made a different person out of me, a different person. Compared to a young boy you were completely, you've got no character much at that age but that builds character, it certainly does that. It broadens your outlook on life and everything. You're much more self reliant which you've got to be because in the merchant navy you are your own man.

28:00 I mean not that I'm not saying the discipline aboard ship is rigid but you've got to make your own decisions. "When I leave this ship, where am I going?" and so on. Not like in the navy, they just put you ashore in the barracks and take care of all the intermediate, and you're on your own. So it certainly learns you to be your own man and to be very independent.

What else does it teach you or has it left you with?

I think it builds your

28:30 character no end and another thing I'm absolutely positive off, you meet some of the most interesting people you'll ever meet, really profound thinkers. You can listen and you can learn. It gives you an education in the worldly sense as my niece's husband, who's ex-Oxford, says, "You learned in the best university of all, in the university of life."

29:00 I was saying that I had never yet met a seaman, maybe in the opposite class, who wasn't a rampant socialist plus. Now that's not through any big propaganda effect, he's been around the world. He's seen all the inequities, he's seen all the bad you know and that is a fact. Met a load of Communists going to sea, no problem at all.

29:30 They were mostly very well educated too. Very well educated in that particular field, they could quote you chapter and verse, whatever you like. Never once did they ever coerce me in any way. If we were interested, so be it. If not, that's all right.

So your world view, your confidence, your character has all improved?

Yeah, absolutely.

Were there any negative things? I say this because I've talked to

30:00 **people who are taken up into a war effort and they feel that they might have had that part of their life stolen from them, how do you respond with that?**

No, not with me. No, I never regretted one minute of it other than what we say, I get this business but that couldn't have been avoided. By and large, I wouldn't have had it any other way and I wanted to go to sea. I didn't want to join the navy and they stick me on some bloody shore depot for 12 months.

30:30 That wouldn't have suited me at all. I wanted to go to sea, per se. No ifs or buts.

Did you ever lose that urge?

Mm?

Did you ever lose that urge?

I think it's remotely there now even. I look at these bloody super Tankers and that. Jesus Christ, they're bloody life boats and that! It's not the same thing now. It's all computers on the bridge, isn't it?

31:00 pressing this, pressing that. Not the same at all, not the same. The same as the old sailing Boat, the old man used to tell me about and how they'd love to sail on that. Hard, very, very hard but there was a romanticism about sail. Never met yet one who simply regretted their time in sail, Bluey will tell you that.

You said to us before off camera that you were never one to pass up an opportunity to put your 2 cents in for the merchant navy?

31:30 No, I wouldn't.

If I give you that opportunity now for a couple of minutes, what would you say in support of this service?

What would I say? Forget all the hype and come down to bare statistics, that is the main thing. Now we lost more than any of the armed services by quite a, armed services by the way and us being a misnomer, we were

32:00 trained in naval gunnery, Admiral Donitz, the U-Boat commander said, "As far as he was concerned, we were in the armed service," so that dispels that. This big money we got was a load of rubbish. First of all, we got no pension per se. As soon as the ship was sunk, we were stopped payment. We never had none of them other perks, and it took me 4 1/2 years to become an AB.

32:30 In the navy, they were an AB within 12 months. Maximum pay took me 4 1/2 years to get the maximum pay in the rating stage and that's another misnomer. They got badly represented in all mannerism and I'm just doing battle now with what's her name? The Minister for Vets [Veterans' Affairs], the lady, you know her -

Danna Vale?

Yeah, I'm just doing a battle with her because the other day,

33:00 I don't know, I might have told you this that in the vets' news they put this little item in there about this big new memorial in London and they got down the bottom there, navy, army and air force, no merchant navy. I thought about this, I thought, "I ain't having this," so I penned a letter to the editor and the gist of it was, "Why have you not represented the merchant navy in this,

33:30 this ceremony in London?" It hasn't happened yet, when the ceremony comes along. I wrote along these lines and I said, "It seems to me to be very, very wrong that the Australians who served in the British merchant navy are well represented in the merchant -

34:00 big merchant navy memorial in Tower Hill. Isn't this a fact that the British can represent your Australian seamen and you can't?" Right, no reply. The next issue of the Veterans' Affairs newspaper, big splashes, merchant seamen here, merchant seamen there and the line went something like this, " - and we were all gathered there," and this merchant

34:30 seamen was representing it " - and we also went to Tower Hill." I thought, "Now, is that a coincidence or did I strike a nerve?" So I just wrote a letter back to, I didn't write back to the editor cause I thought he'd bury it, that's why so I wrote back to the minister and I put that "Is that a coincidence, if not, why didn't you put that in the first issue of the vets' newspaper?" Too much of a coincidence

35:00 there. Look, all I wanted, all I wanted was for them to say "Sorry, we omitted to put this in the original," that's all I wanted but when they 'duck and dodge' and things like that, I don't like it. Just say to me, perfectly good manners, "We forgot to put it in," or "We made a mistake," that's all but he never even had the goodness to reply so I wrote to what's her name? Straight away and I said, "I would

35:30 appreciate - " and I will not give up on it either.

Why do you feel that the merchant navy has been forgotten or does get forgotten in these

things?

Mostly their own fault. You know why? They're a very fragmented force. You see, the navy would go aboard a ship and they'd be there for 2 or 3 years but we were never like that. We were very fragmented, you know, so therefore they never - of late they're getting a lot better, mind but don't say "I would

36:00 never represent - " they were very apathetic in that direction but as I say, I put that down to the fact they were never a cohesive united force. I mean we'd go down on our rounds down there, we'd march our big parades there, the navy for every ship sunk, they've a special little division, if you know what I mean. Now if they had a special little division for us, we'd take up the whole march, wouldn't we? It's their fault again. They never got off their, you know,

36:30 the good bloke for that was Con Sciacca, do you remember him? He was Minister for Vets. He was good, he was very good but this one seems to have got, I somehow suspect as well, there may be a bit of influence from ship owners as well. That wouldn't surprise me. They don't want to be reminded of their short comings, that's for sure.

We're coming to the end of the interview so I'll just ask you a couple more general questions, when you think about the war today, it's a long time ago, today

37:00 **we've done a lot of talking about it but when you drag up those events from 60 odd years ago, what images still come into your mind?**

It achieved precisely nothing, it achieved precisely nothing. Germany is rich and getting richer. Italy is doing very, very well thank you. Japan has never paid for its war crimes. It achieved nothing. I've

37:30 often wondered, Hitler yeah he done some dastardly things but no more possibly than what the British done in their chequered past. They've not been the paragons of war virtue, I can assure you. I think it could have been avoided, personally. I think it was vested interest at work. Did you know that Lloyd's Bank in London was trading with Germany right throughout the war? That's

38:00 the thing they don't tell you either, isn't it? There was a lot of vested interest there, I can assure you and did you know who the principal shareholders were in Krupps, the big German arms manufacturers? The British and there was a lot that weren't, I mean Edward, wasn't it? Was the one who was dead against war with Germany and so on. It's not, then they could whip up a better hype than they can today. I think the young people today are

38:30 a little bit, you know, 'why?' and a good idea too. I'd hate to see my grandsons - I'd rather slaughter them than see them go.

With that in mind and taking into account your personal experiences that we've talked about today, is there any message that you might have for the future and someone watching this archive in the future?

Any for the future? I would say without a doubt and if you'd just

39:00 investigate the facts, forget again, forget all the hype, forget all this George Bush bloody advances, obviously wrong, they're trying to take over the world. You've got this World Monetary Fund and so on, Mr Bush went in there primarily for oil. They've admitted as much. That bloke was no more a villain than a lot more and in any event, who put him in there in the first place?

39:30 Mr America. Who trained Bin Laden in Afghanistan? The Americans. It seems one minute he's a villain and next minute, when they wanted him, he's a good bloke and if they're on about the slaughter they'd done, let's just take a look down in Chile where they put Pinochet in and all his ilk, right down through to South America. How many have they slaughtered there at the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] bloody instigation?

40:00 Facts not figures, facts. No and I think they'll outwit themselves in the end. They're not clever people, they're not clever people. Even when I seen him being interviewed the other night by Pilger, he had him running for cover and as I say to anyone who watches Pilger, "Bear this fact in mind, if he said one

40:30 word wrong, they'd be on him like a ton of bricks, they would. He doesn't, he's done homework. He was even presenting one of the chaps he was interviewing with Documentation from their Government, like that and they ended up by insulting him. Are you a Labour man? Are you a Communist? I thought, "Well that's cheap to say the least, isn't it?"

In a slightly less political vein, is there anything personal you might

41:00 **say to someone watching this in the future?**

Mr Howard is one of the big cons in history two or three times, isn't he? Weapons of mass destruction - before that it was the dock strike in which he was well in with his cohort, Mr Reith which he fortunately abandoned, wasn't it? Mr Reith went to a very nice job outside, didn't he? Did you know he was all in cahoots, and the thing that beat them of course was the fact

41:30 that they, the world and I mean I'm saying this loosely, Canada, England, even Japan who I can't stand

but they all said they were going to boycott Australia if they didn't come off their high horse. That is the mercenaries he was training in Dubai, wasn't it? D'you remember that? He was training these mercenaries. Army people, illegal in every sense. They should never have been working for a civilian in any

42:00 case, and incidentally, they never got paid.

INTERVIEW ENDS