

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Ray Barker - Transcript of interview

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### Tape 1

00:37 **Thanks very much for doing this Ray. So can you start just to give us a bit of a summary of your life, can you tell us where you were born and lived as a child and about a little about your family?**

Sure. I was born in Leichhardt in Sydney and my father was a signwriter or

01:00 really a coach painter. Now signing up as a coach painter in 1914 or so, you can understand that it wasn't a particularly good choice because of, you know, coaches were going out of fashion then. But that's who he was. He was unemployed for a few years and he was a painter on the on the [Sydney] Harbour Bridge but we got along all right. Three meals a day and no trouble at all. We had a great life as a kids, brother and myself,

01:30 we were the only two and so that I was educated at Orange Grove Public School and then went on to Stanmore Commercial School - one of those schools set up during the Depression to take the overflow of people not able to get work. But I left school at age fifteen after the intermediate and got a job with

02:00 James Sandy's and they supplied, oh mirrors, paintings, paints, glass, that sort of thing on a site in George Street now occupied by the Australia Square. Stayed there for twelve months but realised I wasn't getting anywhere so I started to write around the companies and got a job with Universal Pictures, and I was there for three years and really being trained to be

02:30 a salesman. I was in the advertising department selling advertising space, wrapping it up what we sold and sending it out to wherever it was bought. And on the other hand at age fifteen I was going around checking the takings of big roadshows like Show Boat and so forth and having to check that the distributors weren't opening a second door and selling tickets twice and/or

03:00 not selling tickets and so. But we used to get two and a six a night for that so that was big time.

#### **A fascinating job for a young man to have.**

Well it was great but even so back at James Sandy's, going back to Sandy's, just to outline the type of working conditions at the time, starting about eight o'clock, clock in of course on the great big bundies [time card clock]. And then we were five of us on the mail distribution

03:30 and we took the city in sections and we delivered the invoices, couldn't... Too expensive to put stamps on them. And so we got to know the city extremely well and I can still find my way around the city pretty well, got to know the inner city very well. But in addition to that I'd have to sweep the floor when I first came in and of a Friday night very quickly I was

04:00 put in charge of the overhead cash distribution little boxes, and they'd come from all the different departments and I'd give the change and pull the string and it'd go back with the change down there. And in addition to that I was the telephonist - six-plug telephonist - aged fifteen. It was it was great, thoroughly enjoyed myself. But Saturday morning we'd have back-up and work till twelve o'clock. But that was quite handy because

04:30 then I could go straight down to the Domain and I was a member of the Sydney amateur swimming club and put in some training or racing and so forth so it was quite good, in the Boyd Charlton swimming [pool]

#### **I'll just stop you there for a second. I just have to check...**

**Yep.**

But after about four months of delivering the mail I was made credit officer for James Sandy's and each morning the accountant would give me a list, and this was

05:00 in the middle of the Depression, 1935, '36 I'm sorry, '36, he'd give me a list of the people to go and try

and get money out of and so I'd go round, age sixteen, and ask these blokes that were on the on their backsides, so poor blokes down The Rocks just with one lathe, dirt floor, trying to earn knock out a crust doing a job in engineering. And I got to know 'em quite well but they didn't

05:30 have any money. But I went in to... Gee, I forget. Smith Weekly. Smith Weekly, and the accountant, I asked him, "Do you have any money for Sandy's?" "Yes, I have. I have an envelope here and I never pay anything without it being asked for."

**That's all you needed to do.**

You learn these lessons the hard way but it was good. But then I joined Sandy's and

06:00 it... I'm sorry, joined Universal, and I was there until the war broke out.

**Mm. We'll go through we'll go through and talk about the war experiences in point form and then we'll come back. I want to go back and...**

Yeah.

**talk about your pre-war life as well.**

So that I joined the navy on the 6th of September 1939 and at Rushcutters Bay and I was at Rushcutters Bay, Garden Island and then down at Flinders, all land

06:30 depots, for two and a half years, and then I was sent on to join the do the officers' course and I and I joined the [HMAS] Perth.

**And this was about the end of '41?**

End of '41 and when the Perth came back from the Med [Mediterranean Sea] and so I joined the Perth and then

07:00 round the Pacific, round Fiji, round the South Australia, West Australia round the Indian [Ocean] and then up to, ah, Java Sea. So that I'd been on the ship, what, three, four months when we went into the Battle of the Java Sea. And then following that of course there was the Battle of Sunda Straits and then

07:30 I was surviving, but I was in the water for about ten hours, mainly on my own. I was with a chap by the name of Gaye and a chap by the name of Harper. He was... Harper was a navigator. Gaye was executive officer who was... He wasn't. He was certainly on the upper deck at the time.

08:00 But those two were the only ones I was with during but left them after a while. They decided just to sort of mark time and I decided to have a go for the island which was stuck up in the middle of Sunda Strait. I always thought it was an outcrop from the Krakatoa explosion - it was just a heap of volcanic ash - but it wasn't, as I've found out just quite recently.

08:30 Anyway, it had a lighthouse on top so I just made for this lighthouse and the current was quite strong, but I was in reasonable nick and I just kept on going steadily, plodding, making towards it as it drift towards Java. But I tended to hold steady to the light and all of a sudden the current started to grip me as the current quickened around

09:00 the island, and I'd done a lot of surfing and a lot of freshwater swimming and, for example, my brother and I would have competitions, "I bet I could swim across this river," and I'd land before by this tree. We'd have competitions to... We learnt to read water and I knew that it was hopeless, so as I do in the surf, I let myself get carried and I knew that the current would break round the south

09:30 of the island, round the other side, so I was swept past the island. And as soon as it started to break I started to make my way in. Just then a voice came out of the darkness, "Could you give us a hand, mate? I'm bugged," so what do you do? You grow up bloody quickly 'cause you had to give him a hand. That was Claude Woodley.

10:00 So I dragged him in with me so and then as soon as he reached the coral I said, "There you are, mate." So I left him on the coral and got to the island. There were ten of us got there, ten, twelve? Getting a bit mixed up now.

**Was the Perth sunk at the same time as the [USS] Houston or it was...?**

About... The Houston lasted about twenty minutes longer than the Perth.

**So at this**

10:30 **point the ten people were all Australians from the Perth?**

Yes, yes. All from Perth. And so of course we're covered in this black goo and there were two lighthouse keepers - two natives, Javanese - and they were marvellous. They had extremely restricted rations. They would be given rice and that was about all for six months, and they were left on the island and the island would only be as big as that island

11:00 just down the bay there, Snapper Island. And but they were there and they gave us rice, they gave us

kerosene to try and get the stuff off and there was very... It's just like a peak, Toppers, and about a hundred steps up the lighthouse up the top of the island and that's about all. It was just this rock. So we went down to have a look round -

- 11:30 this would be about less than an hour after landing on the island - and it was covered in all sorts of flotsam and jetsam. But just then a raft came by with thirteen Americans aboard, the Houston people, and so we grabbed some of the... One could hardly call it rope, but it's the rope that the Nips [Japanese] tie up casks with, made from straw. And
- 12:00 so we decided to have a go at getting them in because the current was taking them past, and so I fell for taking the rope out and bringing them in. But there was another bloke from Perth, he'd started a little further round the island, and he had a biscuit tin. And he was in the water but of course he was being carried by the by the current too, so he grabbed... So we all came in together. But other than that,
- 12:30 the Americans would have been swept past. They were they were just sitting there. They weren't prepared to make a move. But then we decided to. Well first of all what do we do? And we obviously couldn't stay there as hardly any food and we wanted to get on. There was a fighting war going on in Java. There was the cannons going off and so forth so we knew there were fighting,
- 13:00 so it was that point that I realised that in the group there was... Some... I had something to contribute. I was prepared to say my piece and what we were doing, whereas the others were quiet and subdued and so forth. And so I suggested that we built a raft, go down to the big island we could see about five miles away, and then get across to the mainland and try and get round the round the back through the lines.
- 13:30 So that was decided. So we divided up into groups and we built a raft over the next twenty-four hours because there was plenty of material, plenty of material, and then we set off. But the Americans, "No way, mate. You'll be silly. There'll be Americans coming up the Strait any day." They couldn't get rid of the idea that they were going to be rescued so they stayed on the island and we took off
- 14:00 and sailed and paddled and got over to Sangiang. And there was another group over there, about fifty of 'em. They'd picked up a boat 'cause there were a number of other chaps' ships sunk of course, and one of those life boats floating round. And they'd picked it up in the middle of the Strait and rowed to Sangiang. So of course we all loaded aboard
- 14:30 and went down to... rowed across and sailed across to the coast of Java. And quite a number of the people in the boat then got out prepared to walk. They'd had enough of the sea, had to walk down the coast. And we stayed with the craft and sailed down to a place called Labuhan. And there was a... Sunda's... The Sunda area had never really been captured by the Dutch.
- 15:00 The outlaws in Java headed towards Sunda if they tried to get away, and they'd come down out of the hills with their parangs and revolvers and so forth, and there were knives flashing around and they were ugly but they weren't going for the Dutch. There weren't many Dutch there. But they weren't going for the Dutch, they were going for the Chinese cause the Chinese were money lenders so they were killing those. Knocking those off. A couple of our blokes were knocked off
- 15:30 and a couple of others were knifed badly. Anyway we had to get off the island quick, or Java, to a little island off the coast for the night, and we picked a team to who were prepared to have a go on the boat - to go, have a go for Australia. Well it couldn't take everybody because there were about fifty of us, but
- 16:00 so ten were chosen and the rest of us then made off through the jung... through the scrub, because a couple of them were having to be carried, the wounded people, and so after about three days in the scrub all of a sudden we were surrounded by Nips and that was it.

#### **And you became a prisoner of war?**

Yep. So well went into a gaol in Pandeglang, a little town gaol, then after about a fortnight there we

- 16:30 were taken to a place called Selarang, which is quite a big town, and we were in the gaol there for a couple of months, and then to a place called the Bicycle Camp in Batavia. We were in Batavia for about six months and then on the [NK] Maebisi Maru we were taken up to Singapore generally for a couple of days then up to Rangoon, back to Bombay, and down to Tanbuzite, or Thanbyuzayat, and
- 17:00 started to build the railway. So railway, camp after camp after camp, because after the initial establishment of the embankment we went from camp to camp on embankment building, and then when the rail started to be laid we became the rail laying gang and we laid the rail right through Burma and caught up with the people approaching from the
- 17:30 Siam side up near Three Pagoda Pass. And after that the POWs [prisoner of war] were split all over the place. Some were taken up to back to Singapore, some were up to Japan. I stayed on in Siam and ended the war in, oh, about the middle of Thailand up
- 18:00 near the up near Cambodia. So that was it.

#### **How were you repatriated back to Australia?**

Came back oh flew back to Singapore by Dakota and then [HMAS] Manoora back to Sydney. I brought back, ah, the biggest of the surviving group. About fifty of us. I came back.

**How was your health at that stage when you arrived in Australia?**

Oh, I was down to six stone at the end of the war

18:30 but I was all right compared to... It's always 'compared to whom?' but yeah, I had to say I was reasonable. I'd had all the usual things – you know malaria, pellagra, you know. I was isolated for cholera and so forth, but no, obviously I survived. Then following the war, following?

**We'll go on to that and...**

Yep.

**We'll do that as well.**

19:00 **You've got to...**

Right.

**Did it take you a long time to adjust back to civilian life after you'd come back from...?**

No. Surprisingly quickly. I came back with a firm determination to further my education, to get some education. I had not met a person who'd done the leaving certificate before the war and it was a closed book. And while I was away

19:30 some of the positive elements of the three and a half years, it can't be overlooked, it opened a lot of our – I'm not alone when I say this – it opened a whole new world to us. The people we met, the different professional skills we came across, their outlooks, the sets of values, the attitudes were markedly different from our closed, my closed-in world as it were, and I came back

20:00 with a vastly different kettle of fish. Just as a way, by the way, of example, last Sunday I went to Russian Ark. It's a marvellous film

**I saw it last Sunday as well.**

Did you? And it gripped me because while I was away, and that's going back sixty-odd whatever it is, sixty-odd years, I'd read a book called Peter the Great and I'd read a book Catherine the First and

20:30 it gave me a clue to what I was seeing and what the ghosts were giving allusions to, and it was stimulating. It made you think and that's just what our experience did. This was a total... wasn't a totally new experience but it was markedly different experiences. And I came back with a firm determination and one aspect of that, education, and I have to give credit to John

21:00 Carrick for this, the minister for education, we shared a space together for some time, and he had just graduated when he joined the army and was taken prisoner, and he gave a little group of us a talk on psychology. Now on reflection of course he didn't know what he was nattering about, but on the other hand it was it was a refreshing opening for me – like here was an area of study that of people, how

21:30 they go about it, how they behave. And so I came back, and but I didn't have a leaving certificate so I went and they gave me some psych [psychological] tests and the bloke interviewing me at the end of the tests said, "What would you like to do?" I said, "I'd like to do what you're doing." And he anyway I obviously must have got a recommend and

22:00 so I was accepted. I got a mature matric [matriculation]. I was twenty-five by this time and they said, "We'll give you a go for twelve months and see how you go," and I worked like buggery. Didn't lift me head for four years. And at the end of first year the professor of psych said to me, "Would you like to try Honours?" So, "Oh yes. I don't know whether I can, sir." And

22:30 so I went into the Honours course and held my own and graduated with Honours. And so then what do I do with it? But one reason that I did psych within the Arts faculty was that it was obvious that it was truncated towards teaching, and I didn't want to teach. That wasn't for me. I didn't want to handle kids. I'd been mixing it with the big boys, and but I wanted

23:00 this psych business, so I worked my way to England. I did the rounds of the shipping companies and I went into McIlwraith and McEacharn one morning and said, "Do you happen to have a have a job on a ship going to England?" and, "No, no way," from the bloke behind the counter. There was a man standing alongside me. He said, "I'll give you a job." He was the captain of the [MV] Fort Henley. So you... It's not luck.

23:30 You have to work for luck. But so I signed as it was a supernumerary cabin boy, supernumerary, but it was a just peeling spuds and washing up and so forth. And so six weeks between Sydney and Durban, round to port Cape Town for topping up of coal and then up to Antwerp,

24:00 another six weeks. We were doing one knot off Dakar and a full-masted barque sailed past us. It was quite a sight. You don't see those things these days. But the old coal burner was one of the Fort Henley

- ships. And it had a broken back. It had been blown up on the (UNCLEAR) run and been oxy-welded together again and was still afloat, so it wasn't exactly a luxury cruise but it got me to England. So went down to London. They wanted me to sign on. I must have been doing well as a spud peeler. I said, "Where are you off to?" Very tempting, you know. And they said, "Well I think it's Rio. We're not quite sure." Anyway I knocked it back. I said, "No, I want to want to press on." So I went down to London
- 24:30 together again and was still afloat, so it wasn't exactly a luxury cruise but it got me to England. So went down to London. They wanted me to sign on. I must have been doing well as a spud peeler. I said, "Where are you off to?" Very tempting, you know. And they said, "Well I think it's Rio. We're not quite sure." Anyway I knocked it back. I said, "No, I want to want to press on." So I went down to London
- 25:00 and went knocking on doors for... with the various universities and departments. So I went to see Isink - I don't suppose you've ever heard of Isink but he was one of the leading psychologists in the world at the time - and I said "I've been studying your material for a couple of years now. I'd like to work with you." He said, "Yep, okay, as long as you want to do this, that, that." And he gave me
- 25:30 three areas, whereas if, you know, usually you have to determine your own topic but Isink didn't believe in that. He wanted to penetrate deeply and he had a set number of areas he wanted to probe, and anyone that came to him he said, "Love to have you as long as you're prepared to work." And Gordon Hammer from Sydney University was on sabbatical at Kings College, this was
- 26:00 Kings College Hospital, and he gave me recommend of course, and so I started with him. But it was a clinical area. And so I spent some time with Freud's daughter, Sigmund Freud's daughter, just when she was coming to the end, and she gave a series
- 26:30 of lectures and she was the only person that I've ever come across that was clapped before she started. She was good. Better than the old boy. Anyway, but I quickly realised I'd be on the other side of the fence if I stayed in the clinical field, you know, dealing with offbeat characters, so I decided to get into the industrial field. Psych as you know has got education, industrial or
- 27:00 clinical. Well I declined the clinical, I didn't want the education, so I went to the industrial. I got a job with Rowntrees up in York. Rowntrees at that time had the biggest of the personnel research industrial psychology department in the world at that stage and they always carried two graduate apprentices, one male one female. At that time female.
- 27:30 And so they gathered people around them from all over the world and I managed to pick up the male one. It's understood that you do about four years' graduate apprenticeship in which time you do a Master's degree in some aspect of industrial psych within the factory. About twelve thousand people in Rowntrees. And so I did my Master's at Leeds and then British
- 28:00 Petroleum tapped me on the shoulder as soon as I graduated and they'd been obviously watching my progress and said, "Would you like to go back to Australia with the commissioning team to Quintana refinery?" which was being built at that stage. So I came back to Australia with the commissioning team for Quintana. Stayed with them for four years. I'd married in England, to an Australian, she came over
- 28:30 following my... And we had two kids in York. We all came back to Western Australia. After two years at the refinery, 1956, she got polio in the last polio epidemic in the west and so for forty five years I was looking after her with - and she was quite... - all four limbs gone, about thirty per cent lung
- 29:00 capacity. So that changed my what I could do because at that stage after four years, oh, two years with the refinery, I was thinking of going to America and I'd applied to get to America, but of course we had to draw our horns in and so stayed on at the refinery for another two years. And then one of the consultant groups approached me, John P Young and Associates,
- 29:30 who was trying to get together a team of concentrating on the industrial psych side, and so I opened the Perth branch for him, and then two years in Western Australia with him, and then came over to west, to the east coast, looking after the east coast for consulting company. After ten years with him I then went out on my own. We came to a parting of the ways
- 30:00 and went on my own and stayed as an independent for the rest of my working life.

**At what stage did you complete your PhD [Doctor of Philosophy]?**

1996, after I retired. I did another Masters after I retired 'cause I said to my wife, "I think I'll go back and do another degree." So by that time I was what? Gee,

- 30:30 '86, that'd be forty, fifty, '76, so I'd two years for the Masters at Sydney and then I did four years with... at America, so I was eighty when I graduated. Mm. No, no, yeah, near enough, roughly you know. Mm.

**This...**

1996 I graduated.

**This desire to learn and constantly improve**

- 31:00 **yourself, did...**

Oh yes it stayed with me. I've just finished a course on cultural Chinese at Sydney - it's just one of those summer ones - because two of my specific interests are the white porcelain or Fukkien in China, which is pretty rare these days, and also York silver, particularly the flatware, so

31:30 they require a bit of learning in depth.

**So your interest has broadened significantly from psychology then obviously?**

Oh yes, but the industrial... Well, for example, I was twenty years as an outsider with the Commonwealth Bank. I was twenty years with IBM [International Business Machines]. Tip Top, twenty-odd years, twenty-five years. Gollens, big companies, and so very solid

32:00 portfolio and as well as a lot of government ones. A lot of quite big government surveys and investigations. So it proved very, very satisfactory but I didn't hit the big time in terms of learning, in terms of income, till I went into the consulting game. I was doing all right at in the refinery but it was only then than I started to earn some money.

32:30 **You've come a long way from...**

Well it's...

**Well, not geographically. I mean, I guess, geographically as well.**

Well must say, yes. Without being smug about it, I've done all right.

**Amazing life.**

Mm.

**We're gonna go back now and go over that in detail if you can, believe it or not. It feels like we've been doing this for a while now.**

33:00 **I'm gonna go right back to the beginning. To Leichhardt.**

So I was born.

**Where you were born?**

Yep.

**The day you were born. No, tell can you tell us a little bit about Leichhardt in those early days?**

Well I've been back, I've taken a couple of people back just to sort of demonstrate a few things, confidence for one. You know, it's not everybody that's prepared to. They they'd like to bury their past a bit. But for many years I was...

33:30 And I tended to you know dodge, dodged and wove, and particularly when I was mixing it with people that had been to all sorts of GPS [Greater Public Schools] schools and so forth. And then I realised that, "Christ, you're wet," and I was doing far better than they were, anyway, but back to Leichhardt. To my brother and I

34:00 my mother was the dominant character in the family. She was a good cook and working with pretty restricted means and income. My father was a just happy to rub along. He was a good runner. He was a good but by that time he'd he was, you know, past his running time. But

34:30 he always had ideas about sport and good sport, but in the main we were kept to ourselves. We weren't encouraged to mix with the local groups and that served me in good stead in retrospect, but on the other hand it tended to make me a loner. On the other hand you could be positive about that

35:00 and say that it made you independent as well, so you had to think for yourself and you weren't easily led because there were pretty tough characters kicking around Leichhardt and a lot of them got into trouble but.

**Did you find that you were, as a loner you were a keen observer of things?**

Not outwardly. I wasn't conscious of it but

35:30 in retrospect in looking back there was that element to it. I was observing without being conscious of it, and some of those early memories have stayed and have become built-in values and attitudes so that sometimes you can almost pin the genesis of a particular outlook or thesis or attitude. I've done a lot of work on attitudes. It's quite an interesting area.

**Are there any of the details of life**

36:00 **in that in that area at that time that that have stuck with you? Any particular images that you remember from your childhood in Leichhardt?**

No, only my mother continuously reminding me of my family background. On my mother's side, her mother was part of the Woodcock, of the McCready family -

36:30 my middle name's McCready - of the McCready... And they built the GPO [general post office] and the Colonial Secretary's building and Burns Philp building and they were the leading builders at the time.

But she ran away with a bloke that operated the ferries up along the upper harbour so that I'm distantly related to Betty Cuthbert, for example,

- 37:00 who grew up in that area. But anyway, obviously a baby was coming along and so they were married at some... at St Andrews. But my grandfather was a bit of a loll about, a real ferry crewman really, although it was always said he was captain of the ferry but I doubt it very much. But my mother always
- 37:30 harped and always tried to drill it into me, you know, this is good part and so they were. Their first job was the sculptures on the Sydney University so that they were something to aim at for that matter, but the... it didn't really hit me at all. Never has, except that good luck to them. It's I never had any contact because my grandmother, they were kick... She was kicked out of the family. So in the
- 38:00 family photos of the McCready's there's no... that that daughter was kicked out. Other aspects was to kick over to the other side and each Sunday morning I'd be taken over to see my grandmother on my father's side. Now she was the descendant of convicts and that was never mentioned. I never found this out till I was scratching round later
- 38:30 in life, but my grandmother used to tell a tale of going up in a drove from Sydney up to Inverell and Gilgandra and more particularly Tooraweenah to look for sapphires, and that in that period would be a pretty tough journey. And she had a whole bunch of sons, daughters as well, but sons,
- 39:00 and they varied considerably from a straight-out alcoholic to a person that could sit down and play anything on the piano. One of the girls was a pianist and became a piano teacher. They were a wild... a variety of people that had no ambition but some skill, some... and this impressed me. This impressed me. But my grandmother would sit up
- 39:30 at the head of the table there in her long black gowns and, oh, and closed-up gowns, and I couldn't take to her at all but cause she was so dirty.

**Was the idea of no ambition something that that didn't sit well with you? Were you quite ambitious from a young age?**

No. I never have been ambitious.

**Never were?**

Never were. Never really particularly ambitious.

**Did you have any ideas about your future back when you were a**

40:00 **when you were a lad growing up?**

No. No. I've often told the story: vocational guidance - what the hell's that? We knew nothing of it. At Stanmore you were just encouraged to get a job and in the mid '30s getting a job, it wasn't any type of job, it was any job. And so the way I got a job and my parents didn't kick me out of anything. A cobbler of mine said, "Oh I'm going in to

40:30 look around for a job." I said, "Oh I'll come with you." This was just after the Intermediate. So we went down... Went to... We were members of the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], both of us, and so we went into the YMCA and they had during the Depression a little a recruitment group, or a placement group really, and the secretary of the YMCA was acting as the placement agency so he sent Gordon Hill

41:00 one direction, myself in another, and we both picked up the jobs and that's the way I started. Well I just went home and said to my mother, "I've got a job, Mum," and she said, "Oh, oh, we were rather hoping that you'd go on at school." "Oh no, I've got a job." That was it, you know, and that was it in the family. My brother went on to the middle of fourth year because he couldn't get a job, so that they

41:30 set up this Stanmore High just to take this overflow and so an aunt of mine who was working for school's clubs at the time, she was the secretary of school club, she introduced him to someone that got him the job.

## Tape 2

00:30 In certain areas, in certain areas like with that stuff it could set me off.

**Yeah, well I'll stop you if it becomes too...**

You see in an exercise like this, in an exercise like this you can't expect anyone to roll along. You have to have a spark to kick you off in a direction that will unroll.

**Well let's see.**

And of course I don't often have an audience of this nature.

**See if we can find one...**

Because my daughter's been for years wanting me to

01:00 you know, "Put it on paper Dad, put it on paper," but...

**Let see if we can find one of those sparks.**

But where was I?

**Well let's just move...**

Oh, we're still back in Leichhardt aren't we?

**We are still back in Leichhardt.**

Yeah.

**You mentioned that it was very difficult to get a job.**

Yeah.

**Was the Depression...?**

Well it wasn't. I went down and got a job my first job, yeah.

**Well it was very...**

It was hard though.

**Did you think yourself lucky at the time?**

Well there was there was a queue

01:30 of about fifty yards long to get that messenger boy job at Sandy's, mm, so that just fortunate. And the five blokes they had, kids at that stage, fifteen-year-olds, five fifteen-year-olds, I can't take you through what they all did but they were, you know, they were worthy of a job, the five of them. Weren't any lollabouts at all. They were good,

02:00 quite sound. So one was killed over Burma, one became a highfalutin accountant, another one was a very good surfer, you know, championship class. I forget one fourth one became the manager of Sandy's and anyway back to Leichhardt.

**You've talked a little bit about your job at Sandy's, at the same time, what were you interested in as far as**

02:30 **when you weren't working? What sort of recreations were you were you interested in as a child?**

Well I started off trying to copy my father as a runner but I got, I was with Western Suburbs athletic club and I was running B grade, which was very good, you know. Not many get into A grade. But it was a fair way out to Auburn where

03:00 Western Suburbs... And I was also a keen swimmer so I thought, "Oh, I'll switch over to swimming," because again I wasn't particularly ambitious. I didn't even force myself running. If I was losing, okay, fair enough, you know. I didn't have that that real drive to train all the time or anything of that nature.

03:30 **Were you a good swimmer?**

Yes, a quite reasonable swimmer. Again, I was never for never A grade, but Sydney I was swimming with Sydney club.

**Was that at the Boyd Charlton pool you mentioned?**

Yeah, yes. The old Boyd Charlton.

**Can you tell us a little bit about the old Boyd Charlton pool in those days?**

Well it was a hundred yards long and it had long weed growing in it and you were always conscious, "Is that

04:00 weed?" You know, well there'd... And of course it all took all the flotsam and jetsam in the harbour and the harbour was a dirty place and so you'd come out and there'd be this rim of dirt round your face, you know. And of course the planks in the dressing rooms were right mucky and the whole exercise. But you don't didn't notice it because it was par for the course, that was it, and they were a good bunch of

04:30 blokes. I'd go down there a coupla nights a week and we'd be training, and Sat... most of Saturday afternoon, all of Saturday afternoon'd be taken up in competitive swimming.

**Was the swimming club all blokes?**



Yes.

**Was there any women swimming at the time?**

No, no women.

**Was the Boyd Charlton pool solely for men or...?**

No, there was a woman's...

**No?**

There was a woman's pool alongside it but there weren't any, even... No

05:00 females came into the pool even to look, whereas in the athletics there'd, you know, lots of girlfriends and so forth. But the girlfriends didn't seem to come along to the swimming pool. But we'd go away. We'd go away in those up to Spear's Point or Newcastle or down to Wollongong and with, you know, carnivals and swimming.

**Do you remember any of those trips?**

Well

05:30 I remember why I mentioned Spear's Point first, because I'm associated with Newcastle now. But I remember the Spear's Point one. It was great. But trying to swim a race, it was either a surf race or a swimming race, because it was so choppy it was more of a surfing exercise than a swimming race, but on the other hand it was a lump of water carved out with piles and so forth in the same way as the Boyd Charlton pool but.

**06:00 How did you make those journeys? On the train?**

Trains. Taken away with... There'd always be a couple of officials with us and oh we had a pleasant night, you know. There'd be, you know, girls about and all the rest of it. It was good fun but.

**What was your attitude to girls growing up?**

Oh, I was shy as buggery. Shy as anything. I went along and took dancing lessons out at Five Dock.

06:30 Bought myself a pair of dancing pumps and, you know, but too scared to ask, you know, girls and so the teacher would have to drag me across and the poor girls they were the same, you know. It was terrible, terrible. But learnt to do the standard dances of the period so I could get around. But my brother, being three and a half years older, he was far more confident and always had a collection of

07:00 girlfriends. Fair curly hair and... But after all I found I could knock off one of his, so I... My girlfriends came via my elder brother, three and a half years older.

**Was he a was he a big influence in your life growing up?**

Well we were very influenced in each, we were influencing each other, but yes, he was.

**Can you tell me...?**

Particularly for

07:30 country activities. Very early in the, in our, probably the chief thing that my parents did was to buy a motor car and it got us out of the area and this was in 1938. We took delivery of an old Hudson first of all and then a new Essex, and what they would take us out of a Sunday just for a day trip and a day trip would be

08:00 Galston or Dural, that area, where we knew a lot of... My grandmother on my father's side came from Dural and we still have relatives out there, that type of thing, so that, so it... They were one of the early pioneers of the orchard growers in that area and in fact, going off on a tangent, one of the first convicts had a whole string of, or the

08:30 first male convict, that second fleet, he had a number of children. One married a Best, one boy married a Best, and one girl married a Best so the Bests, who are the leading family out there now in terms of most prolific, they come down the string, but they're... The first Best opened the first pub

09:00 on the Great North Road, mm. Just rounding off that, in light of later years not influencing this period, but the first convict that come out was the second brickmaker. There was the chappie at Brickfield Hill, Sam something or other, and then there was Beckett, who was sent out to Parramatta, and he was in charge of the brickworks at

09:30 Parramatta and a lot of the bricks from his brickworks are still the ones that have got the big drains in Parramatta. But the first forty houses he built fell down so he wasn't a very good brickmaker to start with. I don't...

**Just to get back to your...**

Back to where?

**Back to your brother.**

Oh yes, back to my brother. So he got a job at a place called George Sample and Sons and

10:00 Samples, while they had manufacturing agency lines in Melbourne, there was no factory in Sydney. They were just agents in Sydney selling these different agent lines, mainly in the motor industry, so they were onto a good thing because they were expanding so rapidly. But oh yes I'd go over the big paddock at Leichhardt and where the trams ended, but he'd ride to work on a

10:30 pushbike and then as soon as he was old enough he got a motorbike, so that, yes, he was quite influential in my life.

**Did you...**

He dragged me along to dances and parties and things like that but also very keen on motor mechanics. He didn't get me very interested in that. I could never get much interested in cars.

**Well what were your interests? You've obviously now got a great interest in Australian history, was that something that you grew up with or**

11:00 **something you acquired later on? The interest in Australian history, the...**

No, but at Stanmore it was easily my best subject and it's always stayed with me. I've always been interested in history, to a certain extent Australian history, but mainly Antarctica at that stage, but I tried to get down to Antarctica a few years ago but paid heaps

11:30 of dough with an American outfit, Mountain Travel, but the Norwegian ship that we was supposed to do the journey was knocked back by the authorities that be in Antarctica for not having a strong enough bow so I haven't been down since. But my niece, one of my nieces, she's was one of Australia's best climbers, she's been down there with her husband only a couple of years ago.

**Who**

12:00 **were your Antarctic heroes as a boy?**

Oh, Scott of course. Scott and I, they... I was brought up in very much the traditional British outlook and set of values because the schools were that. There was no, you know, the flag went up every morning and so forth and there was Empire Day. Empire Day was the big day of the year because that's when we had the foot races and so forth.

**Did the Empire**

12:30 **mean much to you personally?**

Only what was told to me, you know, it wasn't a concept that I really grasped at all.

**Did...**

Only in the post-war years, I suppose, I became aware and started to consider what the concepts meant even.

**Did, within your family did was Empire obvious? Did you talk about yourselves as being English or...?**

No, no. Well I wasn't English of course but.

**A lot of**

13:00 **Australians at the time regarded themselves as English.**

Oh, as going home? Well look at me. I went to England instead of going to America. It would have been far better for me to have gone to America but I that's where everyone went, and going around London, you know, all the dentists, they either went to London or they went to Canada, but it, but London was the obvious, England was the obvious place to

13:30 go in that sense and was still... Remember, I'm navy, so very much the British navy, it's very much a still a very English, very English outlook. See the Australian navy these days they get sent across to England still and emerge with a Whale Island accent, which is a terrible English accent.

**You've...**

I've tried to imitate English people, you know.

**Well you were Australian. Let's talk about your Australian identity for a while then.**

14:00 **Was there a sense of Australian nationalism at the time when you were growing up?**

Yes, but from all round me were Australians. There was one Italian at Orange Grove School and one Chinese and, God when I think of it now I cringe. After the war I was in Romano's nightclub - don't

know whether you know of it –

14:30 and the waiter was this Italian bloke and he said, “Hello Ray,” and I was surrounded by glamorous eastern suburbs women. Well, and much to my annoyance I cut him short. I went in and apologised next day, but God these things grate on you. The things that you immediate reaction, surprising how strong some of them are buried. Anyway, good

15:00 bloke.

**There weren’t very many ethnic groups...**

No.

**in Leichhardt?**

No. There were a few Englishmen. A chappie opposite had a couple of sons but we were living very close to Callum Park, the mental home, and we used to dive over it to save the penny going to Leichhardt swimming pool, and so we took these two Campbell boys over the wall with us into Callum Park and

15:30 but they couldn’t swim so what do we do? We took ’em out into the middle of the pool on a plank and left ’em there. And of course they developed these great blisters, terrible things, but we were going to break in these English Pommy bastards and that.

**Was your sense of being Australian slightly against the British...**

Oh it was quite strong. Only because everyone was Australian and what was the... Who else was there?

**What did being an Australian mean?**

16:00 Mean being able to look after yourself, being able to mix it with other people, being able to go to the flicks [cinema] of a Saturday afternoon, being able to find your way round in the bush, and that came a bit harder, and that was probably the area that was extended most strongly because we never, neither

16:30 my brother or I, joined the scouts. As I mentioned, the car was the greatest educational thing my parents did for us. We’d... A couple of years after that my father would take us to one point, drop us, and four days later would pick us up somewhere else. Like we’d drop down into the Kowmung [River] and we’d walk round a couple of the a couple of the valleys and

17:00 come up at Leura or something and or drop down into the Kowmung and climb up the waterfall. And no, we were extending ourselves and didn’t realise at the time we... that was a good thing to do that young. Later on, earlier, fifteen, sixteen, a bloke, another chappie and I, the chappie that got the job same time, we’d catch the train out to Windsor

17:30 and walk down along the Nepean [River] and just camp on the riverbank for a couple of days and things like that, so those were the things. If you learnt to swim in fresh water, you learnt to dive down and get things from the bottom, that was being Australian. That was being... But no, we didn’t have any idea of national pride I don’t think.

**Was**

18:00 **there any kind of Anzac mythology like there is today?**

Oh well Empire Day was really it, but we didn’t really take into us when the headmaster lectured us and told us about Empire Day. I can’t recall anything sticking at all about what he said or anything like that, but obviously he would have given us flag waving, and we did ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ and a couple of hymns; that would have been it.

**What about Anzac Day?**

18:30 **Was that a celebration you remember growing up?**

No I don’t. In fact I don’t think it was. That was the ’30s. See my father wasn’t in the First World War. He had some lung complaint and so he was knocked back for... But I can’t recall Anzac Day. We certainly weren’t taken to it, no. No.

19:00 **Were there any veterans in the area where you lived?**

Yes. We were quite friendly with one. He wasn’t in the area but he was related to the neighbours two doors down and we used to go out and visit them. They were out at Auburn and he was in the... And I remember I got a box over the ears because

19:30 I asked him if he’d killed anybody and so I got a box, and that’s the way I remember. He was a returned soldier bloke but he didn’t talk about it of course, but he was about the only one I can think of, mm.

**So...**

No, no-one in the immediate street were, no.

**It's an interesting question to ask, "Did you kill anyone?" Does that... Did you have that an attitude to war one way or the other when you were growing up?**

No, it was just curiosity. "Oh, he would have a rifle,

20:00 he went to war, war kills people, you know: 'Did you kill anyone?'" That was just one of those kid things. I must have only been about seven or eight at the time. Hm.

**Part of your growing up out, your exercises out in the bush, was there ever cause for you to have a rifle back in those days?**

Yes. Yes we had a .22 rifle. Only never had it in the bush but

20:30 on one occasion we did have it have it in the bush because we came across a wombat and the wombat got into his big entrance to the burrow and there was his back, and again it's like ignoring the Italian bloke, I shot this poor old wombat. Same as on another occasion, used to stay with my uncle at,

21:00 who had the last dairy on the North Shore up outside Pymble, and he was a milk distributor at the time and lived on an old orchard and so stay with him. And so I made myself a catapult and took pot-shots at the birds in the orchard and I killed the a yellow-eye one time and I got as much shock

21:30 I'm certain as the bird did, but I am wandering.

**Was that wombat an event you particularly remember?**

Well it stuck in my memory ever since.

**Was it traumatic at the time, do you think?**

No, it didn't. No. I don't think I needed a counsellor.

**Going on. You mentioned the pictures before. That was one of the things you listed**

22:00 **in being able to be Australian. Did were you a big fan of the pictures growing up?**

Well this leads on to... 'Cause a number of attempts were being made to make films. Well they did make films and it was quite pioneering stuff and of course Saturday afternoon they would appear on the screen so I got to know as much about Australia then as from my educational period, I should imagine.

22:30 Cinema is a vastly underrated exercise in terms of knowledge, same as TV [television] is. The best of TV and Australian-made films. Things like Forty Thousand Horsemen and there were some of the ones of the well known like Brennan, Christopher Brennan, so. There was I'm trying to think of some but things that stuck in my mind were

23:00 the serials, the adventure, the sheer adventure of Tom Mix and the adventures of Miss White of somebody White, Anne White or something. She was always getting tied to a rail just as the train was coming past and she'd always get away before the next serials, series started. So those things, they start to spark the idea of

23:30 of adventure, so adventure was probably my ambition.

**Did you watch newsreels as well?**

Oh yes, and of course you were starting to get ideas of about overseas activities then but there was the Australian Cinesound, but of course when I joined Universal, films became very real to me of course so that I was then sixteen, so between sixteen and nineteen -

24:00 I joined the navy the week I was nineteen - so sixteen to nineteen I was with Universal and they would give us a night at the theatre each Tuesday night, but that was mainly with American show. But we also... Universal also had the agencies for a number of Australian films and so Cheval was always coming in and out of the office and the Australian equivalent of Rin Tin Tin was always

24:30 in and out with his keeper. And a couple of the girls got bit parts in films and so forth so we became quite close. I remember we worked up a correspondence with Diana Durban a couple of us there, so that we... again films became quite real to us and quite an amount of interest, not in the making although I did try to join oh

25:00 the camera people, camera people, oh, and made clocks, they made clocks as well, oh I forget, mm. Anyway they knocked me back. I wrote to them saying, "I've admired your products for some time. Have you a job?"

**Getting back to the newsreels and your knowledge of the world, did you pay particular interest to events in Europe prior to the Second World War?**

Only as a place to get to eventually. I was more interested

25:30 in the Fitzgerald Travelogues in terms of the big mountains and the white tops and the fast water.

## **A Fitzgerald Travelogue?**

Yes.

### **Can you tell us a bit about that?**

Well they were the well, oh very well-known travelogues in the '30s and they took you all over the place. Bit like Global Village on a larger scale. They were quite expensive exercises. Black and white, but they really took you

26:00 and that's I found out you know how the where the world was through Fitzgerald Travelogues, more than the atlas. I used to pour over the atlas a lot, but the Fitzgerald Travelogues were always keenly watched, mm. Keenly watched.

### **Did you...**

Haven't heard of them, have you? Incredible! Things gone by.

### **There's still a lot of things I haven't heard of.**

Oh.

### **Ah, how did you satisfy**

26:30 **your urge for adventure?**

When? Then?

### **Before you joined the navy. Was the navy the first big adventurous thing you did in your life?**

Oh no. Oh no, we'd been into the scrub, we'd been into the bush

### **The bushwalks?**

Bushwalking quite a lot. Oh yes, we could find our way around quite well, but probably the my brother would have been the leader so that

27:00 we'd go and we'd go climb into the caves; for example, we went caving, you know, just with string. Bloody danger, you know, quite dangerous. And but bushwalking, swimming, surfing, canoeing, I was trying to do things, doing things away from our normal pattern. That was the

27:30 degree of our adventure. I hadn't been out of New South Wales until I joined the navy, for sure.

### **Let's talk a little bit about that decision to join the navy. Can you remember the day that the war broke out?**

Yes, 3rd of September '39.

### **Well we all know the date but can you remember where you were on that day and what happened?**

Yes I was at work at Universal, but particularly I was at the town hall to a concert of...

28:00 Oho, the... Now you got me. They were six Negro singers and they weren't called the Negro singers. There was the white minstrels the that, might have been it, the white minstrels. But they were Negroes with white mouths and they harmonise, they were harmonised. And I was at this concert with this Gordon Hill and he'd joined the navy

28:30 about twelve months before, so he wasn't in uniform, but we came out at interval and there were the placards, 'War'. This was about ten o'clock at night, maybe nine o'clock at night. He said, "Have to get back." He was on the [HMAS] Vendetta in the harbour, "I have to get back." So he went, left, went back, and they were in the Med. They left Sydney Harbour three days later or a week later.

29:00 And next day I went down to Rushcutters Bay and offered my services as a midshipman.

### **Just like that.**

So yeah, but confidence, gawd, I must have had something. And of course they knocked me back. What did I have to offer as a midshipman? So I came away and Gordon's sister rang me up at

29:30 Universal on the 6th, the morning of the 6th, and she said, "I hear you've been trying to get into the navy," and I said, "Yes, they knocked me back." Well her father, Gordon's father, was the chief dental mechanic on Garden Island. He'd been in the navy all his life, knew every bloke, and I said... Oh Joyce, the sister, said,

30:00 "Well my father said if you go down to Rushcutters Bay and you ask for Joe Blow, I think you might be able to get in." So I went in, and saw Joe Blow, who was the recruiting SBA, sick berth attendant, and ten minutes later I was signed up in the navy.

### **What did you know about the navy?**

Nothing.

**Apart from your friend Gordon?**

Nothing at all, and

30:30 except of course he'd been in it, but I hadn't seen him much and his old man, he lived a few streets away. God, he'd shoot me if he knew this but he used to do a bit of dental work on the side in the Depression. He'd extract your teeth give you a false set of teeth for five pounds, and I can remember being over at Gordon's place of a night

31:00 and we could hear this chair being dragged around as he pulled these teeth out, and of course we used to use the bags of teeth that he'd probably knocked off from the navy as markers for our card games and so forth. And see, so that to that extent I knew, but I knew very little about the navy really, and but it seemed to be, and the only thing I thought of. Well I wanted to get into it...

31:30 **What did you...?**

as much to get away from Universal, as much to get away from Universal as anything. No, no theories of ambition or no theories of, "We must do this for England," or anything of that nature, I'm quite certain.

**Did you talk to anyone about it?**

Not a soul.

**What happened to your brother? Did he join up?**

He tried twice. He was then in the reserve at North Head on the artillery but he was in reserved occupation, engineer, and so

32:00 they knocked him back twice. He tried to get into the, once in the army, through the... He was already in the reserve, mark you, but Samples got him excused, got him dragged him out. And the second time was tried to get into the air force and he was again dragged out because a reserved occupation, oh, and I think that affected him person, as a personality. When I came back at the end of the war he was a changed personality, totally changed personality

32:30 and...

**In what respect?**

He'd lost that, "Let's do this, let's do that, let's..." He lost that urge, yeah. Whether it was due or whether some other factor goodness only knows, but I've come across lots of other people where the same thing has occurred, particularly when they haven't got promotion that they'd been looking forward to for years and things like that.

33:00 But when I rang, I had to ring Universal from Rushcutters Bay and Mr West was the manager of Universal in New South Wales at the time, and, "Oh, Mr West. I rang you to say I've just joined the navy." "What'd you do that for, Ray? You should have asked me first." He would have talked me out of it. Anyway I said, "I'm sorry

33:30 but I can't get in to work. I'm in," and so he had to lumber it but he didn't mind. Afterwards he was quite good. But that was his response but that's the way I was in the navy.

**What about your parents? What was their response?**

Well they didn't, silence. They honestly didn't say anything. They were good parents, don't get me wrong at all. They were good parents but what could they say? I was in

34:00 and they didn't say, "Oh try to get out," or, "Gee I wish you hadn't," any, no it was just acceptance. And I think to a certain extent they'd accepted that I was an adult just because you were a, you know, nineteen you're an adult. See I was kicking into the family coffers by this time. Oh no, no. I can't there was no

34:30 adverse nor condemnation. It didn't go either way.

**So did you ever go back to Universal?**

Went back to tell them I wasn't coming back at the end and (UNCLEAR) MacIntyre, the managing director, he had the agency for Universal in Australia, he had promised, he had said, "I have set up a trust scheme to set aside a percentage

35:00 of the profits" - and films made big profits in the war as you know - "for the returned soldiers, for the returned service people." And I was one of the first to tell him that I wasn't coming back. Some of the others came back while they looked around and at others because I was quite late in coming back. But I went straight in, told him what I was doing

35:30 because I was prepared to go back to school and so I was, so I got the bonus. I got my portion from that

trust scheme. I did not get all of it and he did not pay any of the others, gee, but so fortunately

36:00 it gave me a little reserve. And of course I had the back-pay from the three and a half years and I was backdated two years to a second stripe, so that I had you know a little reserve. But then the CRTS [Commonwealth Rehabilitation Training Scheme], the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, of course gave you three guineas a week for the first three years

36:30 and then for the fourth year or thereafter you had to carry yourself. If you liked, they'd give you a loan but then you had to pay that back, and the tax position was such in 1950 when I went to England I had to clear my tax before getting out of the country. You had to pay all government all moneys owing. Not unlike now where you don't have to clear a

37:00 tax, so that I had to settle that one year, but for the three years I was given three guineas a week, which was great, you know. I wasn't married, no attachments, gave my mother ten bob a week and lived at home. So I could stick my nose into my book and it was great so.

**Before you went away, did the navy represent a cut in pay for you from Universal or you pretty much**

37:30 **when you joined the navy did that change your financial situation a great deal?**

No, no. About the same. I forget what it was but I joined Sandy's on fifteen bob a week, fifteen shillings a week, and when I left the secretary, who'd been an Olympic swimmer, incidentally, at the Paris Olympics in the

38:00 in the Seine, but he said, "How much you getting at Universal?" "They're giving me a pound a week." "I would have given you that," he said. And these lessons, they burn deep. They burn, gee, they... You have to ask. Don't expect it to come to you. And so I joined Universal on a pound a week and I think when I joined the navy I was about

38:30 thirty bob a week and that was about... I don't think I it was much of a kick-up in the navy.

**Can you tell us a little bit about your introduction to naval life?**

Well you're just there and given a job and you get on with it.

**Did you move into a barracks or did...**

No, I was living at home. Went in every night at Rushcutters and some nights you had to stay back, you were just on shift, but in the main

39:00 you just worked a normal day went home at four o'clock, or went ashore as it was known then. And but see I was dealing mainly with supply so that you were doling out stuff, so that's what I got anchored on, that sort of thing, because I got to know the set-up quite quickly cause no deep, no depth to it really.

**Was there a period of training?**

39:30 Only the local petty officer where he'd tell you, "Fit that in. Tit that..." But no, you quickly picked it up. There was no real training as such. You didn't have to learn all sorts of naval regulations. You picked those up. You were told you couldn't do something or you're told you could do something and you saw what people got into trouble for so you picked it up as you went, but there was no training at that stage.

**Was the discipline something that you had any trouble**

40:00 **adapting to?**

No. Not at all.

**Can you tell us a little bit about discipline in the navy?**

Well it's not as strong as you think it is. It depends on the person that you're with, and as long as you do what you're told you don't get into trouble. So that there's, it's, you're not conscious of it. You, you're conscious of a hierarchy, you're conscious of the leading hands and the petty officers and the chief petty officers and the warrant officers and the sub-lieutenants and so on and on and on and on,

40:30 but they're beyond your own immediate supervisor. They're a foreign world. It's a foreign world, not really, but in terms of your contact with them and so forth. You don't talk to them and they only talk to you when they want something, so that in terms of discipline you're reliant on your... It's a teacher learning situation. You learn from the one above you. It's a real, it was then, that is. It was

41:00 then, now for some courses like gunnery courses and so forth there were special courses but for me there wasn't at that stage. Later of course I, there were.

**Was there any particular mentor for you in your early days in the navy?**

No. Not at all. Mentor being a person that looks after you, no. No. Well of course the local the PO, the petty officer in charge, he's supposed to have

- 41:30 that responsibility but he's just looking after himself really. But each twelve months he'd have to give you a report, a report on your... Well I got 'superior' in each report so that I was the first reserve to get a kellick [anchor: badge of a leading hand], to a hook, which a leading hand, and then I took myself to a coach at the lower end of George Street to coach me
- 42:00 in mathematics.

## Tape 3

- 00:30 (UNCLEAR) wanted to, for me to stay on in the navy.

**And did you...**

But that's another story I guess later on.

**So...**

No, they wanted me to join the reserve too, but I wasn't interested.

**So were you a little bit disappointed to be in the supply stream? Did you really want to go out on a ship?**

Oh yes. Yes, yes, yes. Oh yes, I was very disappointed, but of course you'd signed on by that time.

- 01:00 **So how did you how did you deal with that?**

Um, well I applied, I thought I'd work my way through it, you... And extremely difficult to pass the exams for the, to become an officer. And of course at that stage they weren't wanting midshipmen so much. They were wanting people

- 01:30 that... So they were concentrating on recruiting people from the merchant marine, the trained mariners, and they were getting their seamen and the yachties who could sail a ship and knew winds and so forth. They were concentrating on people like they could drag and bring in with readymade skills, and they would graft on a couple of other skills to fit them into a particular notch, but so that there wasn't

- 02:00 the same opportunity at that stage to do... I for even forget the name of the particular test that you could sit for that would qualify you to become an officer, because you knew it was hopeless. It was one of those, "Oh, you you'll never make it. You'll never get through." And so you were turned away from that so I saw myself just working myself up as a rating, you know, and the idea

- 02:30 wasn't so much ambition but the idea was to really be good at what I was doing, just being doing a satisfactory job.

**What did you have to do in a supply stream?**

Well there was all on... When I first went in was issuing all the clothes, you know, the clothes to anybody who was joining up. It was as simple as that. So you'd get 'em out. It was just like being in a retail shop. And then with food

- 03:00 you were issuing all the food to supplying all the little odd spots all around the harbour while you were at Rushcutters, so that that became a separate division. And the third division is supplying all the mechanical needs, like the torpedoes and all that, according to what the gunnery people want. And so there's those three major divisions.

**Did you work in all three of them during your time in the...?**

Yes.

- 03:30 I did. Not at Rushcutters Bay but on Garden Island I did. So that they were particularly on the food side, and having to deal with the cooks and the stewards and all that sort of thing. The food element of course coping all the flak and so forth.

**Can you tell me a little bit about how the navy was supplied with food?**

Oh well.

**You're a bit of an expert.**

Well you just signed

- 04:00 contracts with your different people that offered, that tendered to supply food, so that the ship would come, a launch would come alongside with meat or would come alongside with spuds or onions or whatever and or explosives or whatever and would tie up alongside, and were dragged ashore so that you would do all the contact with



- 04:30 the with the contractors, like the old stevedores in, for merchant marine, so that all those, well I don't suppose you'd know, but the whole of Sussex Street and Sussex and Kent Streets were full of these stevedores, these people that made their money by supplying ships as they came in and out, so that that's what we were
- 05:00 doing. We would get orders off to them and the stuff would arrive and we'd have to account for it and balance books and so forth. And then there was another group. I think I'll knock off for a while yep, mm.

**The education you were getting on the ship and the...**

Oh no, the studying for petty officer. That's right.

**That's right, yeah.**

I took myself along to a chap at the lower end which

- 05:30 I hopefully, well it brought me up to a level that enabled me to pass the petty officers' exam, although the subject matter in that, in the petty officers' exam, was, is more than just maths and English and typewriting. There was the some technical stuff as well. You had to learn a lot about the supply side and also a bit about keeping
- 06:00 books of various sorts, so there there's a fair amount of learning which I'd picked up in the time that I was on Garden Island.

**Did you find when you were doing these exams that there was a prejudice against you coming from a, not from a public school background? Were they looking for more sort of ah...?**

Oh cripes no.

**Was the very fact...?**

Well at that stage I was on the lower deck so, you know, you, there was no nothing about

- 06:30 schooling there to any extent in that way. No, it was only when I joined the wardroom, you, I came across, you know, the typical class structure that one wonders. It had been going back to childhood as it were. There is a class structure built in to a certain extent in my generation anyway
- 07:00 that, "Oh, you you'll never make that." "Ooh, you'd never be able to get there." "Ooh, don't get above yourself." "Ooh, never speak till you're spoken to." All these values are built in and in the end you believe it and...

**I think that continues on to this day, really.**

Well to a certain extent, but the class structure isn't, I don't think, quite as firmly entrenched so.

**But the traditions of the navy**

- 07:30 **were, would have been inherited from the British, who would...**

Oh, very much. They still are.

**who would have had a very upper class...**

Yes, but very much so and so that you'd when I went into the wardroom you were just ignored, just ignored. No introduction, no anything, and you're soaping yourself under the shower and see the wardroom was half full of RN [Royal Navy] people on

- 08:00 exchange to [HMAS] Perth and so the two striper'd say, "Get out of there, subbie [sub lieutenant]," and, you know, you... And the stewards would know. They certainly knew where you'd come from because you knew quite a number of 'em anyway, and they wouldn't serve you and things, or all little things, you know, just to keep you in your place as it were.

**While you were in Garden Island there were you aware of the Perth?**

- 08:30 Oh very much so, it was one of the icons. Oh yes, it was.

**Had you seen it?**

And of the [HMAS] Sydney too. All my cobbles were in the, you know, gone over in Sydney and been through with the [Italian cruiser] Bartolomeo Colleoni sinking, and then had come out and Perth replaced Sydney...

**In the Med.**

in the Med. And my cobber, back to Gordon Hill,

- 09:00 he was on the Vendetta and wasn't too frequent but letters would come back and a few photos would come back from him and he was with the V&Ws [V & W class destroyers] in the Med, you know, through [Gulf of] Martaban and Crete and the Tobruk convoys and so forth.

**You were following these, this action at the time?**

Oh yes, but what could you know? You know, it was just what you were given, what you were given and people that you spoke

09:30 to that came within your orbit of talking.

**Take your time. It's all right. No rush. Can you tell us about that time when you received word of your redeployment to Perth?**

Well I can recall I was on the on the hill at the top of Garden Island in a big drawing office and

10:00 there must have been about six of us sitting there and the and the message came through, you know, "Report to Flinders for training as officer." I can remember jumping up and rushing round shaking hands with everyone and I couldn't understand why people didn't want to shake hands with me. I was immediately different. I'd be drinking beer with them in an hour's time

10:30 and had been for months but there was a difference immediately. It was surprising and I was conscious of it. Not conscious of it, I was conscious of it in a rejection sense when I was so happy. I'd made it, you know. There was no question of not being able to get through at the end, but that was my immediate response was just the, "God, that's great," from my point of view. "Getting out of this lot.

11:00 I might get to sea even." You know, so that was my reaction. I was only glad from a number of points of view but particularly to be given the opportunity because it certainly has made a big difference throughout my life for that matter. But then I went down to Flinders and

11:30 did the program down there. I was in the second group that went through. They put us through in sixes and I was in the second group. The first group were all Victorians and I was in the second group.

**What rank do you join that group as?**

I joined as petty officer, was I? I'd certainly passed but whether I had... No, I don't think I had the rank up. I don't think, although I'd

12:00 received just prior to that message that I'd been drafted to one of the corvettes, the [HMAS]Bendigo, and as a petty officer so I was on draft. It was officially recognised, officially recorded, and then the one came along and that was good. Most of the others, I was the only person from the supply side. And there's another division called the writers,

12:30 they're the actual scribes and the secretaries in the navy. All of the others came from that side of things. They were the ones that would run court martials and, not run them, but participate and do all the paperwork associated with as well as keeping all the pay records and any official records that need to be kept other than the official log, mm.

13:00 So then the big excitement was when it came out about, where we were being drafted to following the success on the course. A couple of them, one died actually on the course, and a couple were knocked back, and the remaining four were given our drafts, and I was the only one that went to sea, immediately anyway. And so when I,

13:30 Perth came up for me, I was on elated; that was great. So a suit had to be made quick and lively, twenty-four hour job, that can happen in Melbourne as well as up in Hong Kong, and jumped on the plane, ah, on a train, came up and joined Perth in Farm Cove.

**Have a**

14:00 **drink. Go on.**

No.

**Take your time. No, go on. Take your time.**

I can recall joining Perth. I was down at Farm Cove and a launch came alongside and there was two and a half, the dentist aboard. He said...

**I'm sorry? Two and a half dentist, what does that mean?**

Well he's a lieutenant commander

14:30 but he's the dental officer aboard. See there were a doctor and a dentist aboard the ship. Teeth rot aboard ships too, and people get sick aboard ships, so there have to be medicos and dentists. They're only above a particular size ship of course, you carry those. But the dentist was going back aboard and he said he must have known it was so obvious I was new. He said,

15:00 "You realise, subbie, that it's the senior officer last in and senior officer last out." So, "Thank you, sir." So of course I jumped in first and he came in leisurely following, went out the craft and of course he goes up the ladder and I'm last scrambling up the ladder, mm.

15:30 So that you, they're the ways that you pick things up and you have to pick 'em on the run otherwise you're really in the poo, 'cause you do that once and a person hadn't been kind enough, hadn't been thoughtful enough to remind, and I might have carefully, you know, have stood to one side while the captain was supposed to go would have been in the poo properly next time.

**These are all unwritten...**

Um well they're not, yes they are unwritten, they are unwritten. They're not in King's

16:00 Rules and Regulations but you have to know 'em. Anyway.

**Can you describe walk walking up that gangplank for the first time onto Perth and how that felt?**

Well yes. There was a whole crowd scrubbing the deck and I knew a number of 'em, worked with 'em, and

16:30 this is one of the problems of changing over, and one of them I'd been brought up with in Leichhardt, lived next door but one, Percy Bullivant, and what do I do? No guidance. Do I ignore him? Do I shake him as blood brothers? What do I do? Well I went up and, you know,

17:00 said, "Hello," and he was embarrassed. I shouldn't have. It was he that was embarrassed.

**Because you outranked him?**

Oh cripes, yeah. An officer talking to a, you know, a ranker scrubbing the deck as a person, as a friend, and anyway, another one of these instances.

**Was this sort of your self-consciousness at being a new officer or later that that sort of...**

Well...

**Division broke down?**

17:30 Well it didn't break down, the division. Oh of course, oh yes, the divisions broke down to a certain extent but they never do. They never do. But no, it wasn't self-consciousness. I was confident enough I suppose to react in the way that I'd want to react. I could

18:00 have ignored him. He wouldn't have dared say anything and what... I would have had that consciousness I suppose, that would have been the self-consciousness, so it's this assembly or absorption of a way of thinking that has to be taken into account and recognised

18:30 that is often overlooked and it's one of the reasons that these games and so forth occur when people are in the navy join up for the first time and so forth in as a as officers. Not so much as ratings but as officers all designed to inculcate a person into a way of thought, a way of behaving

19:00 and a way of leading if you like because you're given no lessons in leadership, you're just put in charge of people and that's it. Now you're given all sorts of help.

**Can you describe one of those games you talk about?**

Oh well, deck hockey, for example. Deck hockey. Do you do you pull your weight and wear your stripes when you're playing at deck hockey or do you cop

19:30 a cut across the shins with... Because some ratings going to get back at you because... And you exactly the same on the deck in a deck hockey game; it's a very rough game. Very rough. You play it at sea and not much deck to play on but the big sticks and it gets really pushed around and so do you, particularly a little fella like me.

**What happens if you hit the thing overboard? Is there a penalty?**

No, but you lose

20:00 a point.

**So you're really expected to absorb a lot of this by osmosis almost?**

Yeah. You are. You are because you don't like asking your superiority. I can remember wanting to step ashore in Melbourne in civvy [civilian] clothes, as an officer. As ratings at that time you weren't allowed out of uniform but I'd taken some civilian clothes, just a sports jacket and a pair of pants,

20:30 with me aboard, and so I went to my senior officer and said, "Would it be all right if I step ashore in civilian clothes, sir?" He said, "Of course, you're lucky to have 'em aboard," you know. But he was telling me that there's a difference, you know. 'Cause as a rating you're not supposed to have civilian clothes aboard anyway in wartime, mm.

**How long were you on board before you**

21:00 **were given your orders to depart?**

Aboard ship?

**Yes.**

Oh well went to sea the next day. We were up in the Philippines, ah we then met, I think, the first American people to come to Sydney, the old [USS] Phoenix I think it was called. We met that off Fiji somewhere so they had a few troop ships

21:30 in tow.

**Can...**

Then we went we went on two or three of those trips.

**Do you remember...?**

Escort duty.

**Do you remember roughly when that was? What the date was of your departure?**

No. No, no, but late in late in '41.

**Was that...**

It was before the before the war broke out with America as I recall it, because we didn't see them right into Sydney

22:00 so they might have been going somewhere else and didn't know, didn't know, mm, but in terms of a specific date it'd be about Christmas time I s'pose, mm.

**So you were Australia, you weren't at war, Australia wasn't at war with Japan at that stage?**

Oh Australia, of course. Oh yes, mm.

**Singapore fell...**

Well December 8, mm.

**And you departed...**

Departed for the west or for Java?

**At, on that first deployment.**

22:30 Oh the first? Ooh, it would have been before then. Oh I forget, quite frankly.

**Okay. Can you remember the moment of leaving the heads in Perth?**

Ah not really. No. No, I know I know it was a great sense of freedom and elation and feeling of,

23:00 "Oh this is great," but that was general from being aboard the ship to being a part of the crew.

**Did the crew... The crew had seen quite a lot of action in the Mediterranean on several ships?**

The ship had, yes but a lot of the ship's crew from that period had been transferred. See it came back, it, the ship stopped - a shell went straight down one of the funnels at Seda Bay, Suda, Suda Bay, off

23:30 Crete. Four stokers were killed and so that meant they had to get out of the Med and so they came back to Sydney to be repaired, and at that stage a lot of the crew were replaced, a lot of the crew, because they'd been away, what, for twelve months or so, mm.

**Did you lose all your experienced crew? I it would have been...**

Oh no well.

**difficult to replace that sort of experience in wartime.**

No, a lot of those replacements had been on other ships.

24:00 See for example I had two cabin mates, two. First of all there was Lloyd Burgess, who was a navigator, he came off merchant ships. He'd been on a BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary] line running up and down the coast so he came straight to Perth from the BHP taking ships up and down. And then Gavin Campbell joined

24:30 and he was ex-[HMAS]Canberra, ex-[HMAS]Hobart and then Perth so he'd been at sea a long time, mm. He was permanent, permanent navy.

**Can you describe your introduction to Hector Wallace?**

Well I was taken in by the head of, Lieutenant Commander Lowe, and

- 25:00 introduced, and so he was very pleasant. Asked me, you know, what I'd been doing and what I did and thanked me very much and that was it for me, but so it was just normal introduction. He had separate quarters. He didn't eat in the wardroom so he was a separate being altogether. He was god, you know.
- 25:30 **Can you describe your introduction to the wardroom? I know you mentioned it briefly before, but...**
- Ah, introduction to water in what sense?
- Well you said...**
- In action?
- No, at the time when you were introduced to the wardroom on the Perth. You said it was somewhat intimidating. The class structure side of...**
- Oh, the wardroom. I thought you said water, I'm sorry.
- No, sorry, beg your pardon.**
- Put my teeth in.
- My**
- 26:00 **naval vocabulary is not that so good. Ward, the wardroom**
- Wardroom, yes, the wardroom. Well what can you tell about? I was extremely pleased to be there because there was linen on the table and the lower deck tables get pretty messy but the wardroom was, had linen on the table and
- 26:30 silver plates, cutlery and so forth, but the tablecloth was pretty spotty - lots of stains on it. But I was conscious very much of being there on my own as very much the Johnny-come-lately and the new boy on the block and all of those sorts of feelings, and I didn't have a mentor.
- 27:00 There was a, you know, you're not automatically put with a mentor to see me through or anything so you wonder you know, all right well, "Do you talk to everybody? Do you talk to anyone? How do you order your meal? Is it like in a restaurant or do they serve you by seniority?" None of that was introduced to you. I'd heard vaguely about how you passed the port but I didn't see, all the time I was in the
- 27:30 wardroom I didn't see a bottle of port but, cause drinking at sea was not encouraged anyway.
- Can you describe the particular character or individual details of that wardroom for us? Like in your mind's eye, cast yourself back there and colour them in for us, if you like. I mean the wardroom of the Perth can never be revisited now so if you can...**
- Oh no. Oh well in the wardroom
- 28:00 I suppose that there's a dining room table. There would have been seating for, you know, about twenty people in my consciousness. There might have been more, but they wouldn't all be there sitting at the same time because obviously some people would be on duty...
- Were there particular...**
- or on shift.
- Were there particular mementos of the ship in there?**
- No, there were a couple of
- 28:30 photo painting prints but there was no mementos of the ship's actions or anything of that nature. No, it was a strictly stripped down, very much here as a working area where we get fed and where we get out of. For example, there was only about two lounge chairs in the wardroom so you're a bit careful about... If you take one of those you... But there was all the tables,
- 29:00 all the chairs sitting up at the tab... at the dining table of course, but not as lounge chairs. There was just a couple of those.
- Did somebody actually always have the first right to sit in those chairs?**
- I never did find out really but no, there seemed to be a number of people that would plonk themselves in it and pontificate. That seemed to be the principal way there of speaking is to just address the whole wardroom. "Well we're
- 29:30 in for something here." That type of general all-incorporating type of speech. But I noticed that in the main they went back to their cabins if they were off duty or went did some work wherever they had to be working. No, it didn't appear to be a structure as far as I could determine, so from my point of view I tended to scuttle out as soon as I finished a meal.
- Was there a**

30:00 **library on the boat?**

Yes there was a small library but if we... In case I don't mention it again, along the line libraries becomes a very important item that is frequently overlooked. In fact I haven't seen it mentioned in any book or anywhere else and it's a very important item. If you'd like me to enlarge on it now you might be able to cut and but...

**No, please do.**

30:30 Mm, but one group went up to Tavoy in Burma, to the airport at Tavoy, to put that back into shape for use so they were just working on the on the airport, on the airstrip, but there was a library in Tavoy, public library, or a library, and they were given access to it, so those people were capable of carrying

31:00 library books and most of them picked up a book and that became their library for exchange right along the line. And it's a very important learning activity, that exchange of books along the line.

**What do you...?**

It can't be overestimated.

**What do you mean 'along the line'? I'm not...**

Along the railway line, the building of the railway line from Burma to Siam, so that it became vitally important because

31:30 as other groups came up like ourselves, I went into Changi, for example, with a blouse of a Javanese woman wrapped round me and that was it, so that no books or anything of that... And most guys were the same, similar type of thing, but the army people didn't seem to be many books around but this opportunity was grabbed by this particular group.

**Naval, they were naval...**

Naval? No, no, they were they were army.

32:00 Army group. They were the 2/19th I think.

**Well we will we will get back to this in detail.**

Yeah.

**I think that's really important. I think particularly given your interest in...**

It is. It's a very important...

**But I might just stay with the Perth for a little while because it's quite an interesting piece of...**

Oh yes. Mm.

**Australian history that that we can't...**

But so that really the atmosphere, the how I interpreted the wardroom, was really as

32:30 I anticipated it to be. Very much a class-structured thing. And maybe it was me imposing my thoughts on it and maybe it didn't exist. Who knows?

**What did you...**

But that's the way I still see it.

**What did you do when the captain walked into the wardroom?**

He... In my in my experience, he didn't. He sent for you. So that I had a long chat with him after the Battle of the Java Sea. He was sitting on the capstan playing with the

33:00 cat, Red Lead, and he called me 'Subbie'. So he called me over and we were chatting away and obviously he was trying to, you know, extend the hand of companionship as it were, but that was the only... Oh, except in the last action, just before the last action I was the coding officer on the ship and

33:30 I took the last message up to him on the bridge and, you know, gave it and no more than taking it and he just dismissed me.

**What was that message?**

That was the message to say that the [HMAS] Ballarat, a corvette, was in the straits and I felt it important enough to tell him because you know another ship at night a bit hard to discern. And as it turned out

34:00 some of his last words before the, at the beginning of the fight, when the silhouette of the foreign ship, of a ship, came up and was spotted, he said, "Probably one of our corvettes." So he used the material

from that message. But then of course they flashed green, which is the wrong answer, and then of course all hell broke out, mm. Mm.

**So he was expecting a corvette based on the message that you brought to him?**

Yep, mm.

34:30 So just as well I took it up to him, but as it turned out it was the wrong interpretation. Should I have taken it up? Mm.

**That's very interesting.**

Mm.

**I'd really be... Hopefully we can get to those details, but I just might stay with the ship itself at the moment. It was it a happy ship, did you find?**

Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes and there was a companionship.

35:00 You haven't had any experience of ships at all, but ships take on a personality of their own and even the shore bases do, not to anywhere near the same extent, but a fighting ship, particularly a fighting ship, it takes on a life of its own. It's very definite. It's and very real and you've, you're immediately in a club.

35:30 It's a club-like atmosphere. Everyone knows their place, everyone knows how far, supposedly, everyone knows how far they can go. When some people overstep their mark they're quickly told about it and so on and so on. But oh no, it was a happy ship and everyone quite well focused, quite well focused. I was very impressed with

36:00 everyone I met on the ship.

**Can you take us through her from bow to stern? Stern to bow? I don't know what direction or whatever direction you like.**

Well not really um, it'd be best for you to... There's plenty of plenty of documentaries to...

**But from your own per personal point of view. You know, what was your favourite part of the ship, for instance?**

Well I suppose in my own little area, which was one deck below the wardroom,

36:30 space for want of a better term, there was a sort of a square board that you pull up and that has a step series, a ladder, down to a little cubby hole the size of this and that was my world. That contained all the code books

37:00 and all of the requirements to be able to track the ship during any particular actions, not during normal passage but it what was it's a space called the after plot so that Tiger Lyons, the person, the chief instruction officer, he ran what's called the

37:30 forward plot, for'ard plot, that's straight underneath the bridge, and a lot of bridge material would be passed down to him and he'd record it on the on the forward, for'ard plot. Now I was running the after plot because when a fighting ship is likely to be knocked out, the bridge is likely to be knocked out, and what happens? So there needs to be the commander, the second in charge running the after ship, so that he can take over immediately.

**So there's some...**

38:00 So that's virtually duplicating

**redundancy in the...**

Yes.

**If one goes down the other can take over.**

Yes. And I was running the after plot so I was recording everything that was being detailed to me from the after fighting station and I was recording it on the plot. And in addition I'd be doing any decoding and distributing as necessary. So that that was my little world.

38:30 In the wardroom and attached to the wardroom there'd be the eating and cooking areas, of course, and then going towards the stern or... No, that would that would be the stern so we'd be doing forward, we'd be a row of cabins on both sides with a long alleyway running down both sides with various doorways entranceways

39:00 down to the nether regions, down to the engine rooms, and ah that would take us to where the ship's crew would be have their mess decks and living, so there's a, there'd be a great mess deck and that would take you to the rear stern or stern of the ship, so that it was broken up into ships. But of course the main positioning

39:30 would be the guns, where the guns were, so that there would be by that stage there'd be guns hanging

all over it, far worse now but or better now, whichever way you look at it, but you got to know your way around it quite readily but within set patterns. It's a bit like living in a new suburb. You get to know your way around a set pattern and then you gradually extend it and gradually extend it,

40:00 but you never really got to know, like, for example, you'd never be invited down into the engine room, for example, unless you're an engineer or you had to some specific task to perform.

**Did you ever go down to the engine room?**

No, I've never been down to the engine, mm, no. My, as it turned out my most closest friend as POWs [prisoners of war] you had to operate in the tough periods very

40:30 much as twosomes with a third person slightly away, who is attached to another one, so he would have a close friend with a... But he would also be very close to you, the pair of you, because that was straight insurance, straightforward insurance cover. If you couldn't perform in that way, if you couldn't sort of associate yourself and be friendly in that way with all the responsibilities that carried, like getting food and helping them

41:00 when they're sick and so forth, you were just a loner and would fade out. And they were the ones that died most quickly, those loners, mm.

**That's ah fascinating. Yeah that's...**

A straightforward insurance policy

## Tape 4

00:30 The structure of, the social structure is quite an important thing to grasp.

**Well can we just go back to perhaps your the fact that your relationship with the engine room and your colleague in the engine room and then...**

Oh yes.

**And then...**

Ah no, I never did get down into the engine room. Just wasn't my business to go down there so that you know the engineers and stokers and so forth, ah that was their world.

**But you knew**

01:00 **people in the engine room?**

Oh of course, so that you get to know, you know, the wardroom is not such a lonely place as all that. I was just telling you my perception and the beginnings of it and so forth. But gradually you became friendly with groups so that, for example, going off on a tangent again, Knocker White in Tanjong Priok, which is the port to Batavia at the time, on our first call in and we were then having to go down the other end to but he

01:30 was trying to round up a cricket team to have a game of cricket with. Yes, it was that trip. And so that, strange endeavours of different people. He'd just left Whale Island, the gunnery training station in the UK [United Kingdom], and so he saw it as a duty of his to play cricket even though the world was going up around him, you know.

02:00 Um, but so that we never did get... But of course you got to know various people and I got to know Frank Gillen extremely well as a POW.

**Frank was an engineer?**

He was an engineer and we'd met and talked in the engine room. He was a very friendly person and came out of the merchant marine. He was with CSR [Colonial Sugar Refining Co Ltd] doing the sugar run to Fiji and back

02:30 and joined the navy from there, from CSR, and he went back to CSR too. Became chief engineer at CSR so that I got to know him very well. So do you want to me to talk about Frank? Mm, mm. We'd better leave it, ay? It's a, it'd be a long, it'd be a long detour, mm.

**Okay, we'll revisit Frank**

Later on.

**Later, when we get to your POW experience.**

Yeah. Yes that'd be a better time for it.

03:00 **Yeah, that's okay.**



Yeah it would fit in. But the structure, just to make the general point, the structure of our of our POW days is a point that not is clearly grasped by the publications so far that I've read. I've read a lot of 'em, mm. It was very important to have a grouping. But back to

- 03:30 the ship, the ship was a was very much a group in itself so that that was insurance on a bigger scale. You had to work together and it was a fine group to know, mm. Couldn't ask for a better... Particularly one area that was quite group collecting, of an afternoon the officers would be given separate
- 04:00 physical training, the ones that were off duty. So they'd set up horses and mats and so forth and we'd go through quite strenuous exercises, including revolver shooting. You know, we'd throw something over the side and practise revolver shooting. But in the main it was physical exercise so because during the day it's, you don't wouldn't get over much exercise.
- 04:30 And in the tropics they put out saucers of salt so as you're walking along the alleyways you'd be scooping up scoops of salt and putting it in yourself, mm, but so I suppose you could say it was deliberately done in order to collect grouping of some sort
- 05:00 because there'd be lots of the, I'll call them ratings although I don't just, I don't feel that way, but the way that expression, the expression's used at the time. A lot of those who were off duty would be watching as well so they'd say, they'd see these erks [slang: unranked navy person] and turks going through their paces on the quarterdeck.

**Did you feel a special affinity with the ratings because you'd come up?**

Yes, there was a feeling. I did recognise

- 05:30 that to some extent, I had to change my ways. You can't be friends to all. You can't be too close to everybody in the way that you'd like them to be as the way that you were as a member of the lower deck. There are differences and it is a requirement and in any leadership situation a person that says they're very close to the people
- 06:00 that they're supervising very often are being taken for a ride, mm. They're not leading at all. Someone's leading them, but you find that out the hard way, mm.

**Did you mentioned before there was a ship's cat. Can you talk a bit about the ship's cat?**

Yes, he was named Red Lead but and of course there's an awful lot of red lead about a ship, as you know, and there's a very rough

- 06:30 naval saying, don't know whether you've heard of it or not, but when you're speaking of women and talking about women that ashore and so forth, "What sort of fun did you have last night, Joe?" "Oh, bugger me, she had red lead in the bilges." So but so red lead's quite a real thing. But the cat, not supposed to have a cat aboard of course, but for some reason
- 07:00 Red Lead was allowed to stay aboard. And while I knew that she was aboard and she tried to escape while we were in Tanjong Priok the last time and she took off and a couple of the crew grabbed her because they, again seamen saying, "When cats," you know, "leave the ship it's time to get off," and she
- 07:30 she tried to get off but.

**That was at...**

Grab, grabbed her back aboard.

**Was that your last port of call before you were sunk?**

Oh yeah that was, yeah, mm. Yep.

**And who looked after the cat?**

Oh anybody, you know, she did very well. Oh it was some, it was a seaman somewhere, but didn't have a, he looked after her, yeah, but she was spoilt hollow. Everyone knew she was there, mm.

**Did she roam all over the...**

Over the place,

- 08:00 mm. Usually found a, you know, a warm spot or a cool spot or a shady spot and wandered around.

**Were there rats on the boat?**

Not to the best of my knowledge, no. Not the best of my knowledge, but she was well fed, mm.

**Can you talk a bit a little bit about the first action that you saw on the Perth?**

Mm. Well of course I didn't see much of it of course, although I heard a lot and well the first action was an air

08:30 raid I suppose in Tanjong Priok and course another bloke and I were down in my little dungeon.

**You couldn't see out at all?**

No, no, I couldn't see out at all.

**How were you communicating with the bridge?**

Telephone.

**To the bridge?**

Mm. To... And anyone else that rang in of course. But what were we on about?

**We were talking about the air raid.**

Oh the first,

09:00 yeah, first air raid, right. And there were these thumps and I said, "What are these? What are these?" He said, "They're bloody shells, bombs dropping." But fear, it's a peculiar thing. It sorts of builds up as a cumulative factor the fear and at that stage I can honestly say that, you know, I...

09:30 The ship had survived for so long that, "She'll survive. She'll be apples. She'll be right," seemed to be my thought, so that I wasn't really afraid. It's an overstatement I suppose but because you couldn't see I suppose there was, and you're relying on other people so that

10:00 you don't, I didn't have any real frozen fears or anything really at that stage, mm. Be a brave man to say that he didn't later, though.

**And what happened a what was the result of that air raid?**

Well we got a few near misses but we weren't hit. It was only a single ship, ah single plane, mm.

**What about later engagements at sea?**

Oh well, the first engagement was in

10:30 the naval Battle of the Java Sea so that we went down to the other end of the Java, of the island of Java, off Surabaya, and that's where we met up and for the first time with some of the ships that we went to sea with to fight a battle for some of our fleet members. We met for example the Houston captain. We didn't meet him but

11:00 there was meetings and there was a Dutch senior officer that they went across and met who were the ad, who was the admiral that took us to sea to the main action. So that with the Dutch, English, Americans and Australians in the fleet that took to sea communication

11:30 difficulties three ways. Now we were used to the Brits to a certain extent. See the [HMS] Exeter for example was in the fleet. She had fought the River Plate [naval battle in the South Atlantic] job and so very experienced ship, and I speak of ship as a person in that sense, and that's the way we spoke of a person of the ship, and there were

12:00 but other ships the [HNLMS] De Ruyter, [HNLMS] Java. The Dutch hadn't fought an action in two hundred years and so the admiral, who was senior officer, as admiral of the fleet took us to sea with goodness knows what training in action. Waller had been in charge of the V&Ws, the five Australian destroyers, in all the major actions in the Mediterranean so he fought Perth as destroyer

12:30 and but he was controlled by the admiral.

**What do you mean by fighting a ship as a destroyer?**

Well a she... A destroyer's a far shorter vessel, you can turn it round, where a long, a bigger ship you had to take a, you know, bigger turns, and you had to slow it up more slow. The movements of bigger ships, they require different ship's movements. It's a diff... It's a different relationship between ship and captain so that

13:00 a destroyer is flung round like these little things you see going round the harbour of a Saturday afternoon. You're just thrown round and it's a vastly different concept to a larger a larger cruiser.

**What was the Perth like when you were throwing it round?**

Exhilarating if you like. I've often tri... I read a book written by a lieutenant commander on Houston who was eulogising,

13:30 he was in the permanent navy and this was his first action, and he said, "The sight of Perth with its bit in its mouth turning at eighty-five, ah forty-five degree angle," he said, "it was the experience of my life." This is in the foreword to his book at...

**Can you describe that for us, being on the...**

Oh well, you got these violent shudderings

- 14:00 and then a shuddering the other way, but that wasn't in this first action. Where he was controlled in the first action. He was controlled by the admiral so that he had to hold a line ahead and so forth. He had to hold ship of the line, ship line ahead, and all of the requirements of a fleet as opposed to an individual, whereas later on he certainly had Houston but Houston was responsible to him
- 14:30 at that stage. But going back to the first experience, that we were straddled twenty-seven times before we could get a shot in. The Nip was a very, very experienced fleet, you know, in terms of training, whereas we were a knocked together group from the message from Churchill, "Send a few ships up there to try and stop the rot," you know, after
- 15:00 Singapore.
- Where were you heading for?**
- This type a... No, sent up to the Java Sea, into the Java Sea. He shouldn't have let them into the Java Sea in retrospect but he had to show willing to the Dutch. He had to try and produce a some sort of stalling but it was a major mistake on Churchill's part to lose all those ships. In retrospect it's easy to say so but that's the way we all feel. It was a terrible mistake but
- 15:30 my personal experience was just this violent shuddering and these terrific bangings and clatterings of the guns going off and of course the shells landing all round us, which is a very frightening sound cause you don't you seem to think it's next door to you, and then of course the clattering of the big
- 16:00 six-inch guns, big, that was our biggest. And then of course combined with the various rumours that are floating around so you'd hear a rumour floating around, "The De Ruyter's going," or, "The [HMS] Endeavour's got splitting in two. It's gone," you know, and you get these sorts of immediate feedbacks. But of course I'm trying to take notes on the plot for the plot and he'd be telling me directions and telling...
- 16:30 And it was hopeless, got out of hand very quickly as far as I was concerned. But my own experience I was so filled with the immediacy of what I was required to do that I was just conscious of the extreme loudness and the constant movement of the ship because I couldn't see anything, couldn't see anything but.
- Must have been must have been quite surreal.**
- Oh boy, it was a
- 17:00 quasi, but it was it was quasi real, yeah. You don't know but, and you're just getting rumours as opposed to facts too.
- How far over does she go when heeling over on the turn?**
- Well gee, like being in a rough sea. It would go, you know, it would be twenty-five degree over, even thirty degree over, but not much, wouldn't go much more than thirty but so
- 17:30 that's quite a big swing in. But the sea was fairly flat that afternoon so we weren't getting those violent swings of the hull. We were getting the violent swings dodging the shells, dodging the fall of shell. See a salvo will come over as a group and so it's up ladder down ladder as the as the order is given from the from the enemy. They might
- 18:00 drop a group of shells on the starboard side and the gunner over on that ship will say, "Up ladder two hundred," or whatever and the guns would come up, fire, and that might go over you, and the third one might straddle you so that two shells might be on the port side, two on the starboard side so that and with a with a dozen ships firing at you
- 18:30 there's an awful lot of action going on. And at the same time there were destroyers, enemy destroyers, rushing in firing torpedoes at you so that there's a requirement to shift direction quite quickly to let the torpedos slide past you, or you're gauging after you get a flash and, you know, and obviously the skipper
- 19:00 who was conning the ship at all the time, he would give directions to change direction because they had fired their salvo by that time, and so by changing direction he was hope if they were accurate he'd get out of the way. But by guess and by God a bit, you know, because they might be a bit out and you'd go straight into it. But you had to keep weaving
- 19:30 and he was at same time trying to get in close enough so he could bring his guns to bear, mm. So that at that stage the small arms, you know, the four-inch and the smaller stuff, see there was, it was an that action... Some say it was the biggest action since Jutland. But it was also fought in the dying period of
- 20:00 of history, of naval history. There were no planes. Now of course you can't fight an action without planes. They are the action. They are the future. They are everything in an action. But the Nips had one spotter plane, not a fighter plane, but he had they had a spotter and of course terrific advantage. But from our point of view it was a part of naval history that was passing. It didn't have these
- 20:30 dozens of aircraft in the action.

**Of course you realise that at the time you...**

No, we were fighting it of the period. But as naval history it's quite an interesting aspect of it.

**Can you describe the time when the enemy were first sighted in that battle?**

Well the chap by the name of Thode was on the after bridge, a marine bloke, and two striper, and he was giving me most of the directions and he was

21:00 focusing. He said, "There's a single mast appeared. Ah there's two. Ah there's three. There's a bloody forest." Mm. Of course their admiral that was in charge that afternoon, he'd been at Pearl Harbour. He'd had one of the sections at Pearl Harbour.

**Did you know who you were fighting?**

No, we knew they were Nips but

21:30 didn't know. We knew there was a fleet out there and we knew that there was an attacking, a convoy coming and we knew that they were protecting the convoy, so the admiral's aim and object was to get behind to dodge the fight to get to the convoy, of course. But the as it happened, and we'd patrolled up and down and we were just going back into Hote Bay up through the minefields in Tesora [?] when

22:00 they gave us, when they told us there's a fleet, gave us precise directions and so we turned round and went back out but.

**What happened next?**

Well what happened next is the bloody forest appeared over the horizon and we had to fight our way in against, you know, these larger shots, larger ships.

**Is your battle group working as a group or as in every person every ship for themselves?**

Well no,

22:30 that was one of the major area errors because we had had no communication and had no common communication to a, down to a fine art as a trained fleet would have. So that, for example, the Dutch cruisers, they had one British officer as a communications officer.

23:00 Well what's the good of that in an action? So we didn't even have the same communication system. And then quite a number of the destroyers, particularly the Houston, were American. Well of course, Americans do things their own way anyway, and so all in all communication was severely restricted as far as we were concerned. But of course there we were up against a fleet that had been training for years

23:30 and but so we got a beating, we got a beating. Although we got a few got a few shots in. We took one of the cruisers, mm.

**Can you take us into that battle a little more and describe what the next the next critical steps and what happened?**

Well it became a melee. It became pretty mixed later but it was darkness that sort of brought about the

24:00 break off of the action that, in that particular action but. Well again it'd be best to follow the tracks on an illustration rather than me give it wrongly.

**I'm actually rather more interested in your personal impressions at...**

Well...

**that you can remember at the time rather than...**

Yes, well I can't. I can only remember taking notes of these violent changes

24:30 and I'm certain that they weren't being given too accurately either because you know Thode, you know, with full exposure you could hear the cursing and raving and the dodging about and the long silences and terrific swearing and so forth, so it's difficult to believe he was taking accurate sights and be...

**Who's swearing?**

Well the people on the after bridge, you know, that were coming. This was a

25:00 direct link up to the to the after plot.

**Can you hear, can you describe some of the conversations you were hearing from the bridge at this time?**

Oh well it it's just expletives like, "Shit," "Fuckin' hell," "Christ, that was close." You know these sorts of... and continuous babble but. And of course the after bridge is... they're not doing anything until the front bridge is knocked out, the front bridge is knocked out, but

25:30 it was necessary, it was necessary, mm.

**Were you in radio contact with other ships at the time?**

Well the radio contact is dependent on communication device so that, oh no, it's mainly by flag and flag signalling because you can't break silence at sea except to... and notify people to that oh we're going into action and that's about all. You're not keeping up a running commentary

26:00 to anyone ashore. And the contact between ships, it might be by Morse or it might be by flag signals. Mostly by flag signal, which is a very paltry device and very slow device.

**Were you by yourself at your plotting room?**

No, there was another bloke with me, mm.

**Were you scared?**

Well scared, but not as not as... because I was

26:30 doing something. I was I was trying to record. I was doing something. But a chappie sitting in the corner, there were two others, sorry, there were two others. One to help me if needed and the other was a firefighter. Now he was waiting for a fire to break out to go and help put out the fire and they they're scattered in groups all over the place. Well he was on his own ready to join whatever group was necessary and he was

27:00 obviously petrified. He was petrified so that...

**How do you know that?**

Just I was only going by looking at his eyes, looking at his total immobility and but then when I spoke to him he, "Yes, yes, that's right." You know, I was just speaking non entities, "Gee, it's hot down here," or something like...

27:30 Oh I first broke the ice by just winking at him. You know, I just winked at him and you know a bit of a grin you know, and but then when he was called to a fire he got going, he was right, it was action. People needed to be active.

**You were hit...**

No, we weren't hit. Not in that first action, no. The Exeter was the first one to be knocked out and

28:00 then one of the destroyers and then several of the destroyers but we had to make smoke round the Exeter to allow them to limp out of the action. And so Houston and Perth made smoke that was put a colossal smoke screen around the ship and then that's the way we got in. We went through the smoke and when we came out of the smoke we were in fighting distance

28:30 so at that stage the, you know, the blasting was on so that we were getting... and there's a terrific shudder as these six-inch guns go off in unison. Groups of four, usually you don't often get the groups of eight, mm, but and then of course later on as the destroyers came into action the four-inch guns close and so forth.

29:00 **Ah...**

Enough?

**I'm getting a bit breathless even listening to it. Um, how long were you involved in this engagement?**

Be about two hours on that, two hours in that, and then we broke off and then we made, there were only the four of us afloat. There was the De Ruyter, Java, Houston and Perth still a still fighting

29:30 so we at dark broke off and headed for Batavia in line ahead straight headed for Batavia. 'Bout eleven o'clock that night, now I'm trying to think of the order, there was the De Ruyter, was it Java? Or was there Java between Perth

30:00 and Houston? I think it was De Ruyter, Java, but I could be wrong. All of a sudden the des... the De Ruyter went up and then about five minutes later the Java went up and we were back in a fighting war. We'd run into we don't know what. We thought they were submarines, we thought they were possibly mines, but then we were driving through hundreds of people

30:30 off the two ships, having to go through them but we were blasting off. I really don't know what we were blasting at because there's no records that I know of about ships being sighted other than the poor old De Ruyter and Java just went up and sank.

**You couldn't stop to pick up survivors?**

No, could, no, we didn't know what was there. We'd go up ourselves if we did that. Geez, if you stopped

a sitting target.

31:00 **Were you still down at your post at this time?**

Oh yeah.

**So you could just hear this?**

Well and the word, "We're going through people. We came through Dutchmen. They're screaming," you know, as people ran along alleyways to an action stations and but that was it, that was it.

**You could hear this on your coming through on your...**

No I couldn't hear it. I couldn't hear anything. Couldn't hear anything.

**What about the ships in the Java Sea? You also had to leave behind the**

31:30 **survivors from those ships?**

Oh yes. We didn't pick up anybody, nor Houston, no.

**That must have been quite hard.**

Mm well it was. It's you or them and do you sacrifice seven hundred for a couple of hundred? You grow up pretty quickly in terms of decisions.

**Did you know anybody?**

But I didn't.

**Did you know any of the people on the other boats? Ships?**

What, the De Ruyter and Java? No, no.

32:00 We... See there it was a knocked together group. Just waifs and strays except the Australian ones and the Hobart was very lucky, it got out just got out, and went to Trincomalee across into Colombo, north of Colombo, so they got out but they were very fortunate. See that that photo next door which you've just seen, the last photo was taken from Hobart in Tanjong Priok and they were detailed to get out so they

32:30 got out, mm, after making a sweep up towards Singapore.

**Do you know if the Perth got anybody? Did you were you able to inflict any damage on Japanese ships?**

Oh yes, we claim a cruiser on that, in that first battle and hits on two others; that's our claim. Now in that sort of action where did the shells come from? You know, there's an awful lot of shells about so that

33:00 but we claim it and that's done by line of sight and chock cross-check by the gunners and the navigators, the people that are and the observers, so that we're pretty confident that that's a valid claim and it's claimed in the report too so, mm.

**And sorry,**

33:30 **so you limped back to the port...**

Oh no, we limp... We were still fighting ships, Houston and Perth. Well see the Houston had, their turrets had been knocked out in a previous fight. They were in a big air attack off Darwin and they had their they lost their rear, ah rear turrets in that action so they were limited in their armament right from the start.

34:00 **They weren't fully operational?**

No they weren't fully operational, so the 'Gallopings of the South Pacific' the Houston's known as, but so that Bata... Perth and Houston got back to Batavia and then another story starts, if you'd like to break there.

**Do you want to break there?**

Yeah.

**Can you tell us about the ports you called in**

34:30 **on the way on the way over to this Java Sea?**

Well starting from Sydney? We called in at Melbourne, Perth, ah Fremantle, and then we left to come up to Java and then we doubled back halfway up to go back to Fremantle.

35:00 I think we went right back. We picked up convoy and then the next port was Batavia, Tanjong Priok and then Surabaya, back to Batavia and that was it.

**You'd be waiting two years to join a ship. You you'd never left Australia.**

That's right.

**This must have been an amazing experience for you.**

Oh

35:30 mm, yep.

**Can you talk a little bit about your feelings on at first being at sea and calling in at these ports?**

Oh I can distinctly remember coming into the foreign port into Tanjong Priok and there was, and I've lived in, I've lived in the tropic for years afterwards. The oily water of a calm harbour is a sight that you don't see further south.

36:00 And there was a long canoe with one paddler and he had a great stick of bananas and I can still see that bloke. This was the east, you know, it... Tanjong Priok is a bloody terrible port in terms of it just grew you know, it typical Conrad stuff. You know there's all huts leaning every way and there's just... and there's,

36:30 although in one section of the harbour there's oil wells, I think they were Shell or Mobil, and of course... No, they could, they might have been Indonesian stuff, but they were nice and glittery and aluminium-like. But the face of the harbour and the walls themselves were just sticking together like any knockabout

37:00 bloke that's been living in a tropic for years but. But to me this was the east. This was Conrad all over and I was very impressed but Surabaya I only saw it from the ship. I, in fact I didn't get off in Tanjong Priok either so I didn't get up into Batavia at that stage,

37:30 but at Tanjong Priok I got down onto the wharves but didn't get away from the wharf area but I saw really diving into the atap [matting made from coconut leaves] type. Surabaya at that stage didn't have a, don't think it had a stone building in it. When I back went back years later, I've been back a few times on another different life,

38:00 when they just put up, Holiday Inn had put up their seventh day Holiday Inn in Ba... in Surabaya, and it looked so out of place alongside these atap huts, that I grew to love, that I grew to like. I like the atap.

**Had you been ashore anywhere before the ship was in action in Java Sea?**

Oh in Perth?

**Out outside Australia?**

Not outside Australia, no. I hadn't left New South Wales till

38:30 I went...

**So was Perth a significantly interesting experience for you, having never left New South Wales?**

Oh you did, yes. It was one of the really outstanding experiences of my life. It changed my life. Oh yes.

**You went back to...**

Never be the same again.

**You went back there later on to live didn't you? To Western Australia?**

Well I came out with a commissioning team from Quintana refinery. From England. I was working with British Petroleum and they asked me to come out with the commissioning team

**Just in the last**

39:00 **couple of minutes before the tape ends can you just tell us your impressions of arriving in Perth?**

Of arriving in Perth or Fremantle?

**In, oh well...**

In both.

**In arriving in Fremantle, obviously you had leave in Perth. Is that right?**

Oh yes.

**Yeah.**

Yes.

### **Can you tell us about that?**

Well I just I headed for the OBH. Do you know Perth do you? No? The Ocean Beach Hotel in Cottesloe. Everyone heads for Cottesloe after you've done the Fremantle pubs. Course it's a seamen's port.

39:30 Not now, but it was a seamen's port so that you had to, you know, drink your way through every pub and then you'd take up to the OBH at Cottesloe, and I pressed on, on a couple of occasions I went further up to Scarborough which is the Scarborough Hotel; it's gone now. But the OBH is still operating but it's a pretty seedy outfit now but then it was a good pub, and of course you went for a surf and went back to the pub.

40:00 And there again I came up against this class bit cause I was in uniform and walked into the pub and there were a few of the blokes off the Perth so you know I joined in with them but they weren't comfortable. They weren't comfortable, even though one striper. I wasn't of them. It's a strange

40:30 set up. So I quickly realised it and backed off and went and had a feed somewhere. Oh but...

### **Did...**

Oh but the last night aboard, if you know Perth at all, the old Adelphi was the pub, the Esplanade, and the Adelphi, the... But the Adelphi was the one so I went in and had cutlets and they had to last me a long time.

41:00 Although as a matter of fact the night before we went into Bata... into Sunda Strait, Gavin Campbell, it was his birthday, and he said, "Barker how about having the evening meal? It's my birthday." So I said, "Great." So we went in and it was cutlets, so we had cutlets. So cutlets live, linger long with me. But there I was,

41:30 sole, no-one else in the Adelphi dining room and I was sitting down and had this and went back to the ship. It was good.

## **Tape 5**

00:30 **All right. After what we talked about on Friday, now about the Battle of the Java Sea.**

And we've just arrived back in Tanjong Priok.

### **Tanjong Priok.**

Yep.

**So I think we'll take it up from, do you remember the when the ship left Tanjong Priok that time?**

Oh yes.

### **Was that you mentioned that Red Lead had run off the ship?**

Yes, had attempted to run off, yes, and was brought back. But we'd also loaded a lot of

01:00 safety, of rafts that usually carried on the on the merchant ships, but we took oh quite a big number of those. They were just on the wharf but it was chaos. It was a declared open city at that stage at the port. The petroleum installations were going up in great billows of smoke and it was chaos. Although you weren't aware of it so much but it was the

01:30 non-movement of people. They'd all cleared away from the harbour and so we were just loading up stores and the great difficulty was get of course getting oil for fuel. The there weren't enough people around. We were almost having to do it ourselves and there wasn't a great volume of it anyway but we were pretty low by this time so we were anxious to get it otherwise you're

02:00 dusted.

### **What other kinds of stores were you loading on at that time?**

Well food, and but we... not much ammunition but it was main... We were after fuel. Fuel was the essential and when we came across this heap of floats and of course we grabbed those.

### **Did you, was the ship fully equipped with lifeboats anyway?**

Well that's one of the issues.

02:30 In action one of the first things to go really because the concussion and everything else the lifeboats tend to be destroyed or blown off the ship like the aircraft the Parsons Duck, the aircraft that we had. That was destroyed by our own shellfire so it's a bit mixed. Those safety devices are good while you're



safe but

03:00 tend to be over underestimated or overestimated in times of strife.

**So these floats you were taking on, I mean I'm sure you were a bit worried about...**

Well why I, why I, I'm sort of laying heavy emphasis on it; they became so vital a few hours later.

**Can you just give a description of these floats? I mean while you...**

Oh well, they'd be about six feet by six feet I suppose and just

03:30 consisted of, I don't know what the composition would be. Probably cork surrounded by canvas and open in the base so that it was water but floating, but with some ropes round the side. They weren't really Carley floats [life rafts] in the sense that we understand Carleys but they were good. They were fine because they floated off. We didn't store 'em down below or anything,

04:00 mm.

**It's very easy now to think back to that moment and with what had happened afterwards and impress that upon it, but if you can possibly remember at the time, was the morale on the ship, okay, when you left Tanjong Priok?**

Of course, oh yes, it was great. It's just after you'd been in any sort of a fight, even a fight at school, of course you don't have those now, but you get a sense of ad... exhilaration. And but everyone was

04:30 so tired, unshaven and anxious to get their records up to date, sort of trying to get the ship shipshape again. There were you know the shell cases just... They were ejected and they float. They go out onto the deck and so every movement of the sea these dozens and dozens of cases swing around on the decks

05:00 and some go over the side there so there's a lot to be done to tidy the ship up again, mm.

**You mentioned before that the cat tried to run away.**

Oh God yes, mm.

**Was this an omen that people took particular notice of at the time?**

Who knows. Who knows. Some people I suppose would be more suspicious than others but it was certainly a talking point. It was certainly a talking point, mm.

**Do you think sailors are superstitious**

05:30 **people by nature?**

As a group? I don't suppose they are any more than any other group, individual differences being what they are, but to a certain extent. It's part of the tradition to keep them alive it's part of the folklore and same as the songs, but it's part of the past that's quite keenly passed on and enjoyed.

06:00 It's a good thing to have a sort of a coherent subculture if you like, mm.

**Were there other any other either lucky charms or bad omens that you remember from your time on the Perth?**

Well coming up to later on when we buried an American sailor on Toppers. He had a rabbit's foot with his medallion of his name and number,

06:30 which I gave to the surgeon commander that we dragged ashore, but so I suppose there's those sorts of individual lucky charms but I wasn't conscious of it at all. People own their own individual tokens if you like, but I wasn't conscious of it.

**You didn't have any such thing like that yourself?**

No I didn't have anything, no. No.

**Before we move on, because**

07:00 **this is gonna be the next part, is when the Perth goes down, you'd mentioned songs.**

Oh don't ask me sing 'em, no. No, I've forgotten most of them. Some people, Knocker White, if you interview Knocker White, has a whole flood of them but I've never been a dirty joke teller or a you know a singer at parties or anything like that, but some people are and you thoroughly enjoy them when somebody else

07:30 sings them. Ted Stapleton, a New Zealander that we caught up with later, a sailor, he had a whole flood of them. He'd just left the RN. He was on transfer over there and came back to Singapore and was picked up in further up the Java Sea.

**Most of these songs were a bit ribald?**

Oh yes, quite ribald mm.

**The reason we ask is 'cause that's one thing that oral histories often pick up that are left behind in the written accounts.**

08:00 **Are the song so...**

Ah, left out you mean?

**Yeah.**

Yes. Well Gavin Campbell would be another one that could read you up to them, mm.

**All right. Let's go back to leaving Tanjong Priok, that was it. Did you leave in the morning?**

No. It was late in the afternoon. Late in the afternoon and there was quite a big minefield outside the port so that it took a bit of winding through, mm.

08:30 So no, it was late in the afternoon

**And when...**

And it was line astern. We went out first and Houston followed, mm.

**Was the Houston damaged at this stage?**

Oh yes. Well the Houston had its rear armament knocked out from an earlier engagement off Darwin earlier on, mm. Air raid, mm, but oh she was still very much a fighting

09:00 ship but reduced.

**And where were you headed?**

Well we were headed to get out. We were going to Trincomalee I understand, or Colombo, one or the other, you know, but that's where Hobart went to. We might have gone down to Fremantle again but we were just anxious to get out of the out of the out of the Java Sea.

**Your role on this voyage, you mentioned the other**

09:30 **day was you were receiving radio messages or...**

Yes, um.

**Can you explain a bit about that?**

Well they'd come in code and I was the decoding officer, which meant you know going through the coded according to a series of codes which are highly confidential and putting it into our own language,

10:00 which and I then had to make a decision as to what I did with them. To keep them for later on. My job would then be pass to, pass them on to the appropriate person, mm.

**How did those codes work? Were they... Did they use words in place of other words or letters in place of other letters or...**

Well I don't know if it's all been bypassed now but I wouldn't be free to talk about that. My job was to get rid of the code book

10:30 in the event of us going down. But it essentially it's of that nature so that they come in in groups of letters and then has to be translated back through a series of arithmetic calculations.

**Do you remember any messages you received going out that day?**

Well yes there was one and it was from

11:00 the admiral in charge of Col... Admiral Collins, and it was to the captain of Perth and it was to the effect that the to expect the corvettes, was a plural, corvettes were patrolling Sunda Strait so that I felt that important enough because it was dark by then and it was important

11:30 enough to get it to the captain as quickly as I could. He took it, glanced it, thanked me, so I left. I left the bridge, mm.

**What was the captain doing on the bridge at this time? What was the normal role of a of the captain on board the bridge?**

Oh just to be there and ready to you know give orders as he thought fit. But there were navigating officers the... I can remember John Harper was there.

12:00 I can remember a chap, a midshipman, by the name of Tranby White. I can remember Gaye and yeah, that's about all I can remember. I think there's a gunnery chap. I forget his name, RN bloke, mm.

**The ship wasn't in action at this stage? It was a normal...**

No it wasn't. It was just going a normal course to Sunda. You don't have to go far before you have to swing in to

12:30 make towards Sunda Strait, but it doesn't take long to get from Tanjong Priok to the strait, or beginning of it.

**When the ship's not in action, was there anyone manning the after bridge?**

No. No, it's not manned. It's an action station function, mm.

**Was the Sunda Strait acknowledged as a dangerous place for shipping? During this period?**

Well any place at sea is dangerous but it would be keenly recognised that

13:00 the Japanese at this stage would be one would expect them to be if they were seamen at all to guard the Straits, to guard them all and bottle anybody inside the Java Sea, which they did. That's where they picked up the Exeter the following day and a number of the ships that are linked out the destroyers that are linked away from the main Battle of the Java, mm.

**Can you explain a little**

13:30 **bit just for the for the record about this geography just so as we have an idea of where the Sunda Strait is and...**

Well it's important to realise that Indonesia is a string of islands. It runs across and it's really a protective barricade, I suppose you can think of, running from New Guinea to the north of Australia through to Sumatra, which is to the south, and west of Malaya and Singapore,

14:00 so that you get the long island of Sumatra coming down parallel along with the Malayan peninsula and then roughly horizontal going right through to Papua New Guinea, of which Java is the one closest to Sumatra. Sunda Strait is the strait dividing those two so that on any map you when you find Sumatra, look to the bottom of it, there's Sunda Strait, and Java separate

14:30 is the island to the east of Sumatra.

**But when you're actually in this strait...**

Mm.

**Is it is it narrow? You can see land at all times or...**

Well not initially be... not when you're in the strait. But the entrance to it there's a very big bay called Banten Bay and then there's a projectory out. Rough, going in roughly a north-west direction. That's where the strait narrows down. But Banten Bay is quite

15:00 a big bay so that you're... But land would be visible from the bridge at this stage, but not in the dark of course, mm.

**So how does the ship navigate through this strait?**

How do you mean navigate?

**Well it's...**

The navigator tells you where you are and...

**The navig...**

You get the order, mm.

**Okay, the navig, that's obviously not your role to do that.**

Mm. But how do you mean navigate the mm?

**Well the in the dark are there are there signals from the shore? Are there any lighthouses**

15:30 **or were there...**

Oh the there's the Merak... They're mainly for navigational purposes. There's the Merak light, which is on that big promontory I spoke of, and that's where the ferries go from in the present day from Java across to Sumatra. But then there's another light in the middle of the strait on a rocky outcrop and that's flat in the middle of the Sunda Strait called Toppers Island.

16:00 That is not the native title but it's the title by which it's well known.

**So these lights were visible...**

They were still visible and still operating, mm.

**When was the first sign of there being any trouble to come on this journey?**

Well there was a dark, and I'm relying on other people now.

**Right.**

But there was a dark shape

16:30 and they've got we've got lookouts all the time of course and people with the sharpest eyes and all the rest of it, very powerful glasses, and there was an outline spotted at the entrance to about Banten Bay so it was challenged, as any shipping would be, and it gave the wrong signal in reply, which indicated that it wasn't ours. Just gave a series of green flashes

17:00 and turned away. Immediately the captain ordered to you know to fire and then also to get a signal away that we were going into action, mm.

**What was your what were you doing at this time? What was the first mission you had?**

Well we went to action stations immediately. We were at second degree readiness at that stage.

17:30 We went immediately to action stations, which is the highest degree of readiness, and so I was down at my action station.

**Were you involved in sending the message off?**

No.

**No.**

No. That would be done by the signallers, mm.

**So action stations, we talked a little bit about in to do with the Battle of the Java Sea.**

Mm.

**The after bridge would be manned immediately?**

Oh yes, that would immediately manned and that was manned by Commander Martin,

18:00 who was the father of Sir John Martin, the, Sir David Martin, rather, who became governor of New South Wales, who was also a navy bloke of course, mm.

**So for the next period who were you in contact with yourself?**

With Thode, who was up with Martin on the after bridge, and there were two other people at my action station so they were

18:30 my immediate points of contact, but it was mainly with Thode, who had the responsibility of assisting Martin. And Martin of course would be in touch with Waller, the captain, but there wasn't too much of that. Waller was fully engaged so really Martin would be watching the flow of what was happening,

19:00 ready if anything happened. So it was largely a passive role until anything happened to the to the bridge, main bridge, mm.

**Was there anything particularly frightening or unusual about this engagement?**

Well everything happened. There was a terrific amount of movement of the ship and all armament was

19:30 firing because we were in close by this time. We'd run into a an armada of about two hundred. There were about... I understand there were about two hundred ships on the for'ard plot, underneath the main bridge, so that we realised that it was the landing convoy for Java and so

20:00 there were supporting craft all round us and we virtually immediately a lot of big ships and small ships, but mainly the ships that that landing troops were on were well into Banten Bay. And there's a book by Brendan Whiteley that has a neat illustration

20:30 of just how they were positioned. And but in addition to that numbers of destroyers and cruisers and of course we were immediately under attack by destroyers firing torpedoes and their deck armament and we were doing the same, so that it was a real dogfight, a real dogfight,

21:00 mm. And of course Houston was endeavouring to follow us. It was a case of 'follow me' 'cause Waller was in charge, mm, but they were doing exactly the same just it was on to local control. It quickly moved to local control as opposed to coordinated firing. It went to local control so the captains of each of the pieces of armament could pick their own

21:30 target, mm.

**Ah did you get hit straight away?**

No. No it wasn't immediate and then we copped some shellfire, but not the bridge. It was mainly aft and so that there was a fair amount of wounding and they were taken into the wardroom and the wardroom became the ambulance centre under action

22:00 and so I understand the surgeons kept quite busy along with the sick berth attendants, the SBAs, but then the fire people trying to get fire under control and a neat illustration, it's not accurate but the window on for Perth at Garden Island chapel gives

22:30 a clear demonstration of this action. But a lot of blazing colour because they were firing shells in order to lighten up the sky and so forth.

**You were you were at below deck at this stage**

Yes. I didn't see a thing.

**What could... What were you experiencing at the time? There must have been noises and...**

We realised that we were in serious trouble by the amount of movement,

23:00 and of course the reports coming down from the after bridge, which were pretty garbled really because Thode and Martin didn't really know what was going on. They were quite limited in their appreciation of the situation.

**Was there an atmosphere of panic at any stage?**

No. No, by no means. That because I suppose people

23:30 expected us to get out of it. It's surprising the... It doesn't sort of creep up on you that anything untoward was really going to happen. "Oh, we'll get out of this. We've got out of it before." And so that while there was obvious fear and one would couldn't say otherwise,

24:00 no, it you could never say it was panic, no. Even when abandon ship occurred and in order we were the first torpedo and that really shook the ship, and that's when Waller said, "That's torn it," because he knew that he'd never get the ship out then and

24:30 after shortly after that abandon ship, the order went to abandon ship.

**What happens at that moment when the order to abandon ship comes through?**

Well everyone just rushes. You're on your own. And I came up to the wardroom flat, which is immediately above where I was, which is quite a big space and

25:00 my vivid memory I remember a chappie going to the fridge to get some to have a drink of water and in the main people running each way going every way, so I went for the ladder that lead onto the upper deck. I had to go down an alleyway towards the port side

25:30 and when a second torpedo hit and I was bounced from one side of the alleyway to the other and the angle of the alleyway changed so it... But I kept on going 'bounce, bounce, bounce' and I got out onto the upper deck and assisted people

26:00 throwing any wood any anything that they reckoned would be useful overboard, which was a bit redundant because they'd float off anyway, but at the time it was considered worth doing and after about ten minutes it was, we thought, "Come on, let's go." We were all mopping in.

**After an after an order for abandon ship has been called is there any kind of command structure that's still in place?**

No. No. After that it's

26:30 on your own. You're on your own, mm.

**Did you see any panic at this stage?**

Well I wasn't exactly looking to make a study of other people's reactions but no, I wouldn't say that. In fact I was quite impressed and I'm looking back, I was, you know, twenty-one at the time I'm eighty-two now so that you're asking a lot, but I was quite

27:00 conscious when I came out you know how black it was and also how people were doing this coordinated work. They were. But on reflection it was a panic move, mm. It was a panic move but then we went over and I carefully climbed through, you know, the wire struts

27:30 ah ah because I thought, "You don't want to get caught," but then I thought well, "Will I dive or will I jump?" and so I thought be best to jump in case I hit something. And so I just jumped and swam as strongly as I could away from the ship because I knew that you know that things were happening and the further I could get away from the ship the better, mm. As I was going away it must have been

28:00 the third torpedo or it might have been a shell landing in the sea but I seemed to felt a terrific thump on my tummy which was explosion the effect of a explosion, like when you toss a an expl... a gelignite into

a river you see the fish, but and quite a number of people were killed with that sort of effect, mm. So I got away, turned over and watched

- 28:30 the ship, and it was rolling towards starboard and when the propeller came first came up and then it righted itself and rolled to port but the both propellers were still turning and then it just went down and a great shout went up, "She's gone." And
- 29:00 speaking of tradition, all debts are off at the last turn of the screw, mm. At so then you know I was just milling around as we all were and then these floats, you know, these floats were... I was clinging to one for a while and then it was very overcrowded and I thought, "I'll back off
- 29:30 and let things get settled a bit." So I backed off and just started to paddle a bit and I caught up with the navigator, Harper, a bloke by the name of Gaye, who would have been amongst the last people to leave the bridge. And I stayed with them oh it must have been for a couple of hours but Harper had lost half an ear
- 30:00 and so he'd lost the... And I was talking to him and he said, "I can't really hear you, Barker. You'd better get on the other side." So I got... 'Cause I wanted to know what that light was and he said, "It's an island in the middle of the strait." And they were just paddling along because the water was quite warm, quite warm, and so I thought, "I think I'd better have a go for that," because
- 30:30 I wasn't really making much headway towards the coast of Java and we could have been alone in the world, the three of us. And I said, "I think I'll have a go for the island," and they said, "Okay, good luck," and they stayed together and they were picked up by a Nip destroyer shortly afterwards. But I kept on and on reflection it might sound a bit iffy or so forth but
- 31:00 I really swam into another life. I became another person. I caught up or got close to the island when the current caught me, you know as currents do, and I was just about to make that break to give it a go and I realised that the current was too good and a lot of quite a number of people died by giving it a go.
- 31:30 So I let myself go and I was swept down to the southern side and immediately it eased, which I knew it would from my earlier, from my swimming days, and I started to, just about started to swim up to the island and the voice came out of the darkness, "Could you give us a hand, mate? I'm bugged." And so
- 32:00 what do you do? So I went and talked Claude Woodley into getting going. So he clung onto me and you know I was swearing at him and cursing, "Come on you lazy bastard, swim. Kick it, kick it, come on." But he was bugged. He was really bugged but fortunately we started to hit coral and I've still got a scar on my ankle from the
- 32:30 first ulcer that emerged I think from the coral. So I just laid in the shallows and then pulled up onto the... 'Cause didn't have shoes on.

**Can I ask what you what you were wearing at this stage?**

Well I had a long pair of pants on and which I kicked off because when you go into action

- 33:00 stations you're supposed to have anti-flash gear on which covers your face. You're supposed to have gloves on, anti-flash gear, you have a life belt and you're supposed to have your legs and arms covered, but of course that goes by the board according to your degree of action and so forth. So I kicked my shoes off and kicked my long pants off
- 33:30 but I had my Mae West on but I didn't blow it up because I wanted... I felt it best at this stage not to be impeded by an inflated... And so that's what I... But I did have a... From Paddy Pallin I, about a year before, couple of years before, now, come to think of it, I'd had a good windcheater
- 34:00 waterproof top jacket with hood which was pretty new, pretty up, cool in those days, and a nice green one with a big pocket in front, new stuff, and I'd bought a quite a bit from Paddy and so I had that on and I had that till the Nips took it off me so it's, so that was it.

**Let's go back a little bit. You mentioned you**

- 34:30 **in the water you could have been alone for all the world.**

Yeah.

**Can you describe that in a bit more detail for us? What could you see? What was around you when you were in the water there and the ship was sinking?**

It was just darkness. Darkness. Couldn't see far at all. You could see the Javanese coastline but as I remember it couldn't see the Sumatran coastline so it was still pretty open, but I had my... I could see this light

- 35:00 with the hillock. It was like a volcanic apex against the dark. There's an illustration drawn later by Ray Parkin in his book Out of the Smog. Must give him a plug.

**No, well we'll take a picture of that as well if we can. Was the water completely full of debris?**

No,

35:30 I wasn't conscious. But of course a hell of a lot of oil. See we were swimming through oil and so we're completely covered with oil, and one had the sense to be careful to keep your mouth shut because a mouthful of that and you really knocked over. But you're conscious of this sluggishness in the water as you swam through it and you were

36:00 hoping it would just be a small patch. The other thing one was conscious of, and I've never had a satisfactory answer, was continuous, not nibbles, but stings on the both legs, particularly, and obviously there was some something in the water that was stinging but I didn't see any sharks or anything like that but obviously you were conscious...

36:30 **Was there...**

very conscious of aware of the possibilities.

**Was there a great deal of noise?**

Not at that stage. It was all over. See the Houston went about half an hour later and then from time to time you'd hear the screws of a ship but I honestly didn't see the ship. I didn't see... I

37:00 distinctly recall hearing, you know, the turning of a screw but I didn't see anything. But I was conscious of the Javanese coast and keeping my mouth shut, swimming leisurely, not rushing it, and but particularly the focus was on Toppers, mm. Mm.

**You're**

37:30 **coming into Toppers Island, who are you with at this stage? You'd just picked up this one...**

Yeah, Claude.

**Claude.**

That was it. So we got ashore. I left him on the coral and I got a onto the island itself a little quicker and there were a couple more people at that stage and then

38:00 before it was light even there were ten of us. You'd have to ask others where they actually landed on the island. I'm conscious of Roberts, an engineering two striper, who said that he landed against the current so that I remember speaking of that with him one time, but where the others landed, I don't know, mm. But

38:30 there was... The layout of Toppers is quite interesting because to get up the lighthouse there's a step of stone steps made from the local material. There must about a hundred of them, which is quite steep, and of course dragging, we all dragged ourselves up these steps wondering what was on top, hoping there'd be

39:00 you know a facilities like water and so forth. But there turned out to be two natives who were manning the lighthouse. No English at all, very limited in their food because they were given rice as a ration but they were expected to catch their own fish, which they did

39:30 mainly by the tidal movement in the ponds. And they would drain the little ponds for those tiny little fish that they'd dry and so it was dried fish and rice that kept them alive, which they shared with us. It was marvellous and it... They didn't... They weren't aggressive, they weren't angry, they were helpful

40:00 and we were eating them out of house and home because shortly after that as I mentioned before we saw a float, a raft, coming by with crowded with Americans. We knew we knew they weren't ours so we assumed they were American, covered in oil of course because the lighthouse keepers had given us kero [kerosene]

40:30 to try to get some of the oil off, which we had scraped off some, and so relative to what was... what we were like when we came ashore we got some of it off, particularly around our face, which was stingy, could be quite stingy, unpleasant. But so how do we get these people in?

**How much time had elapsed?**

We would have been ashore about half an hour. Time to go up, the they gave us

41:00 the kero which we were all scrabbling for and washing ourselves and then we went down to see if there were other people, so in retrospect about half an hour I'd say.

**And how far before dawn was this?**

Just cracking dawn. It was cracking dawn when we got up to the top of the steps. I was conscious that you know we had no difficulty in seeing where we were

41:30 at that stage but when we got down it was light. We could see these people in the water on the raft and so it was tons of stuff all round the island by this stage.

## Tape 6

00:31 Just to... Just before start the...

**Yep.**

The, ah, I... At one stage in another life I was selling brickworks around the world. I owned a company that was, we had the agency for scratch lottery tickets all over Australia and in addition while we were going around places like Colombo and you know Fiji and places like that selling lottery tick...

01:00 ah lotteries, we picked up a couple of other agencies, one of which was making bricks, brickwork, the actual brick making equipment, Wallbanks, and we had an agent in Kathmandu and every time I'd go to Nepal he had two teenage sons and so I built in a few days

01:30 and they took me to some iso... Marvellous experience. I've done a couple of the standard walks like Everest and Annapurna and so forth. Anyway, away we go.

**So we'll go back to are we ready? Um just**

Where are we?

**You're on top of Toppers Island**

On dawn, at the crack of dawn, yeah.

**At the crack of dawn.**

Yeah.

**I just... This is quite a high peak. It's a hundred steps, you mentioned.**

Mm.

**What could you see as dawn was breaking from the top? Was the panorama open to you?**

02:00 I wasn't conscious of it really. I was conscious of sitting at the top but not at that stage. This was later on, but in terms of vista outlooks we were so concerned with ourselves at this stage, we were dripping in diesel oil you know, so that you're very conscious of trying to prevent swal... getting any of it in your nose, in your ears, everything, and

02:30 in your hair, of course. I had some hair at that stage. And so that you're mainly concerned with, "Right, we're here." Fresh water, that's one thing. Getting rid of the oil's another and what are we going to do now is another, but immediate thought was, "Whew, we're ashore." And then was the rescue.

03:00 And then...

**Well let's stick with your immediate thoughts. Let's go through this thing bit by bit.**

Oh yes.

**You came down the stairs again.**

Mm.

**You had some kero, you were washing yourself off. What happened when the...**

Well there was tons of stuff about and we're, you know, strong current we were all conscious of. But we weren't talking much. We were bits of zombies, really, but what'll we do? Well there was a

03:30 rather long strips of Japanese rope, I'll call it, that for, made up of straw, really. It's a, that they tie up casks and so forth. I don't know whether you can place it or not but it's strong if you've got enough of it. Well there were lengths of that which we tied together and the main operatives involved would be

04:00 Thode and myself. We quickly gathered these, although a chap by the name of Al Parker was also, you know, involved, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." We strung 'em together and, "Who's going out?" and no-one else was making a move so, "I'll go out." So I tied it round me, which was very loose and I doubt whether it held really for if it come to the crunch point,

04:30 but I swam out, which wasn't very far, it would be from here maybe beyond the front fence, not much further. Another chappie by the name of Jewel, he was wasn't with this little group. He was on his own and he had a biscuit tin which... and a lump of wood so he was in this like a tiny little bay,

05:00 a bit of a... where any boat would land, and he was on this but wasn't making headway but he got to the, to this raft as well cause just as well, he couldn't have got it in. So he clung onto it as well so we dragged him in, but he was trying to get to them to help as well so we all came in together. Well soon as I got to it they could see me and they pulled me in.



- 05:30 But I was surprised with the Americans. They hardly said a word. They were they were zombies too. Amongst them was a very big overweight surgeon captain – we didn't know he was a surgeon at the time; didn't know he was a captain – but he was the surgeon captain on Houston and the others were pretty deferential
- 06:00 to him as it turned out because they helped him up these a hundred steps and he was really buggered, covered in oil and so forth, and up on top which I haven't mentioned before there was a little, oh there was a house, we'd call it call it a house, and the main section of that was a bedroom. Double bed made up, clean linen, which we hadn't dared thought of flopping onto, but he flopped
- 06:30 straight onto it, oil and all. Just flopped onto it and I'm just telling you thoughts and conscious visions at the time. So that's how it came that I when I got the rabbit's paw from the American, it was washed up, I knew who to give it to, but he just tore the
- 07:00 rabbit's paw off, tossed that away and kept the kept the medallion.

**Let's just talk about the American that was washed up. Was that the only body that was washed up on the island?**

On Toppers? Yes, we had to, we couldn't... There was no soil so we just had to pile stones on it, and I said the Lord's Prayer. No one knew the anything so I thought something had better

- 07:30 be said and that was it. The Americans weren't there. There were thirteen of them and again, and I like Americans, they're fine, but I'm just conscious again of a different outlook, different set of attitudes. We were starting to come to life then somehow, but we went back up the stairs. Nowhere else to go, you couldn't walk round the island,
- 08:00 nowhere else to go really, and got up there and there was one of the Americans sitting down alongside... it was more than a tin. It was a big sack full of the of food that the Japanese issued to their soldiers on landing. It's like popcorn only it's made from rice, sugared, and it was like
- 08:30 a big container. And we knew that we were devilish short of food. By this time we could see what was there. And there he was calmly eating, eating his way through it. He was quickly hauled off it of course but so we had the Australians, the Americans weren't involved. The Australians sat down and
- 09:00 a map emerged, I don't know where that came from, just a school atlas, and it had a... and was geared... It was Dutch of course so it was geared, there was one map of Sunda and so this was... We tore that out and we were sitting round on the deck of the of the house, the verandah, and deciding what to do.
- 09:30 This was twenty-four hours later really.

**So at in this period did a sort of command structure emerge? Did rank form become important again or were you just all on your own?**

Well this is it. This becomes difficult talking about oneself. It's... This is the awkward part. That's where I say I swam into a different life. I became a really,

- 10:00 a different person, and I found myself making the creative suggestions and so forth. And same as in the morning. Thode ah was recognised as a two striper but there was Roberts, who was a two striper engineer, but he didn't endeavour, there was no creative input,
- 10:30 and that's when I felt... Maybe it's only me, it's only my projection, but I felt I came into my own. I was a man, a man amongst men. I could make a contribution and be conscious of trying to influence people and I could do it and I did it, and it was quite an enervating
- 11:00 experience. It was quite something and I was conscious of it, that's the peculiar thing, because before although we I'd been put in charge of people and I'd supervised people it was all along strict standard lines and it wasn't where were you in a tight spot and someone swims to a surface. I felt that I was swimming into a different role and well it's stood me in good stead ever since.

**So when you had this map, what did you decide?**

Well we decided to we had plenty of material to work on. There were plenty of people that had the capability of knocking together a raft. Two drums, plenty of flat timber so and plenty of cordage to tie things with. We'd head across to that island

- 12:00 across there which we could see (UNCLEAR). It's... It runs from sort of west to east across the strait, Sangiang Island, and we thought that the currents wouldn't be too bad between the two islands. We thought that would be broken up, which it was, so that we wouldn't get caught in the mainstream current running out into the Indian... And then
- 12:30 because we could hear the fighting war going on in Java, cannons going off and so forth, we realised that there was a fighting war and two sides and we knew that we, the Allies, were on the eastern end of that war. And of course the Japs we knew had just landed so we knew what roughly where the front line would be, so we thought if we could then get over

13:00 to the mainland, which Sang... going to Sangiang would be one step towards getting us closer, we could then possibly get round to join our people. We weren't to know that you know, that the whole exercise only lasted four days before the Japs took over the whole island because there'd been another large landing following the Java Sea show.

13:30 There was a big convoy at the back of them that just went a, went into Saul Bay.

**Did you ever see while you were in Topper Island or any time after that what happened to the Japanese fleet that had attacked you?**

Yes. I can remember being right up on top and trying to go to the toilet because one thing that happened in terms of the trauma

14:00 we all dried up. None of us had a crap for about a fortnight but I was trying, and I was squatting behind a couple of shrubs, down on my hunkers of course, and a Japanese destroyer slowly came by obviously looking at the island, just sussing it out, and there was this great Nippon ensign

14:30 on the stern, great big... Still had... It was still like a battle ensign. When ships at that stage went into action they'd put up what's known as a battle ensign, which is a great big thing, to let everybody know who's who. And it gave me the impression looking at it, "God, they've still got that battle ensign." But it wouldn'ta been, it would have been in another position, this was on the stern, so that was the only

15:00 ship because I had floated past. Toppers Island is around that big projectory where Merak is, the Merak light. Banten Bay is to the north of that so that you can see the advantage of having an illustration in this...

**Mm.**

circumstances but, so that you couldn't see where the wreckage... I couldn't see where the battle had occurred. I'd

15:30 swam out of the region.

**Out of the line of sight.**

About ten miles to the north.

**Was anyone who you had landed with amongst the Australians or indeed the Americans in a better position to tell the what had happened in the rest of the battle? Did anyone have any idea what had happened to say the captain of your ship?**

No, ah there was no-one off the bridge. But of course I'd been speaking to Gaye and to Harper. Gaye was the

16:00 last, he was ordered off the bridge by Waller, but of the other Australians there was no-one off the bridge. Thode had some idea but not what happened on the bridge, not what happened on the bridge. He wasn't...

**You knew from speaking to Gaye that Waller had gone down with the ship?**

16:30 He thought he had. One of the interesting aspects, again I'm speaking of secondhand now, but a number of the senior officers such as the commander, gunnery officer, the chief two and a half dental chap, there were about five senior officers on a log, they were seen together on a log going down towards the

17:00 Indian Ocean. Never seen again. So obviously just went out to out to the Indian some... So that don't know what it tells you, but I've always interpreted it that seniority and consciousness of positioning and so forth starts to break down a little bit under those circumstances because I should imagine

17:30 that, and I'm only guessing, ah that there'd be a certain structure remaining and the chief of that structure will stay on the log, but who knows? Who knows? But there's all sorts of interesting aspects that and this is one of the main aspects of the whole three year, three and a half year exercise

18:00 that has been missed and cannot be told or hasn't been told so far of such feelings and attitudes and ways of behaviour under stress. Quite vital elements of people's behaviour that marvellous opportunity but completely won't say completely

18:30 but has been missed in terms of the secondary analysis.

**When you said you swam off into a new life, do you think...**

Well that's a poor statement, that. It, to me it means something.

**It it's an interesting one because it talks of this breakdown of rank and the breakdown of the superstructure of command and then...**

Well it doesn't entirely the breakdown, but it restructures itself. It restructures itself,

19:00 mm.

**Do you think there was a latent interest in psychology when you when you were...**

Oh no, that's another story in terms of how the... I was very conscious of the need for education but I wasn't conscious so much of looking at behaviour as such, although I mentioned before John Carrick had talked to us and I was conscious of the... there was a subject matter to be studied. But no, when I started

19:30 the first degree I was so conscious of having to pass and I took on four subjects in the first year that I just put me head down and worked like buggery without really thinking of what I was going to do at the end of it. That was an end in itself

**Mm.**

But when Bill O'Neill said, "Would you like to try Honours?" that tended to focus me in the direction

20:00 of psychology. And then of course I developed a, you know, a very deep interest in it and became a career. But then later on in life, jumping of course, I became quite disillusioned with it. It had been taken over too much by the welfare system and the health system and so forth and we lost sight of the industrial stuff, of industrial relations and people's behaviour at work

20:30 and attitudes at work and all of these facets of people's behaviour which is a large section of the population.

**Well...**

I realised that that wasn't receiving the attention within the hardcore professional grouping.

**I think your survival experience, to get back to it, was a fascinating...**

Mm.

**study in human behaviour, but I mean I don't know how much you want to go into that now.**

No.

**Let's go on from there. You had built the raft, you knew where you were heading...**

Mm.

**And was there...**

And we took off.

21:00 **And you took off, but the...**

Real, real...

**the Americans...**

Huck [Huckleberry] Finn stuff.

**The Americans as you mentioned didn't want a bar of it.**

No they said, "You're mad, you're mad Aussies, you're mad Aussies, we're not going. We'll have ships coming up the har... strait any minute now. Don't go don't go. Stay here. We'll be right. We'll pick you up," and they genuinely felt it. They genuinely felt that American would come surging up the straits and knock 'em up, pick 'em up. It was a different outlook, whereas

21:30 we were quite realistic, mm. We knew that there was a long haul, mm.

**Was that trip reasonably trouble free?**

The trip across?

**The trip across.**

Yes. Thode took the sweep. I don't think anyone else could've. He's out of the merchant navy and we'd found

22:00 some clothing, which we had used at that stage, don't ask me what they were. But I was conscious that there was a bit of a sail but one we so we got a bit of breeze out of it and we all had paddles and Thode acted as a sweep. I took it from him at one stage, but I couldn't handle it. I was, and I was conscious of it and

22:30 it was moving away and he took it over and stayed with it, which indicated a certain change in itself I suppose. One of the first things when we did get to Sangiang Island, it was a lovely little island, there was another American sailor dead so we, Claude Woodley took his trousers, 'cause Claude didn't have any, and I took

23:00 his T-shirt. We didn't bury him, we just left him cause we were conscious of not knowing who was on the island because we thought there might be Japanese, and so we got to a point when we started to walk around Sangiang there were movement of people and we dived behind rocks and then, "Oh no, they're ours." So we came along

23:30 and met up with this quite large group that had surfed in, surfed in to Sangiang in their... Actually there were two crafts. They'd picked up two crafts but a small group of them had left. They'd got up in the middle of the night and just took off with one of the ships and they were the ones, that's the Sumatra group, that ended up in Sumatra. But they took off with one of the craft

24:00 and so the rest of us crammed into the other after about twenty-four hours, we only stayed there a brief time.

**Was that a reunion of sorts? Were there people that you knew?**

Again a lot of us didn't know each other. A lot of us did. So that there was giving and throwing, "Did you see so and so, did you see so and so?" Trying to pick up as an example, although Frankie McGovern wasn't here,

24:30 wasn't in this group, he had a brother that didn't survive the sinking. There were two of them. There were two sets of brothers. I forget the other one, mm.

**Was there anyone you were particularly keen to find out the fate of?**

Well Gordon Black would have been the only one at this stage, and Gavin Campbell, but no one knew anything about either of them, mm. See

25:00 the groups were widely scattered...

**Just stop for a second, sorry.**

Just for the record, has the distribution of survivors...

**Mm.**

of which we were only one group, of course, and the Sangiang group's another group. But there was groups that were picked up by destroyers, there were, picked others that were climbed aboard other rafts, other

25:30 lifeboats for merchant marine ships that had been sunk. They'd got to Java so that there were major groups of survivors in distributed all the... all around at that stage. And of course as it turned out that distribution, that scattering, occurred for the next

26:00 three and a half years, mm.

**On this island the American pop... the population of American survivors was still separate to those of the Australians?**

They were picked up by a Nip destroyer...

**Right.**

a few days later and taken... We caught up with them in Selarang, a gaol that we spent a couple of months in.

**So what happened then when you were in this new group and you had a boat, is that right?**

Yep.

**Mm.**

A steel boat from one of the merchant vessels.

**Did any one person take**

26:30 **command at this stage or were you still...**

Mm? No it got a bit mixed. One wasn't conscious then. I forget who took the sweep getting across to the coast but configurations certainly changed. There were like people like Ray Parkin who was the coxswain, the bloke on the wheel during all the action. There was

27:00 others that were very seasoned seamen. They'd been... For years they'd been all their life at sea and so forth so the selection of the ten people later on that went with the craft to have a go at getting to Australia were in the main very seasoned seamen. But in terms of control

27:30 it was a pretty mixed bag and it tended to be some tensions emerged as well like, "Will we go for India or will we go for and work across along the islands?" and those sorts of... Knocker White was in that group as a subbie, just back from Whale Island, and was still very deeply entrenched with the Whale Island outlook and so forth. But

- 28:00 wasn't conscious of that redistribution. The ones on Sangiang tended to be a bit more possessive of the boat, for example, because they'd copped it in the middle, they had it, and there was a certain amount of pemmican. Do you know pemmican? It's a tinned meat like beef's blood and so forth that
- 28:30 by law has to be in every lifeboat, and the heavy Sao, not Sao biscuits, but they're the white biscuits like Saos that are very hard that you have to soften with water or some... On other words, lifeboat food. There was some of that in the in the craft so that was everyone was guarding that. And, for example, I hung my jacket up on a tree

- 29:00 and I noticed someone had taken it and put it away somewhere, I won't say took it, but had placed it elsewhere but I found it.

**Well what supplies did you have at this stage?**

Nothing.

**There's those cans of meat...**

Oh the pemmican. Oh well there were quite a number of those...

**Mm.**

as I've said but we didn't eat that. Just as we arrived

- 29:30 the previous the group that was on Sangiang they found a sheep. It was occupied and there was a family used it as their farm, Sangiang Island, and but they weren't on the island. They were obviously over on the mainland for some reason and their, but their one sheep, which our blokes knocked off, and was in the pot. It was in a big kerosene tin that they'd found over naked
- 30:00 flame and just boiled it in salt water. Then the owners came back, there was hell to pay. They had revolvers and they were going to shoot everybody. By that time we'd arrived. We arrived just and of course we weren't welcome because we were gonna have to buy in on the distribution of the of the of the sheep, but a bit of tension there. As it worked out we only got one piece of
- 30:30 lamb each but it was very welcome just the same. Anyway, ah so that we overcame and he was wild, he was going to kill us but then... the ones that still have wristwatches strapped to their, and any necklace or any... There weren't many of those. There was mainly wristwatches. He seemed satisfied with the three or four of those that he got
- 31:00 and seemed to be settled down a bit so we quickly got off the island after that anyway.

**And where did you head for?**

Well we headed straight...

**Did you have a plan?**

Head across as close to our nearest point, nearest on the coast. Couldn't see anybody. A destroyer came up to us, looked at us for a while, told us to stop

- 31:30 in English. We kept on rowing. The gun came around on us, "Halt, stop rowing." We all to...were taking it in turns to row and so we stopped. They looked at us and then they just turned away and we pressed on so obviously
- 32:00 they knew that we were pretty harmless at that stage and they had other better things to do. So we pressed on, landed on the coast and a large number of people got off. They were glad to get on land and started to walk down the coast.

**Could you still hear fighting going on at this stage?**

No, it stopped, mm.

**Did...**

It stopped.

**And was there any talk about the fighting having stopped?**

- 32:30 Yes. We were cons, you know, that was one of the chief subjects of conversations. "How far down the coast will we go before we try to go inland?" Not knowing what sort, what was inland. So we pressed on. The rest of us rowed down the coast hugging the coast until we came to Labuhan and so we turned in and then realised that there was it, was you could feel
- 33:00 the tension, feel the all the houses were shuttered up, people were glancing out. But there was a Chinese woman and she beckoned us in and she said, "Big trouble," you know, "Bad people here," and she invited us to stay on the verandah out the front, and she gave us
- 33:30 a meal and of beans and rice. Marvellous, marvellous, because she was really under tension because

she knew that they were going for the Chinese. And but we backed off after having the meal and at that stage we saw some of our people, three of them, running off the track. It was a

- 34:00 macadam road really, narrow one, down the coastline and then started to get onto the volcanic coastline, which it's all volcanic around that area, and starting to run over this very sharp stuff and obviously in strife. And one of them had been badly knifed in the back and they said, "They're killing us! They're killing us!" as they ran. So we
- 34:30 rowed into the nearest point where they were and jumped, they jumped aboard. And so we paddled off to this little island off the coast. Lit fires because the mosquitoes were terrible and that's where the scheme was hatched to separate because it was obvious that all of us couldn't go and
- 35:00 it was thought that the ones that had the best chance would be obviously the ones with the greatest degree of seamanship. And so we settled down to ten could have a go. But in terms of seniority, which is quite interesting, there was a two and a half, gee, I forget his name now,
- 35:30 but he was taking passage to Hobart on Perth but they were half way across to Hobart when air raids... So the coxswain of the... doubled back and so they stayed with us. There were two, the chaplain and this two and a half. He took no, to my mind took no role in the supervision or the structure, which was surprising, and of course the chaplain wasn't with us.
- 36:00 And there was also Burgess, Lloyd Burgess, who was again a two striper and navigator, been with BHP all of his working life, and been with Errol Flynn, as an aside, up in the on the north coast running across to Fiji recruiting Fijian labour for the cane fields. Anyway that's by the bye, but they did not enter into the structuring or
- 36:30 what would happen. They seemed to be pretty stunned at that stage and so...

#### **So two groups formed...**

Two groups. One took off in the boat and we took off inland with the wounded. There were stretchers and we took it in turns to carry the wounded.

#### **How many wounded were there of...**

There were two stretchers, two badly. There were others that were wounded but not so bad that they couldn't walk. And there was a

- 37:00 native that came with us to show us the way. And we just walked all day and slept in a village that were quite friendly that night, and that was quite interesting because they had turbans on so they must have been a Muslim family and very friendly this village.
- 37:30 Right, dense jungle on a river though, on a river, and he detailed his daughter. Obviously he... And this was the chieftain. The chief detailed his daughter to look after me. Don't know why I was picked out. I got the name thereafter as Stud Barker but she was
- 38:00 to look after me. So she was hovering around and we all wanted a bath went down to the river and with the chief to... He shepherded us down so we came back and the daughter had prepared meals with other women but the daughter had been separated out a bit. Anyway then the chief in
- 38:30 unmistakable terms, no English but it was unmistakable, indicated to me that if I stayed with the village, you know, with the daughter, in other words take to with the with the daughter, he'd keep me separate from the Japs if they arrived, if they, when they arrived, and
- 39:00 that was it. That was the proposition. Why on earth it occurred who knows, but it was a... I was propositioned all right.

#### **Did you think of accepting this proposition?**

No. No, I didn't. There was no thought of it at all. Mm.

#### **What... You mentioned that the Japanese were coming, was there any kind of news of where they were from the natives at this stage?**

Well at that at that stage they didn't know, they didn't know, but they obviously had no

- 39:30 contact but they thought that they were approaching and that's why he said, you know, "We'll hide you and so forth." And next morning we pressed on and we arrived at another town, M-E-N-E-S, Menes, and it was a slightly bigger - it wasn't a village, it was a town, small town. And before we knew where we were we were
- 40:00 surrounded by Nips. A whole group of us. Machine guns and rifles and so forth and they stood us up and took whatever they wanted to take, which wasn't much, and then after sitting there for a while, hours that is, a series of these small sulkies, like the dog carts, arrived.
- 40:30 Particular... We were loaded into these with, particularly the wounded, the two wounded people, one of

them was very sick by this time, and we were taken to a town called Pandeglang, which had a little gaol in it, and we were put in the gaol, where we caught up with some Americans and some other Australians, but not many, and we found or heard

41:00 that Gavin Campbell was in hospital there with one American and...

## Tape 7

00:31 **Were you interrogated by the Japanese when they first picked you up?**

Not to any marked degree because they had picked up a lot of people out of the water, so we were just waifs and strays by that time so that beyond the being

01:00 located, as being from the ships that were sunk, we weren't as a group. And as individuals we weren't interrogated to, in any depth at all. We were just picked up and treated as POWs, as cattle as it were, and taken to Pandeglang, which was, and we were there for ooh three weeks, a month, something of that

01:30 order, in this vastly overcrowded little village gaol of course. But then we were moved on to Selarang, which was quite a sizeable regional gaol, and heavily overpacked with Americans and ourselves. And also we caught up for the first time with some of the army people. There'd been four army officers captured from the

02:00 2/4th Machine Gunners and they'd gone out on some reccie [reconnaissance] or other and got themselves caught, including Black Jack Kennedy, who was mayor of Hobart for many years, and his wife was mayor for ten years so the world goes round, but. So there was a whole mixture of us there and there were a number of women also internees, the Dutch women in the area. They were

02:30 in Selarang at the time too. But the one of the outstanding features of memory of that gaol, one was the cask in the corner that for, you know, toiletry purposes had obviously been used for years. And it was sit... like sitting on the top of a saw. It was... The edges were so serrated there was no shape other than it was round. And of course you can imagine the

03:00 the smell of it. It was, you know, only emptied once every twenty-four hours, terrible thing. But one other thing that springs to mind is that there was an American officer of Houston, he had his Annapolis ring and we were very tight for food, they weren't giving us much at all, and he said, "Well

03:30 if they're prepared to sell it," you know. And he gave his Annapolis ring and there would have been about fifty people, forty, fifty people in that cell, a cell made for ten. Now he tossed his Annapolis ring in and all he got for it was one shindagha, which is like the sugar that fills up a coconut

04:00 and that was carefully divided amongst the fifty of us. Claude Woodley had the job of dividing it up so everyone was watching him with... But many years later that ring was repurchased down in the Sunda area. Someone found it, I forget what the true story was, but it was found again. The same as the second one taken off the wounded American in

04:30 Pandeglang gaol. His ring, wasn't an Annapolis ring, but it was a ring that he had. That was also recovered fifty years later, mm. Amazing.

**Were you still together as a group? The group of survivors from the Perth?**

Yep. Ah no, not all. We were still divided, all over the place. The Selarang people

05:00 came together as a group again but had been divided so their paths to get to Sangiang, ah to Selarang gaol was quite diverse. They came from all over different parties, but some people had been moved up to Japan quite early, Sam Stenning the doctor, for example. Gaye

05:30 had been in the water with me, Harper. Three of them were, went straight up to Japan ah and there were more than... Roberts, that's another one. So that, ah what was I talking about?

**Oh, the groups, the groups together were...**

Oh yes. So that we started to interchange our stories then and that's where we knew that there were many more survivors than just our group.

06:00 **Did you have any idea of the loss of life?**

Well no idea then, and we thought on Sangiang we were the only survivors, but then when we landed there were other people walking down the coast. Then when we got to Selarang, oh got to Pandeglang, there were others that had been put in the gaol there because it was a quite a quite a scattering after the sinking, following the sinking

06:30 and before the capture, so that we were brought together into Pandeglang. We stayed there for a while

and then we were all moved up to the Bicycle Camp at Batavia. The Bicycle Camp. The Dutch army had a bicycle, choral bicycle company or something and it was called the Bicycle Camp so that that was a normal army barracks so that we had cover over us and there was running toilets, running in terms of open trenches, and that

07:00 was running water and there was reasonable food. We were getting regular food. Only rice, a bit of dried, ah dried fish and a few veggies at that stage.

**How were you adapting to captivity?**

Well this is one of the other points that I was going to raise. By that time the changed, changing diet had st... really started to catch up with us so that the pellagra,

07:30 for example, the skin changes start to come up so that any under the armpits and in the groin section your skin starts to peel, and when you sweat the, you know, it's stinging and hard and very difficult to stop scratching so you'd dig great holes out of yourself. Very unpleasant. And also of course the constipation problem. Johnny Ross, for example,

08:00 there was doctors in the camp, army blokes, and they had no anaesthetic but they had to sort of open him up physically to get a great wad like a an enlarged cricket ball out of him to get him... But we gradually started to go from that function to very loose function.

**How did...**

Very important, toilet's very important for the next three years. It's an ongoing

08:30 problem so that from then on for the next three and a half years it was all dysentery and very loose so that in talks later on, "Oh, won't it be lovely to have a firm crap," you know, as a thing, as a desire, so that yep. So it wasn't too bad. There were the Dutch. There was a Dutch group there as well and it was at that stage that

09:00 people started to be taken out of a morning to be interrogated and in some on some occasions to broadcast home. Now this was touchy because being asked to broadcast, "Gee, can we? Are we allowed to?" So we had Brigadier Blackburn VC [Victoria Cross] with us. He was the senior officer and he said, "Look, there's nothing we

09:30 can do. It's under duress. You just have to." But Frank Gillen, he was invited out one... not invited, taken out one day and refused and he had a very rough twenty-four hours at the guard house but. And then he, they just kicked him back inside. But I was taken out one morning, my number came up, there were only about half a dozen of us altogether,

10:00 so I was taken to the nearest radio station and started to be interviewed and so I had a very rough morning and about lunch time I said, "Can I go to the toilet?" So, "Humpf," yep, so I was marched out and it was a uni toilet, men and women,

10:30 and a beautiful Eurasian girl, back to 'Stud', beautiful Eurasian girl swam up to me. "Is there anything I can do for you?" in English. So I said, "Could you get me a spoon?" because up to that stage I was eating with my fingers. So in the afternoon I broadcast and it was picked up.

11:00 A number of Australian ham, those ham operators, and it's really how the garbled version got back that I was alive.

**Can you take us back to that interview? You said you... Take us take us through that what happened at that time in the morning?**

Well they ask you and you say, "No," or you just give a simplistic answer and they want deeper opinions and so forth.

11:30 Well you dodge and weave and they know you're stalling and they get more aggressive and then they start to hoe into you and so forth and on it goes. So that you hold out to a certain extent but I knew all the time that Blackburn had given, said, you know, "It's stupid holding out. You can't do anything. You might as well and get some information back," so in I realised after, you know, after being knocked around all morning that it was,

12:00 I wasn't going to give anything. What did I have to give? I couldn't give anything except they'd use it as propaganda. Well they were probably using it as propaganda anyway. So I spoke and then went back to the camp but it was when I got back to the camp and told them what happened, "Ho, ho, ho, Barker, you wanted a spoon." And of course we'd been in the camp for about six months at that

12:30 stage. That's a joke. It's...

**You...**

So we then after six months there we are in the Bicycle Camp.

**Oh okay.**



Yep, and we shared a section together with John Carrick and one of the people that had come up from Timor.

13:00 They started to drift in from the islands into that stage, so he'd been down on the islands.

**Had he told you his story of getting off the Perth?**

Sorry?

**Had he told you his story of getting off the Perth?**

Who?

**Frank.**

Frank?

**Mm.**

Oh yes, yes. I'm trying to think whether we'd caught up with Frank in Selarang. I'm not certain. Can't recall, but

13:30 certainly oh probably did. It was probably back in Selarang when he was cause a lot of story telling. We were locked up for most of the time. We'd be let out to have a wash at the well, but not every day. We had to empty the toilet thing every day, some of us. We had to some of us had to go and get the food and ah but in the main we were there and so all we could do was

14:00 talk, so there was quite a lot of exchanges of experiences at that stage. Frank....

**How did you notice the... Sorry, go on. I've interrupted you there.**

Frank, um, story is that he was probably the last man off the ship and he probably went down to the bottom and only got out what he did, he was met by a wall of water coming down

14:30 the alleyway at him so he quickly ro... turned his back, rolled himself into a ball to minimise the objects that could get caught anywhere. Rolled himself into a ball and let himself be moved along by the wall of water and he got pushed out of the ship, fortunately, got caught up in the wire round the edge of the ship but on the, in the...

15:00 He got off, but he was still under water, so he then had to get up and he said he popped up like a cork and a topi [Hindu, hat], sun-never-sets-topi, popped up alongside him. So he put that on. He said, "My first movement," because he gasped he was just about, couldn't hold out any longer, popped up so he put this on the head. So he went round because

15:30 when light broke and he could see heads around him he was going around, "Good morning, good morning," you know. But so he was a holding device but he got into one of the lifeboats and between there and Selarang I don't know what happened. Oh, I know. He was in a lifeboat when I think it was the pilot of the aircraft who was back had been cut, ah badly smashed.

16:00 He was still alive, but died, and so they were about to cast him over and Frank's very religious. Very. And so he said to Bish Matheson, the chaplain that was supposed to join Hobart, to say a few words. And Bish Matheson, who must have been in a state of shock, he was,

16:30 he said, "I can't. I haven't got my robes with me." So Frank said, "Get on with it, Bish," so Bish, you know, said a few words. But that lingered for a long time. But Bish turned out he grew with the job...

**So...**

and he became very good.

**So you were in the camp for six months. How...**

In Bicycle, mm.

**Yeah in Bicycle Camp. How were the crew members from the Perth coping with captivity, how? And**

17:00 **yourself?**

We were just coping. What else could you do? Um we started to split in terms of personalities I suppose. Like some were very keen graftsmen who could work deals. Other others became keen sportsmen because we were in reasonable nick still, because we were getting reasonable food although these the change of diet was

17:30 obviously affecting us in various ways, but there was a number of sports being played. I know that there was a bit of boxing going on. I was having some. I was boxing a bit. I was also playing basket... Not basketball, volleyball, volleyball and

- 18:00 but that was available to everybody. And but the majority of people were just prepared to sit, mm. Gavin Campbell was in hospital at the, allocated to the hospital with his broken leg, he was blown off the ship with a broken leg and never been properly set but in Pandeglang they'd put a plaster on, wrongly placed, so that he emerged with a great
- 18:30 big solid ring of bone round his leg and walks with a limp ever since. But he was in hospital so I used to go and talk to him quite a bit so you get to know each other's past and their past life and so forth and so on. But in terms of structuring, the hierarchical pattern tended to take over and the navy was submerged
- 19:00 because of our seniority within the army. So the army took over at that stage so that there was like a brigadier, Brigadier Blackburn was there and a few colonels so that we were submerged in that hierarchical structure.

**How did the navy prisoners interact with the army prisoners and fall under this new command structure?**

Oh we were all

- 19:30 Australian, and the Americans and the Dutch they tended to keep themselves to themselves in the main, although there was a lot of intermingling. The Houston people and ourselves got together a lot more later on when we were allowed to, when conditions permitted, but in the main we were kept ourselves to ourselves and just got on with life,
- 20:00 wondering what was going to happen. And of course when word came through that we were going to be moved and at that stage it was going to be to Singapore, ooh ooh that's when all the fears emerged. It's best the things that you know than the things that you don't know, like even that emerged when we went from Pandeglang to Selarang. Pandeglang was bloody terrible.
- 20:30 So was Selarang for that matter. But when we heard got the word that we were going to be moved from Selarang, destination unknown, "Ooh," all the fears and, "Ooh, I wonder where we're going." "Ooh, are they gonna knock us off?" It was rather tense making because the lack of what was known, lack of communication. Why should they tell us? But so but in the Bicycle Camp
- 21:00 until we started to be moved, then the old fears emerged. That's when fear started to, when you start to think more, not when it's all action, it's when you start to think more the possibilities and lying or sitting there wondering what's going to happen and everybody else doing the same, and some of them talking about it more than they should and all the rest of it. So there we were on the Maebisi
- 21:30 Maru going up to Singapore. We were taken up in groups but we only stayed in... When I say 'we, our particular group that went to Burma, we were in the group that went up to Singapore. Some people were sick on the way, some people were sick in Batavia and were left behind, other people got sick in Singapore and were
- 22:00 left behind so that the scattering continued, the distribution continued. But Maebisi Maru was, that was quite a trip. We were all shunted down below and space was at a premium. Anyhow a couple of other people and myself got up on top of the tunnel within which the propellers are and
- 22:30 we thought that'd be great, that we were separated again, a bit of space, elbow room and so forth. But of course it got so bloody hot when the ship got going so we were cooking ourselves. So we had to get off that. But that's when we first experienced the latrines, back to toiletries, on the Maebisi. They build bamboo structures or pine structures over the stern of the ship and so you're dangling over the edge of the ship
- 23:00 with the sea surging around you and so forth and you don't linger too long, mm. And then of course you had to come up on deck, wait your turn and you know you're jumping from foot to foot by the by the time you managed to get out on this swaying, wouldn't call it a platform. It was a skeleton structure

**Have a...**

But it served his purpose.

**Have a drink if you like.**

Yeah, mm.

- 23:30 So arriving in Singapore Gavin and I, Gavin Campbell and I, were put with the Argyle and Sutherlands Highlanders and they had marched in with all their full kit, salt and pepper shakers, beds, beds the lot. They marched in with full kit, Argyle and Sutherlands, you can imagine their structure. Oh my God, the one of the first questions...
- 24:00 And we walked in, minimum clothes, still with the remnants of oil still in with us, when you sweated you could still taste it and so forth. One of the first questions of the mess secretary of the Argyle and Sutherlands, "What's the, what's your seniority, Barker?" What bloody sen... so he wanted to go to the navy list to check my seniority to know where I'd sit in the bloody
- 24:30 mess room! Incredible! That's the Brits for you. It's a strength and it's a minus.

**What... Round about what time was this, do you know?**

Well six months after we'd be about September October '42.

**Were you given a prisoner-of-war number by the Japanese?**

Oh yes. 3808.

**Your number was?**

3808, mm.

25:00 **And were you kept together in groups using that number or...**

Well no, not really. Be... Our number travelled with us for sure. In fact switching over to Germany, I think a lot were tattooed, a lot of Jews were, anyway. Jews had their numbers tattooed on. But no, the... our number wasn't used much but we certainly were numbered.

25:30 But then when we got down to the kumo kumi size, platoon size as it were, and I had all Perth people with me, there were fifty of us, well we quickly learnt our numbers but only up to fifty that you need and so that those that numbering system stayed with us, but only at tanko [parade], only when we were being

26:00 counted.

**What was your first impressions of Changi camp when you came to Singapore?**

Just another camp. Just another camp. Lots of space. We were, remember I was only there for two days so that, and the time was taken up with marvelling at this,

26:30 the contrast in arrangements because they were there solidly in their own serried ranks. And the food was getting pretty light on there but they still had their salt and pepper shakers and each carefully guarding their own and so forth, and but we were conscious of being with the Argyle and Sutherlands, which is a very important group

27:00 of soldiers, but we didn't rub shoulders with them much at all. We were just an imposition on their structure. We were just a damn nuisance, obviously. That's the impression we got. After two days we were put on another ship and then made our way up to Rangoon, which was... And we hugged the coast, although we had a

27:30 a destroyer escort. To a certain extent we could occasionally see it; it didn't appear much. And a scheme was hatched to take over the ship. We'd decided to have a go so Gavin, not Gavin, um Frank Gillen, he knew, he said he could run the engines without difficulty as long as the fuel was there, so the big question was the fuel,

28:00 whether we'd get to India. And the other one was Lloyd Burgess, who could take a get us there no problem but the query would be fuel. We reckoned that we could easily overcome the guards. We, no trouble with taking over the ship but with the escort we were right inside the

28:30 Andaman Islands, that string of islands running down, and there was massive, millions thousands of little islands all up that coast. Very difficult navigating job to get beyond the Andamans, to get west of the Andamans and those two queries killed it. What was the good of taking over to just float within touching distance of the of the convoy?

29:00 So it didn't come to anything because what Frank went round you know surreptitiously opening valves and so forth testing the various pipes and so forth and he came to the conclusion that there was very little fuel aboard. It was just about enough to get to Rangoon and that was about it so it would have been an extremely large gamble, and at that

29:30 stage the Japs had completely taken over the Indian Ocean ah well most of the Indian, certainly the Bay of Bengal. Anyway we occupied ourselves with competitions like counting the number of sea snakes that we'd see in a twenty minute period or a fifteen minute period. Hundreds of sea snakes at that stage. Going off as an aside, I went back to

30:00 Burma, I've been back several times in another life, but I went, I was taken down to the southern part of Burma, down to Thanbyuzayat to the cemetery. I went in with a... Each year all the ambassadors are allowed into Thanbyuzayat cemetery, to see that the cemetery's being well kept, so I went in one year with a group of ambassadors and the Burmese were laying

30:30 on the tour and so as part of the exercise we were taken out to a beach that they were trying to promote as a, promotional as a tourist beach, and everyone stripped off had their costumes, went into the surf - it was surf running - and I said, "Gee, be careful of the sea snakes." "Oho, Barker." So I said, "Yeah watch it,

31:00 watch it." Anyhow they went splashing in cavorting all over the place and I walked up the beach about twenty yards, thirty yards, and there was a half a dozen dead sea snakes, so when I, when they came

out of the water I took them up – none of 'em went back in. None of 'em went in for a second surf, mm, but yes. That was good a little exercise. Anyway, where we were? Back to Rangoon.

### **Well Rangoon,**

31:30 **yeah.**

Anyway we arrived at Rangoon and the mosquitoes were so big you could name them. They were colossal. And we were, we only transferred. We were only there long enough to transfer to a smaller vessel that took us into Moulmein, across the Gulf of Martaban.

### **Did the Japanese tell you where you were going?**

No, no. Well we knew we were roughly where we where when we arrived at Rangoon and we knew

32:00 enough of the coastline to know we we'd landed in Moulmein. We were... And then we were put into the gaol at Moulmein, which is just below, you know, the old Moulmein pagoda. There were actually three pagodas looking west towards the sea, not east, but that was that was quite an experience. We arrived in the middle of the night

32:30 and we were marched through, rambled through the town. And of course the town all poured out to see who was and they were passing us food surreptitiously and all this and we got into the camp and they, the Nips were satisfied to get us inside the main gate, close the gate, we were all in. So we had to find somewhere to just doss down for the night and a group of us found a

33:00 little hut. One bloke found a lump of wood that he could use as a pillow. He woke up the next morning he had 'VD [venereal disease] Ward' on it. Another bloke found a structure that had a plank on the top so he commandeered that as a bed and that turned out to be the morgue, that was the morgue bench. But the most interesting thing was the next morning there was paper

33:30 blowing everywhere and it was the case record of all the prisoners. But in the dawn we could hear this rattling, this chain rattling, the first dawn. We couldn't work it out then we realised it was the chains round the ankles of the prisoners that hadn't been released by the Nips, the hardcore people, and so we realised that, "Geez, we don't want those shackles on us." But there they were hobbling

34:00 round. But the case studies then became interesting reading because they were written in English.

### **They were the record, the colonial the British colonial records?**

Yeah.

### **Of the prisoners? Of the British?**

Yes, mm, of the of the prisoners that were in the gaol. Not only the current ones but the ones that had been released, because the Nips released most of them. So after that we were there for I don't know how long,

34:30 two or three days, and then we were put into lorries and taken down to Thanbyuzayat where the line starts, or the line that branches off from the Tavoy line. Tavoy and Moulmein are joined by a loop line and then the Thanbyuzayat, or Thanbyuzayat line goes off as it started with us. I've got a photo in there of me taken on the line

35:00 when we went back, mm.

### **Was there much construction going on at the time when you came in there?**

No, it hadn't started really. There had been a group that went up before as I mentioned the other day. They'd been working on Tavoy on the airfields and they had got the books out the library so that at that stage we didn't have any books, but they had books and they gradually distributed themselves all along the line.

35:30 But so that that we were amongst the first of the groups, so I think we were the second group into Burma and we scattered them ourselves or were directed to different groups. Thanbyuzayat was a base camp and then from there the groups went out to the 25 Kilo [kilometre], the 30 Kilo, the 35 Kilo, the 40 Kilo, that was it to start with. We went to the 35 Kilo

36:00 and started construction of the embankment so that the various... And we worked north and south or east and west, whatever the direction was, either building culverts or little bridges over the streams or the embankment, so we started to construct the railway.

### **How were you supervised at this stage?**

Well supervised by engineers and mainly Korean guards

36:30 and then that, well that was the direct supervision. The Korean guards were the main supervisors but the engineers, of which there weren't many, were dashing up and down giving them directions about what to do and then it got down to the local group so each local group was given a darg and starting on

- about 1.5 cubic metres, which gradually worked
- 37:00 up to 3.2 cubic metres per person per day, which takes a lot of moving.
- Sorry. What... Can you just explain a little bit more what a darg is?**
- Well that's it's a mining term of, "What's your darg?" Is your, "What's your allocation?" "What are you required to do per day?" So if you were lifting wheat, for example, "What's your darg for the day?" It might be so many bags of wheat or something.
- 37:30 **How did you...**
- I think it's Welsh originally.
- How did you take to, you know, as a group of naval personnel to be asked to make a railway?**
- Well it was just had to be done. It was, it was there. We were, you know, thought we could be clever and the first couple of days
- 38:00 shovels, picks, hatticks, mattocks of whatever they're called, 'chungles' we called 'em, they were hidden and broken and so forth. But we quickly realised that we couldn't do it because they said, "Go back out there and find them." So we never got back into camp. The repaired ones, "Well you fix it," and quickly pushed back onto yourself. It's discipline of
- 38:30 a very firm order and the Koreans were anxious to ingratiate themselves with the Nips of course, but they were in turn prisoners. They were detailed soldiers so they were main in the main harder than the professional engineers, so that all in all the Koreans were a pretty nasty lot, mm. Pretty nasty lot. But
- 39:00 so that when you finished your darg, and that was one of the limitations early on that really had to be learnt the hard way and never was really learnt. "Finish, go back," and linking it up to the present. It's why unions are extremely loathe to work to a 'finish, go home' contract because people tend to work quickly and get finished and go home.
- 39:30 Get finished with the task. Well on the other hand we could easily concede that once we'd finished the darg we'd be given a far heavier load and gradually build up and that's what occurred. So that a lot of people worked themselves to death almost. It's an odd situation. There was this darg that was established, this,
- 40:00 not mirage, but this end of the day relaxation period was extremely difficult to get straight and merge with our past values in some way. It was an odd situation but that's what occurred. The darg gradually went up and of course later on when we moved away from the embankment building and bridge building to
- 40:30 the rail laying we became the rail laying gang and so we built, we physically laid the rail, the sleepers and the rails, and spiked the rails onto the sleepers. We did that and we were given a darg of so many miles a day we will shift because the hours of work will lengthen as well, so we were doing a twenty-four hour shift. But
- 41:00 by the time we got out there walking to take over the shift and then walking back as the line extended away from the camp we were working at one stage about a thirty hour shift with all everything else crammed, boxed into the remaining eighteen before we were out again. It became very hard work, mm, but so that's what we did for the next twelve months or so.
- 41:30 It started off in the...

## Tape 8

- 00:30 **We might go there if you like. The...**
- The change from the... It started off in the dry and I became quite attached to the bush, to the, in that dry period. You got the early mist and quite cool and but of course it heated up very rapidly during the day, but
- 01:00 that early morning mist there was a softness about the whole atmosphere. But when the rains came, it... And it just fell down. The monsoon has to be seen to be believed. You just don't know how this water just drops. And by that stage we were moving on to areas where we had to build small bridges, not major ones,
- 01:30 but we had to get over raging culverts and so forth so that became a major exercise. But the Nips tried to get over those problems before the rains came so that early on while we were on the embankment just take you through building a small bridge. So a dry gully and you you're put into a group
- 02:00 that would operate a large pulley and each with a rope, it's like a maypole effect so that each of you got

a rope and you have to haul, which would pull a large weight up. And the pile is of course stuck into the ground and the use of elephants is used. We were working with elephants at that stage to help put the pile in the beginning. And then

02:30 we would have to pull this rope in unison, and the thing would drop and we'd start all over again. And so it went on until the pile got down. So that that was the major exercise, except for the planking which was relatively soft stuff.

03:00 But then the rains came and it's a changed world. Have to go out in the heavy pouring rain and everything was clay or mud or dirt and grime and at the same time we were changing camps. On the rail laying gang we'd change camps frequently so we'd go into camps and maybe a group of

03:30 embankment builders had just moved out. We went into one and there'd been a cholera epidemic and there were bodies lying under the decking and wild dogs were rushing by with a lump of limb in their mouth and oh God, what a terrible... But you had to get rid of these people and you can imagine using the fresh water stream, no matter how fast it was flowing. You wouldn't dare use, you know, drink the water.

**These were your colleagues?**

04:00 Pardon?

**They were fellow prisoners who had died?**

On this particular camp they weren't. They were recruited locals. When you say locals, Malaysians, Chinese, anybody that they could grab from conquered countries. They had been caught this time from that particular camp. No they weren't our own because the hygiene was terrible, whereas we as a group were extremely fortunate of being

04:30 anchored with the 2/2nd Pioneers, the army group, and the pioneers are the people that look after the hygiene in camps and do the construction and really look after those facets of keeping a camp hygienically occupiable, I suppose, so that they knew the right things to do to minimise the problems

05:00 of hygiene, so that they'd dig the deep trenches for the latrines, they'd build... Bamboo can be used for an awful lot of things and they'd get the big bamboos and cut them to shape, put them in the ground as pisseroons and so that you'd have a leak into those instead of filling up the trenches. And they'd always start a big fire as soon as they arrived at a campsite

05:30 and the big woks the big woks, they would gather a wok full of water, boiling, and so after every meal you would dip your dixie or eating material through the boiling water and your eating irons and you'd wrap it with something to try to keep it as, you know, away from the atmosphere after it had dried. If it was sunny

06:00 you'd put it out and have it baked in the sun. But very conscious of the hygiene and that kept, must have saved a lot of us, although our death rate was quite high relative to compared to other camps

**It...**

But we had different activities so it was very hard to pin what it was.

**You spoke a little bit before... I'd just like to go, just perhaps discuss the... There's the condition**

06:30 **of hope, induced hopelessness, under captive conditions and where people...**

Oh, of induced hopelessness.

**Or hopelessness where people actually lose hope and then don't have any sense of going on and it's just...**

Well you don't notice it. You wouldn't use hope as the word. You'd have to generalise it a bit more to general outlook.

**I was thinking of the...**

Which would include being a loner, mixing with people.

07:00 It was a whole conglomerate. I wouldn't like to separate hopefulness.

**There's a psychological term of hopelessness, isn't there, where people get...**

Some people use it but we'd be quickly, it'd be quickly killed by most people because you immediately ask for a definition.

**Oh right, okay.**

It becomes hard. You'd find it used quite a lot in attitude surveys and so forth.

**Mm.**

But I don't think it'd be too widely accepted. But if you like to use hopefulness and

07:30 I would place it where I mentioned before...

**Or hopelessness, yeah.**

Yes, where people would say, "We'll never get out of this at one end," and, "Oh, I reckon that those big planes. I reckon they'll be here tomorrow." You know, to the extreme fanatics of thinking they'd get out of it so that those people at both ends were quickly squashed. "Oh, shut up," you know. "Get on with it."

08:00 And food became a subject not overly discussed, you know. You read in a lot of books where we talked about the roast meals and the steaks and the cooked eggs and all the rest of it, but it was almost a verboten subject. It stirred too many gastric juices and so forth so that it wasn't a subject too readily. Might, after a good meal you might start to talk but it gone down to basics such as, "The only two

08:30 foods that's any worthwhile is a banana and a leek." Things that were available sometimes locally. You quickly focused in. The past was the past, the future was the future, and maybe we'll get there. It was a... It changed so that... Very difficult to convey some of these nuances. But what were we on? Building bridges. Then we moved onto the rail again.

**How far down, how far into your**

09:00 **time up there were you at this stage?**

Oh this was moving on because we were the rail gang which went right through over the hills at Three Pagoda Pass, which is the pass over between Burma and Siam, which is the tail end, the lower ending of the Himalayas as it comes down, just about ends. If you go west from Bangkok you go up the river from Bangkok and you, there's

09:30 Three Pagoda Pass and they were only little fellas, the three pagodas are only about so high, but that's the pass over and then you're in Siam. Well we moved into Siam, the Siam group, the rail layings hadn't come up as far as... They had a longer run and it was, the line is longer in Siam than it is in Burma so that... But we were in the middle. Well we went walked straight into another cholera epidemic

10:00 just over the border the of one of the extended camps from the Siam side and I went in to try and get some food and they had a great big pit, oh, the size of this room that they were throwing the bodies into and keeping the fire going.

**Lit.**

Mm of cholera.

**How...**

(UNCLEAR) people.

**Were you, were any of your close**

10:30 **colleagues affected, become ill or passed away at this stage?**

Oh yeah, I was. I was isolated with cholera but that was back in the 70 Kilo camp, of camp way back in Burma. And four of us, they stuck a little bit of bamboo up your tail and they had put the four specimens on one plate which they'd examine and if there was a any finding positive finding they'd isolate the four.

11:00 They didn't worry about trying to isolate who was what, so one of us had it and we were looking at each waiting, "Who is it?" But none of us had it, mm, but we had that epidemic and quite a number of people died of course.

**How were they conducting those medical...**

This was the Nips.

**tests?**

They came round and with their white coats and so forth. When an epidemic hit like that they went up and down the line to try and contain it but they didn't have any materials really

11:30 and they just isolated and just let it die itself out, mm.

**How were the guards treating you?**

Oh well they had a job to do and you can over emphasise the guards. Some of them were shocking. Some of them were neutral. None of them were good because they'd been knocked around. I can well recall one Korean guard early on in the piece, quite a good-looking, fine, upstanding bloke.

12:00 He obviously something, said something wrong because we witnessed it. The one of the Nips kicked him, knocked him over and then their boot has a horseshoe steel on it, and kicked him in the face with this steel, with his heel, and that bloke all the... For the next couple of years he had this horseshoe on his face. It was interesting. So that

12:30 it wasn't restricted to us. And their food, they had quantitatively more than us. But yes, they did have more but you wouldn't say it was a major quantum leap difference in food.

**Did you know his name, this guard?**

No, no. We gave them all sorts of names but again you have to realise that talking to Nips

13:00 or Koreans wasn't a thing to be done. You kept apart and those people that tried to talk to the Nips and I... They tended to be warily watched by the remainder of us so it wasn't considered you to talk to the Japs. You just took your orders, minimised the contact altogether, so that it's not clearly often realised.

13:30 One wonders sometimes about learning Japanese, but if anyone tried to learn Japanese they would have been ostracised. Don't mix with them, keep apart, minimise the proper because the more contact you had the more likelihood there was of saying the wrong or getting in the wrong side so you kept apart so, mm, so that you just minimised the contact really.

**How were you dealing with the deaths, of high death rate**

14:00 **at that time?**

Well it was the only immediate people. You became very case hardened, case hardened, mm, very hard. Very hard.

**Can you explain?**

Well that's it, mm, what can you say? What can you say? You some people died some people didn't. The ones two groups of people tended to drop off and this is what I was alluding to before.

14:30 In my judgment, and there's been no stats [statistics] done on it, don't think, on this or anything of that nature. But the ones that were married and had a bit of age to them, and if you were over thirty you were getting a bit of age to you, they were the ones that died first. But at the same rate were the ones that had started to reveal themselves as personalities that were awkward personalities and

15:00 to operate effectively to shift the big lumps of soil or to lift the rails and the sleepers and so forth you had to work with other people back to this in insurance bit. You had to work with a group and those people that didn't easily merge in with working groups, a working group of three, say, or a mateship system of three, they still had to shift their soil

15:30 and or do their workload and of course they were the second groups so that they died, those people, so that and people didn't give them much help I'm afraid.

**Can you explain a bit what you mean by awkward personality at the...**

Tried to

16:00 not carry the right load. Try to shortcut the system, tried to leave the job to other people when it had to be done, try to minimise their work and maximise their food, tried to get first in the queue for the food dish out. Aspects of behaviour such as that would reveal themselves as you know a bit outside the group. You had

16:30 to cooperate. You had to be along. You had to be with the group, mm. Mm.

**What about the other group you mentioned, the people that had the over thirty but who perhaps had wives or partners back home in Australia?**

Yes, that's a bit trickier, I'd say, why they dropped. It could be just an age factor but it's hard to believe that, but I think it was worry. I think it was concerned, you know, "I wonder what my wife's doing?" Frank Gillan for example,

17:00 his wife had a baby about, well it would have been about November December of '42. She was pregnant when he left. There's a navy, there's a naval saying, particularly in the merchant marines as opposed to the navy, "Always leave your wife with a scone in the oven." So that

17:30 his son, David, his son David as it turned out, he was born. And also Claude Woodley had a child born after he left and Claudette, Claudette Woodley. You know Pat Woodley? Do you, are you familiar with the modelling school, Pat Woodley's modelling school?

**I'm not, no.**

No, you're not. She's got one of the biggest of the modelling schools still, but she's the eldest daughter

18:00 of Claude Woodley. Well Claudette is her younger sister, who works with her.

**Can you talk a little bit about how you, how the system of, your mateship system? How you got together with colleagues and...**

Oh it just, it just happened. I don't know how it... You just rub along better with some people than any others. See Ted Stapes over in, he's dead now,



18:30 over in New Zealand, navy bloke that got caught up. His launch was sunk up in the Java Sea up off the Sumatran coast, but he was very closely integrated. He used to come over here once a year and I'd go and stay with him and so forth in the years that followed.

**I was...**

Very close, very close.

**I was thinking more of the system you were talking about, the buddy system I guess.**

19:00 Yes, well you...

**In the camp.**

How that was established of course would as the deaths started to thicken or to increase and so forth there were all sorts of changes in that grouping because one would die, there'd be a regrouping and so forth as numbers decreased in the overall group so that it just would happen. I'd hate to

19:30 try to analyse how you dissect, "Well will I cobber up to this bloke or will I talk more to him or so forth?" What's the criteria? How do you develop friendships? How do you develop acquaintanceships? It isn't a conscious thing. It's almost a... Well it is, it's an unconscious, some... And maybe you have a bit of a tiff with somebody. For example, I remember having a tiff over something with

20:00 Ted Stapes and, you know, we were glaring at each other till we realised, "It's stupid under this situation glaring at each other." But no don't ask me how it occurs, it just occurs.

**But did you develop a specific relation, a buddy system to look after one another?**

What?

**In the camp.**

It was never, it was never verbalised.

**But it did exist, do you think?**

Oh, very much

20:30 so.

**Can you...**

Whether you were conscious of it, you mean?

**Yeah, not whether you were conscious of it. But the (UNCLEAR) you described...**

Yeah, you were conscious of it but the choice of who you buddied with, it wasn't a conscious...

**Can you just perhaps explain the buddy system to us?**

Well I think I have done. It just works, there are always a group of two who, "Who was your mate? Who was your..." Well our 'mate' wasn't an expression

21:00 that was used very much. Buddy, chum, none of those were meaningful. You just knew. So it was Frank Gillan and I to start with, but it also included Gavin Campbell as a third. But Gavin Campbell with Ted Stapes were very close, so that if you ask Gavin he'd probably say Ted Stapes and but I would be

21:30 the third. And trying to think of Frank's... His next mate I think was an army bloke I forgot, mm, so that, no, that's the way it operated. But how it operated, oh it operated very effectively. But in terms of trying to pin down criteria or trying to pin something whereby you could measure it or

22:00 come to conclusions about it, very difficult.

**I was more, I was thinking more of just those, the actuality of it of who you were with and what you...**

I think the...

**what you did for one another.**

Language runs out. You... But you do realise it was necessary. It... I suppose as the year, as the year months, years went by, you realise that that you had to,

22:30 that you have, that you couldn't be on your own. You had to be... For example, I was at the opening of the line when the line actually joined and this was photographed by this French footage. You see the line actually, line. Well I drove the last spike. I physically joined the rail. But in the film in the footage they've cut out every POW. You

23:00 only see Nips in the footage. But I was standing alongside the colonel from closer than this close and

when he emptied his whisky bottle that he was none, the POWs weren't getting anything. But the with the army people around him. So I tapped him for the empty bottle. I said, you know, "May I have the bottle?" He gave it to me. Now Frank Gillan had had malaria, ah, cerebral malaria, which is the brain one,

23:30 not many people survived but Frank had, and he'd lost his water bottle because as people died the effects were distributed round. Well by that time Frank had got a water bottle but he'd lost it when he was... Cerebral malaria you go off the rocker. And so I gave him the water bottle, the whisky bottle, but he broke it a couple of days later so it didn't survive. But that would

24:00 have been a remnant to have had, to have kept, but it didn't survive. But there it was with the bloody colonel in his hand and I got it, mm. Anyway, that's it. I've got a lump of the bridge there if you want to see the bridge on the River Kwai.

**Hm?**

I've got a lump of the bridge there.

**We might get a photo of it. Just going back to the, perhaps the things that you were able to do when you were not working. Can you talk a bit about how you...**

Oh

24:30 well, you got flat on your back. Pretty flat on your back. There wasn't... There wasn't any play time because you then had to do different jobs. For example, you arrived at a new camp and maybe it had been put up. Sometimes you had to put the camp up yourself but at other times it might have been put up but a storm had blown half the roof away and you had to repair things.

25:00 You had to put fences round the little, the little or big cemetery. You had to bury people. You had to look try to look after each other who were getting sick and you'd get leaves if they were had diarrhoea or so forth and so on, all of which they couldn't do themselves. You...

**Did you have to do a lot of nursing duties?**

Of course, of course.

25:30 Everyone did unless they were on their, you know, trying to be smart alecks, of course. But, for example, after the line had finished I might have mentioned that Black Jack Kennedy and I were in a camp down by the bridge, right alongside the bridge. I can show you the exact spot if you like. But we were there for a few months and we started a veggie garden

26:00 and Frank Gillan built, to get the water out of the river down below, he built one of those pylon things those like you see in Egypt, you know, that piles up. And but Black Jack Kennedy, the bloke that became mayor of Hobart, he and I took to this veggie patch. Anyway, we noticed that one of the Nips was fostering a group of ducks

26:30 so we decided to knock these ducks off, which is a very dangerous exercise. Stealing was death but we... How do you kill ducks without them squawking? So each of us took it in, took two each. The ducks separated. They were feeding and along and we grabbed their legs pulled them straight under the water, wrung their necks under water. But then of course we had had to get back

27:00 through the gate. This the garden was outside the gate. Nips on both sides. So we filled up a bucket with the ducks and so they weren't big ducks, you'll understand, so we both had to hold onto that hammer, that bucket. We wouldn't allow each other to carry the can. We both grabbed the can. But then of course we gave

27:30 the ducks to the hospital and then of course how do you anchor the aroma of ducks cooking to give to the to the sick people? "Where's my bloody ducks?" So on it goes. But that's the sort of thing. So where are we? Back up the line are we?

**Well I was just thinking more the day-to-day camp life I think is quite fascinating.**

Oh yes.

**Was the hospital sort of the centre of the camp, or the centre of camp life?**

Well it was always essential to have the really sick

28:00 people, the ones that couldn't go out to do their shift on the line when they were really crook, and there was always that separation and there was a little bit more given to them, realising that whatever food there was had to go round. But you had to prop them up because the Nips on some occasions, not all occasions, but

28:30 the Nip officer in charge of the camp would sometimes say, "Well if you can't supply the numbers we'll go to the hospital and tell you if they're sick or not." So that we had to keep the people going, if you like, but at the same time try to support them so that there were some people that went out under the wire. This didn't occur in Burma so much because we were in

- 29:00 just real jungle, and was only a very occasional village that we'd hear. We didn't pass through one village but occasionally we'd hear the drums and the music of a night to keep the ghosts away and so forth. But we were in real jungle stuff whereas on the Siam side the line goes up the river, which is a trading route of course, and so they tended to supply...
- 29:30 Without me knowing the details, they probably wouldn't agree with this, but they had more food available to them than we did on the Burma side but that's only me talking. But we always when we came down out of Burma and was brought down to the bridge on the River Kwai to a camp right alongside it, I can remember they had a meal prepared that we thought was marvellous. One of the
- 30:00 best meals we ever had. And the food remained good while we were there because there was a lot more people about and a lot more food available. And the people, some as I mentioned, some people would go under the wire and risk being caught to buy food. 'Cause one aspect of camp life that hasn't been mentioned very much is that we made our own money
- 30:30 in these larger camps, these more stable camps, after the line finished, before people were redistributed and we actually physically made our own money. Only little lumps of cardboard upon which we'd print on carved out five ten cents you know that sort of money that we could then in the canteen that we set up that the official buying groups
- 31:00 could go out and buy, the Nips allowed us to go out into the on this particular set-up, to load up the canteen as it were so that money was used so that you could exchange for in the canteen, mm.

**How was the canteen supplied? Can you explain that?**

How was it supplied?

**Mm.**

We'd go, there'd be an official buying group get permission from the Nips to go out with a Nip to the local

- 31:30 town to buy veggies and eggs and shindagha, mm. That's about all.

**What were you using to buy the supplies with?**

Well you were being paid. There was a payment along, very low, but there was a payment of Nip occupation money so it didn't buy much at all because the local villages or wherever you came across, people, "Oh no." They didn't want Nip money. It wasn't real. But after a while of course they had to accept

- 32:00 Nip money so that it was Nip money. But with our own made money you could just, what I say, you could distribute that. You could give everybody ten bucks, for example, with your own money, didn't mean but it would be sufficient to buy from the canteen and that original money would have come from all over the place. And a couple
- 32:30 of occasions some people managed to get loans from people in the village. Didn't mean anything but they gave them a written screed written on the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and people accepted it. A lot of them were honoured, as a matter of fact. A lot of them were honoured. One of our close group, army bloke, he was a manager of the Wales [Bank of New South Wales] and he managed to get a loan.
- 33:00 How on earth he did it nobody knows but he got a loan from the local villager which we thought was... He was pretty good to do that. I suppose he offered made very gross exaggeration in terms of what he'd give at the end of the war but someone took a punt on him. Like the jewellery and so forth. But remember the army
- 33:30 people, the army people, particularly the motor transport group, I suppose they should be a bit cautious about this they were as they retreating down the Malayan peninsula there were some nasties amongst the people and I've seen cigarette boxes full of jewels that they were carrying, you know, and
- 34:00 so in some parts there was no... It wasn't a shortage of money in that sense because those people would sell, you know, a sapphire, a diamond, say. Some people got boxes away to Australia before the capitulation. Mm. I've heard of families that moved on to a different monetary level all altogether
- 34:30 but.

**This is while you were on the railway? They kept these things while you were...**

While they were on... They took 'em into camp with them, mm. Oh yes, took 'em into Changi, mm and while there were Nip searches and all that sort of thing from time to time, mainly for radios and of course we had a couple there were a couple of radios I suppose you'd have heard of that along the railway. I didn't know there was, for example, but there were... In

- 35:00 hindsight, there were two there were two radios

**And you were getting...**

And the senior officers were told about what was happening but I personally didn't know there was a radio on the line.

**Did were you getting information or rumours of the war?**

Rumours. It was fed out as rumour because they weren't to know that the people, that in the senior officers they weren't to know that I wouldn't be grabbed and interrogated seriously and would

35:30 blurt it out that I knew so-and-so, so that the distribution of data was extremely restricted, extremely restricted, mm.

**Can you talk about the importance of rumours in camp life?**

Well this is one of the facets of that period. We were so cut off from the world that rumour mongering rural

36:00 catering, rural ah rumour activity wasn't a real function. We were living in the real and now. We were living in reality, really living in reality time. It was from day to day. We were living an existence from day to day. Virtually no further. We were zombies by that stage in my book, the majority of people. There were the...

36:30 I don't know how to... I don't know to this day how many did it and I admit quite frankly I wasn't, couldn't do it, but so many people had diaries when there was no paper. How they wrote those diaries that they've published as books I wouldn't know because the paper and the Bibles and everything with paper went up as smoke or toilet paper.

37:00 So and but there must have been some kept and it must it was mainly on the Siam side. None of the good artists, one of the, none of the artists that have come out of it. Like the two English ones. There's Searle, Ron Searle, and there was one another, Whitbread, Whitebread.

**Butterflies or something, drawing wildlife or something, wasn't there?**

Yes, oh and the instruments,

37:30 the instruments that they were making and so on, they were both on the Siam side. So maybe you know they brought sufficient paper to do this. But paper was an extremely scarce commodity and the same with rumours, so that, "Oh it was a hearing of an escape and people were killed." "Oh I heard of a person having had, he had his head chopped off." But again they were mainly nasties

38:00 so it didn't assist very much to probe that, to know much about it. So those sorts of rumours and in some cases facts. We did get to know about executions, but in the main it was not over not over much rumour-mongering or gossiping of that nature. We were flat out surviving. It's extremely

38:30 hard to explain but there was not even much over much conversation. You came in, you had a wash, you flopped on your back, you got a meal, and you flopped on your back and you tried to survive.

**Was it...**

And so, mm.

**Were there any executions that you knew of?**

I never witnessed one. I never witnessed one.

39:00 I've witnessed some close ones when Drower, one of our translators, an English chappie, when he was put in a box in the ground for a couple of weeks. But I never did witness... There was no head lopping in any of the camps.

**What happened in that particular case with Drower?**

Oh, they at last

39:30 released him but he was almost dead. I had lunch with him a couple of years, oh it'd be going back three or four years over at the yacht squadron. We had lunch together. One of the army chappies rounded up a few of us and I was in the yacht squadron at the time and we had lunch over there and it was great. He became a diplomat. He was a diplomat caught up in Singapore. And but

40:00 he was put with the army and he was a, he had a bit of Nip and worked on becoming proficient but that was it. So that's about it for the line.

## **Tape 9**

00:30 **Um let me go back to the, on the line. Was there, from the very beginning, a set of rules that were that were told to you and then enforced, or did you have to work out as you went along what was, what were you able to do?**

Oh yes, oh it was quickly laid down because the Nips didn't have any English, in the main, we didn't have any Japanese but

01:00 you're quickly told of what is needed. That and then it's adhered to in terms of the job being done so that it was as clear as that. Other than that there was no, "The by-laws of this camp..." or anything structured in that way, no. Where do you get food from? Who owns the food? If someone

01:30 dared go under the wire and gets something, steals something, buys something anywhere else that's their personal responsibility. But in terms of the rules, no real set, no, no real set of rules.

**What about something like I'm interested in, how did people distinguish between sickness and wellness? Did the Japanese have a hand in that?**

Well, doctors. Doctors.

**Were they your own doctors or were they Japanese...**

Yes, yes. Army of course.

02:00 We didn't have any air force doctors. We had quite a number of air force people, no doctors. We didn't have any naval ones, we only had army ones. Our Sam Stenning was the doctor aboard Perth. I don't know whether you've heard of the Stenning brothers. There's five of them, all doctors. Sam Stenning was the child specialist aboard Perth,

02:30 Sam, and they were extremely well known. Most of them are dead now. Sam is, he's dead too. But Sam was ours. He went up to Japan but they utilised the army doctors as doctors. They recognised, the Nips, when I say 'they', the Nips recognised that it was advisable to allow people very sick,

03:00 not to just bash them out and so forth but to try to get them to recover. It was it was a judgment that to be made. It varied from camp to camp. It varied from leader to leader. Some officers, Nip officers, were reasonably neutral as long as the job was done. Others were bad eggs really. Sometimes the officer was okay

03:30 and the Nip sergeant was a bad egg. We had one particular Nip sergeant early on, he had syphilis because he came along to our doctor and so our doctor knew that he had syphilis. He was obviously starting to go mental. But he was a real, he... No, you couldn't look at him sideways - you'd get bashed. Anyway.

**Can you talk a little bit about the brutality**

04:00 **you witnessed on the on the railway?**

Well what's the brutality? It was over work. I've got the reputation for... I've got documentation in consideration that they reckon that I was the most bashed person on the line but. All right, you can immediately say, "What were you doing so wrong that you're stupid enough to get bashed?" Um so that what's right and what's wrong? Who knows? You can only do your... what you think

04:30 is you should do at the time. But the brutality, ah, it was an ongoing thing. You were aware that the there'd be a bashing at any time of the clock in any situation. In terms of people say at night... After a while they decided to intrude another level

05:00 of occupation by making us work shifts to keep watch on the huts in case they went up in flames so that you had an hour broken sleep each night or whenever, and the Nips would sometimes come around and catch somebody asleep or dozing off or not aware that they were there, and so there'd be rumpus kicked up immediately.

05:30 So that for any reason that the Nips... And we didn't even know what the reason was, but they'd hoe into us. We mightn't have saluted a Nip and he walked across the camp grounds, you know, a hundred yards away. We wouldn't see him, but he would see us and as he came up to us he'd hop into us but. And it wasn't just with their hands but they'd anything. They'd go just go wild to us mad, mm. Just didn't know what was going to happen.

06:00 Like, as an example, back on the bridge, that little bridge we were building, at one occasion I got on the wrong side of the... He was a Nip guard this bloke and he started to hoe into me with his closed fists so and I stumbled on the lucky stones in the base and I went down. So I got up again, he hoed into me again and a bloke out of the camp said, "Stay down

06:30 you silly bugger," so I stayed down and he gave me a couple of kicks and then got fed up and knocked off. But those sorts of instances were happening all along the line and at any time and at anything. But the deaths and the executions. But the brutality was seen with the workload that you could say they had to do because they were ordered to do it. They had to get the, push

07:00 the line through because they were ah equally brutal in terms of their discipline, as I've mentioned. They'd hoe in with kicks and butts and hits and everything. Their short... Their food wasn't so hot but so it's a bit hard to be cut and dried about any of these things. It's...

**I suppose the over work...**

But the brutality was an overlaying sense of wariness.

07:30 People had different degrees of fear. There was mainly you had to be careful, you had to watch your step. "All right, kowtow. We don't mind kowtowing. We don't mind bowing. We don't. We know it's not serious but we do it, we don't it, doesn't mean anything to us." You got to that hardened state that you didn't have the righteousness of right and wrong

08:00 if that's meaningful. It assumed a different connotation altogether. You were right if you dodged and you were saved from somebody else from being bashed and things like that so that it assumed a different role.

**Did you always swallow your pride? Was there ever any moments of...**

Very.

**Levels of rebellion?**

Well sometimes you held onto it and then

08:30 sometimes you were told you were stupid. Sometimes you were, you tried to sort of bluff it out and always lost so that in the main it settled down to a pattern. They knew how far to, that they could go without actually I suppose killing you. And others would... You'd know how when you had to knuckle - you could tell by the gleam in their eye that they were dinkum. But and they weren't wearing

09:00 swords but they always had bayonets out and they if they got a wild gleam in their eye it's far better to give way, mm. You had to live. Nothing in getting killed over. What's the use of getting killed? Same with the escapes. The... It reacted immediately. A few people had had a go tried to get to India. through Burma, but the

09:30 attempts reflected back on because immediately anyone was discovered to be gone they stopped the food into the camp. They tankoed everybody and so that the it was immediately back on the camp. We punished the group like the Germans did, they came in, just knocked down the town. The same with us. They would say, "If they're not found..."

10:00 And they had the Kempitai, the underground police force. They were scattered throughout Burma and Siam, very strongly entrenched in rural... They ran by fever, by fear, so that they would knock over the villages if they harboured villagers. But in the main, again I can't prove it, but the escapees, the

10:30 ones that had a go were picked up by the locals, weren't picked up by the Nips. Handed back to them for a reward.

**Did you ever work under speedo conditions? Did that happen on your end of the...**

Oh speedo, speedo. Oh yes.

**Can you tell us a bit about that?**

Well the speedo was the increasingly, in the dark, the amount of work that you had to do. If you... If they felt that you were hanging back a bit and walking too slowly, it was just

11:00 a term that would indicate, "Hey, pick it up, go faster." That's all, mm. Mm. Speedo, mm. It's the same as 'Tanko! Tanko!' was you had to form in to be counted, but so it goes on.

**The Japanese, as you said, didn't use English and you didn't learn a lot of Japanese. Were there a series of commands that you learnt over the period?**

Oh yes, yes.

**Tanko, speedo, what else?**

Oh, you're going

11:30 back what sixty-odd years? Um yasmae, 'knock off'. Um, the counting of course, had to learn to count. Trying to think of a few. I'd recognise them if you said any, said a few, but no. Minimised, minimised the learning,

12:00 which in retrospect probably would have improved things a bit. A few people tried but it created a lot of confusion as well. You must remember that you were misusing the degrees because there's about, I understand there's about five different levels of Japanese that if you slip from one to the other it's an insult, and the degree of bowing is all...

12:30 And but those sorts of behavioural patterns could get you into trouble very quickly. You didn't know what was wrong but you you'd quickly know that something was wrong, so as they tried to impose their structure and culture on you and you didn't know what they were wanting even.

**Life on the line was fairly routine based. You would do the same thing over and over and over again.**

Oh yeah.

**Was there any part of that routine that you particularly dreaded?**

13:00 No I wouldn't say that. You were certainly under tension, a strong tension, um no, not really. Dreaded, dreaded.

**Or was there...**

No there's not, no I couldn't...

**Was there any time of the day that that you would...**

It wouldn't get you far, you know, mm.

**you looked forward to? Like...**

Oh well, obviously the knock off time and the bath. The use of those, the

13:30 big sections of bamboo and some of them were buckets you that you could leave out in the sun and you'd fill and you'd come back of a night and you'd have hot water and you could have a decent soak with. My recollection one time is being sent back to pick up a few cows, mangy things they were too, and one got away. So what do you do? You've got half an hour. Do you stay with them,

14:00 about a half a dozen of them and try to round up the... or the one that made a break into the scrub? So of course I stayed with the six but always regretted losing that one scraggy cow that got away on me. But on the other hand I made up for it. We were out one time and we came across a water buffalo that didn't appear to belong to anyone. Just mooching along. So I said to the guard, "Will I knock it off? Will I

14:30 take it?" and he nodded. So we took it back to camp and of course it didn't last five minutes. It of course the Nip got in for his chop but it was a water buffalo was quite good, mm.

**Did you ever experience any kindness from the Japanese guards?**

Oh, this compassion concept. No, I didn't. I've gone through this before but

15:00 I don't recall. But I can recall us being compassionate to the Japanese. At one stage we were in the path of the retreating Japanese army from Burma, or a section of it, and they were absolutely euchred when we came across them. They couldn't climb up onto the onto the trucks, the rail trucks. The line had finished and they were getting out through the line and they were they were really dusted

15:30 and we gave 'em food, mm. Gave 'em food. They were euchred. But in terms of compassion I honestly can't remember a Nip passing on food. Certainly they would allow us to buy food if the opportunity occurred. You could call that compassion, possibly. But they,

16:00 their compassion would be neutrality. It would be... The concept of compassion would be the neutrality. They didn't go looking for trouble whereas some would look for trouble almost, like the ones that were killed following the war after the Singapore court cases with, to which most of us gave data. Like the Maggot and the Black Prince, they were both executed.

16:30 But the ones that were neutral, and they were the ones as long as they took you out you didn't make trouble they wouldn't make trouble, they'd just go out, be there, take you back, just do their job and wouldn't buy in with you but didn't look for trouble. I suppose that's compassion.

**Can you explain in a little more detail the context in which you ran into these retreating Japanese army?**

17:00 Well we were on the line and obviously they'd been told to get out, or a section of it, and so we came across this group and they were scraggling. But this series of flat tops were there with an engine and obviously poised there and we were resting on the side of the road. We'd been walking from A to B

17:30 for some reason. It was up again, back up to, back up the line. And we'd gone back up after the line was complete to do a bit of maintenance work like, oh, I think one of the locomotives had come off the line and we had to get it back on. You imagine trying to get an engine back on because the line was pretty poorly spiked and it had a habit of

18:00 ballooning out, and of course when it balloons out something has to give. But we were there for some reason and these Nips, these scrawny skeletons dragged their way up, almost crawling, and then flopped. Some got others up onto the flat tops, others could get up themselves but the vast majority were, just couldn't actually get

18:30 onto the flat top so they were skeletons, mm.

**How did that make the prisoners of war feel? Was this...**

We were sorry for them. We were sorry for them. I can honestly say the majority of us were sorry for them. You hear stories of, particularly later on when the [NK] Oryoku Maru was sunk up in the China Sea and there was a whole flood, of a

- 19:00 flood – I wasn't there – a flood of POWs in the water that a few of the POWs tried to drown the Nip guards and so forth. But I can honestly say that I didn't experience anyone trying to kill any Nips or anything like that. On the... How... What would have been the reaction if we'd come across them on at night in the water
- 19:30 it would have been different. I'm certain we would have gone on fighting in the water, which is strange, an odd thing to say, but your adrenaline gets up and I can always recall back to Java Sea, Java when we ran up the battle ensign and it was like a roar – I've near heard experienced anything like it – a roar
- 20:00 went through the ship, the battle ensign, and was this roar of human voices. You know it was almost like an animal, you could say it was almost like an animal roar. It was... I was so conscious of it. But it was everyone in unison almost with this exposure, you know, "We're going into a fight," mm. Strange. Anyway, back to... Where are we?
- No, no, that's fascinating**
- 20:30 **that to hear of the ship becoming one...**
- Yes.
- like that.**
- Mm.
- Did you...**
- Yes the battle ensign, the unison of it. It's often spoken of, mm.
- Have you experienced that a lot on board a ship just to follow that up?**
- The only time I've ever experienced it. No and well there's a fair amount of shouting. Ah but they were mainly orders, directions, information but this was
- 21:00 almost a guttural roar that, but when you, you know, you're always get getting into fights and scraps and I've been in a couple of brawls and there is that sort of guttural feeling. It's an adrenaline rush of some sort, that that's why you don't feel pain as much and so forth and so on but they it was I was just conscious of this
- 21:30 unison that this very conscious of it, mm.
- Did you think that adrenaline helped you get to the island?**
- I never at one moment thought I wouldn't. I've always maintained all my life, I know I couldn't now, from my experience last year, but I've always maintained all my life if I could see land I'd get there. But bit of bravado I suppose
- 22:00 because it would depend on the sea and the cliffs and all the rest of it. We didn't have a big sea running for example. On the other hand, at Sangiang they surfed in, bit of a surf, not much. But what were we on about?
- I think we'll move...**
- Yeah, move on.
- We just moved an aside there but...**
- Yep.
- I want to go back to the railway. When you had the lines came together. You said you hammered in the last spike.**
- Yeah, mm.
- 22:30 **How did you and other prisoner of war mates feel about this thing that you'd constructed?**
- Well it's a, "Thank goodness it's all over." We just wanted to sit down. It's... You just can't convey with any clarity to people that really hadn't haven't experienced extreme hunger, extreme
- 23:00 tiredness, extreme worn-outness, just how you react so that you get to a stage where it's just a flop. Whenever you can you flop so that at the end we were see there were films all round us, they were filming this. As I say it's alive, the French people have got it.
- 23:30 It's been shown twice on tele [television] so you could ask the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], be well worthwhile to get hold of, because that was it. That was reality but we as POWs we were just so relieved and we were just there. Just, "Thank goodness it's over. Thank
- 24:00 goodness it's over."



**Were you proud of the work you'd done?**

Oh no. No, no. No, Peter Buehl, Pierre Buehl that's, I think, is very fictional of course. The bloke have you heard the story of, of the chappie that built the bridge? Toosey? Colonel Toosey? The real bloke. I met him

24:30 later on and he gave me the brush one time at... Very strong disciplinarian but a fine officer. He came to the conclusion that it had to be built, there was just... Otherwise you'd get shot. Simple as that. All right, what's the good of this, you know, just going in for the sake of it? And they brought

25:00 order, the group, to building it, but the Nips were always in control. The design was always Nips. In fact the bridge was brought up from Malaya, the span by span, and the rails were brought up from Malaya. They stripped railways all over the place, took 'em up to Burma. They weren't new. It wasn't a new sparkling new. It was all secondhand stuff so that when

25:30 the chap who wrote Bridge on the River Kwai he was distorting lots of things in order to make a fictional account, which took off. Still being published, mm.

**So did you have any feelings one way or the other towards this bridge? Was it a symbol of all the suffering or was it...**

Oh, back onto the bridge on the Kwai?

**Or towards the railway in general? Not just the bridge but...**

No, we never, certainly had no sentiment towards it.

26:00 Not at all. So that... Oh, that was the point wasn't it? No, we didn't feel any elation, "Look at our what we did. We pushed through this jungle that had been never been pushed through," and all the rest of it. No, lot of malarkey, mm. No. They didn't even give us a good feed. They did give us a biscuit or something but they certainly didn't give us a feed and they certainly didn't give us anything to drink,

26:30 but they were laughing and chaffing. They thought it was great, the Nips, because a lot of those had been drafted to the line. This is a point that's sometimes overlooked. They've failed elsewhere. They'd failed as personalities, they'd failed as military officers and they were pushed up the line. "Get 'em out of the way on this task, give 'em a task. Let 'em get on with it. Wouldn't care if we don't see 'em again." That sort of outlook,

27:00 or that's the way we interpreted the information. So do we move on or...

**Yeah, sorry, just got to look at this note that was passed to me. When the lines came together, was it a meeting of two different groups of prisoners?**

Yes. I'm not I can't quite picture the other group now from in hindsight. I

27:30 would have said yes, but I'm conscious of the two lines and there wasn't any question about us joining it so we might have mixed up, we might have mixed in. I simply can't recall that. I simply just don't know so I'd say it must have been the meeting, it must have joined but we were well in to Siam. We were well in. See we ended up for quite a time at a little town called Niki

28:00 where we came across food for the first time on the Burma, on the Siam side, and we stole quite a lot of dried fish um and we hadn't really come across much dried fish in Burma so this was food to us and we hoed into it and we lost a lot of skin from our mouths be because dried fish is pretty hard to eat and we didn't soak it for long enough and so forth. But

28:30 so it was a fair way in to Siam.

**And what happened then? How long were you still in the same place for before they moved you out?**

Well we did a bit of maintenance work according to where the line broke down so we were in Niki and then we moved on to the next camp into Siam as a group before we caught up. We... No, I'm sorry. We... I'll go back on that. We worked past

29:00 the F and H forces who had been up there embankment and line building, we worked past them so we pressed on. We musta joined the line. The line was waiting. They must have moved the row layers from the Siam side back. But I'm only guessing because we pressed on well into Siam because I can well recall in English they asked us to write

29:30 a one page, write a composition about an instant and I wrote an instant on the line of lanterns, just naked lights that people were holding, as the line came through the jungle as told to me by one of the blokes in F and H Force

30:00 that I still see occasionally. He said it was one of the most, the experiences of his life. There's black jungle at the and all of a sudden this line of flickering lights was surrealism. It was Hollywood at its best. This waving line coming down towards him from five, ten ks [kilometres] away through the blackness. Long line gradually more and more of it. They were the lamps

- 30:30 that we were holding, just burning bamboo with a bit of tar at the end of it that coming down through, and then caught up to him at the camp so it was one of the experiences of his life to see this approaching group that they didn't know were coming. Just came out of the blackness, woulda been two o'clock, three o'clock in the morning and they had this big pot, big cauldron going of burning this cholera crew,
- 31:00 yeah. Quite a time. So there we are.
- When did they decide to split up the prisoners and send them to different parts?**
- Oh must have been down there about six months later. That was quite a good easy time. That's when we had the market garden going but then the main split up was with a group taken up to Japan.
- 31:30 They went through and took the healthiest ones, you know, feeling muscles and so had our doctors pick out and then said, "Right you come with us." So the doctors in the main went with the group. They... Our particular doctor went up to Japan on the Oryoku Maru too, although he survived. So they were the big group to be separated.
- 32:00 But while we were in that camp you know I can recall we built our... We built up considerably with reasonable quantities of food.
- Did you still have access to radio transmissions or any idea of what was happening with the war?**
- I had no idea but there was a ra... As it turned out afterwards there was a camp, there was a radio in that camp but I didn't know of it, mm, I didn't know of it.
- 32:30 So that the Japanese group then was taken out and they went down to Saigon and I think they went down to Singapore to finally get on the ship, taken up and they were sunk in the South China Sea, but somebody else will tell you that.
- So where you were when you heard about the war ending?**
- Well I was in with another group that was moved up near the Cambodian
- 33:00 border, and why we were moved up there I don't know. I think it was to separate us into groups again because I've got documentation that we were due to be executed two days after the end of the war so that I can only think of the separation into these big separation groups to make them
- 33:30 um easier to deal with, because they took us out by bus, not by bus by truck, by trucks to a to a place called Ubon where later on in the Vietnam War, Ubon became a great city where the American planes largely took off from, but then it was just a strip and a little town.
- 34:00 And we walked and carrying all our the building materials to put up a camp. Our first task was to march, oh about thirty kilos up and down this road carrying bamboo or attap or whatever needed to be taken to build a camp. We didn't have a camp and so we built this camp and Gavin Campbell and I were up on a ridge top putting attap on a roof when
- 34:30 the word went up, "The war's over, blokes," and I can recall that quite clearly. So we were up there. Another group was taken down to near Phuket, down on in south Burma, no, in south Thailand where Thailand moves across to the west coast, but
- 35:00 another group was in Nakhon Pathom, which is the big rail centre, and a another big group, the major group, was sent down to Singapore. They went back down to Singapore so that again this... They didn't want us to keep us altogether by any means. See we weren't the only camp by the bridge there. There was another one about four or five ks away, further down, that we went down to later
- 35:30 on but. And then there was the Chung Kai group, that was another group again on the bend of the river just before the bridge.
- Well what happened when news of the war... Had that news that the war had ended came through? Did...**
- Again we just flopped. We just sat. A couple of them went out to the local villages and the local villagers have a alcohol brew brewing concept of just chucking all the rubbish in the big bin down in the ground,
- 36:00 which is pretty potent stuff, so I've never seen a bar set up so rapidly with bamboo. We found out it must have been eleven o'clock in the morning or so and the guards were still on the gate and but the officer had officially told us. We didn't believe it. He mm the Nips told not us as two people but told the
- 36:30 bloke in charge of the camp that the war was over so he let it be known as fact, and so we came down and a number of them spread throughout the community, the area, because it was a reasonably settled area. And to gath... get as much food as they could and
- 37:00 the cooks were continued to be cooks and they cooked a quite a reasonable meal. And of course we were got as full as hoot owls ah on this local brew that was... Although I... We didn't get full. We were a bit wary somehow. Gavin and I, "Bugger this," you know. "This is too good to be true," you know. So we

stayed a bit cautious and a matter of fact

37:30 we went up, there was a like another... Do you know Burma? Do you know that geographic area? There are different parts. There's little hillocks pop out of the flat plains and they develop trees where there's a bit of wood about. So Gavin and I went up there to gather some firewood and I was poking around and I looked across from here to about a bit further than that corner there and on a flat branch

38:00 of a tree there was the biggest cat. It wasn't a cat. It was an ani... Name of it. But this tail was waving. I've never got off that hill so rapidly in all my life. It was looked like to me like a bloody tiger, you know.

**Was it a bit of an anticlimax?**

Yeah in a way. In a way. Um

38:30 I won't say an anticlimax but it wasn't a realisation that the world would start again. I never did really believe that the war was over and I was out of trouble until I stepped ashore at Woolloomooloo. I got down and kissed the wharf at Woolloomooloo. I didn't really believe all the time I was in

39:00 'cause I stayed up in Bangkok for quite a time. See they couldn't ship everybody out all the time and I gave my original place to Claude Audley, Claude Woodley, to get back to his family, and he was home quite early but I was quite late in getting back. And then we came down to Singapore and we were living in tents outside Changi gaol um for oh quite a time - fortnight, three weeks - until

39:30 the shipload was gathered together. And then we came down via Singapore, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney. So but I never really relaxed and really the only time I really broke down was when I arrived home. It wasn't when I arrived home, it was about three days later. I was just flopped down on the in the front room and

40:00 all of a sudden I started to cry and ten minutes later it was all over and that was it, in terms of trauma, dramatic emotional exercise or anything. They gave... They didn't send me down to Melbourne but they sent people down to Melbourne and they went through a course of bringing them up to date and what was in the world and supposedly reintroducing them to the world

40:30 but I didn't go to that and I was... I felt I was all right, mm.

**Can you describe the moment when you came ashore at Woolloomooloo?**

Well there were people waving, there was a big group and I didn't see them but there was a bus load from Universal came down, Universal Pictures, and they'd decked it up you know with all the different films that over the last few years and all the rest. But

41:00 they missed me, because there was a navy group there to collect us from Balmoral and this navy group came aboard and said, "Navy chaps," so I rounded 'em up and we'd collected a bit of clothing then by that time and I went along to see the colonel that had the shipload, responsible for

41:30 the shipload, and said, "You mind if I if I take off? Bye bye," shook his he said, "No, go to it." So we were the first off the ship. We got off quick and lively, this navy group had a group so they had this great bus so we clambered aboard and the poor bloke, two striper, he had the devil's own job reconciling. We were one short, we were one short on his bloody list and John McIntyre he told me in Fremantle

42:00 and we all knew he was a West Australian

## Tape 10

00:32 **Can you tell us about when you saw your family for the first time after coming home?**

Yep. Balmoral, the navy set aside a room apart from the wardroom and invited my parents, my brother, his wife and one, ah, two aunts.

01:00 They had lunch and set up so from the ship the navy took us by bus and we had all this strife about one bloke being missing and that was Johnny McQuaid over in the west. His wife was in Sydney so she was expecting him of course, but he reckons he was West Australian, and he'd dropped off and I had no reason to quary but of course this poor bloke trying to reconcile numbers

01:30 he didn't know anyway and I did and I didn't even know the list that he had of who he was supposed to be looking for and he stupidly didn't in try to involve me. He was, you know, he was going to, you know, be the mastermind of taking (UNCLEAR). Anyway I said he was holding us up when we got to Balmoral. He was counting us again, just like a bloody Nip that we'd been living with for years, so

02:00 people were getting a bit touchy because they'd arranged lunch with a big group of... I brought about fifty of the Perth people back and...

**Careful of the microphone there...**

Yeah, and then what happened? Oh yes we arrived and he was counting and (UNCLEAR). I said, "You'll have a riot on your hands in a minute." So he at last he got the message that he had to let them go. So I went

02:30 to the wardroom and I was taken there because I'd never been to Balmoral before. Taken there into this room where they'd set it up very nicely as only the navy can do, and all, my... So they didn't come outside at all. I was taken to them and opened the door and there I was in the midst of them, so it...

03:00 And they left us alone and then stewards came in and served lunch. But I suppose I had about half an hour, they were coming in serving drinks and so forth. They laid it on very nicely, for which I was very grateful, but I hadn't met my brother's wife, for example, and trying to think of whether they'd had a child. I'm trying to think. I don't think the child was there but a couple of the aunts were there and so on,

03:30 you know, great get-together. But my parents were definitely not, they weren't demonstratively good parents in that sense. They there was no great show of in those days. You just didn't show feelings at all and well that's about it. Mm, oh there was no weeping or wailing or extreme

04:00 shows of affection but obviously my mother was deeply affected, mm.

**Did they comment on your appearance?**

Well they were afraid. Later on talking, cause the... I'd sent them a copy of the a photo that I had taken up in Bangkok and that had they'd got that and they saw how I'd withered

04:30 down and changed and they thought it was a scar along my face here - it was not -and of course I'd written and they'd had letters from me while I was up in Bangkok and but that was they didn't comment at all, no. Just tried to overfeed me, mm. But that's

05:00 how I arrived back. Then they sent us on leave of course and we were on leave for, oh, three weeks, six weeks I think it was, so.

**You mentioned there was only one occasion where you've actually broke down and cried.**

I... But I was on my own, that was all.

**Was there other problems that you had adjusting to this being back in civilian life?**

Well I just this workaholic I think. Just became a workaholic,

05:30 mm, so I think it was largely the effects and of course dreaming has gone on ever since, still with me, and the unexplained, the unfinished, the un... everything's broken up and distorted and so. But you can live with it, God. Nothing, mm.

**Can you tell us a little bit about...**

No.

**The dreams**

No. No. Mm.

**Don't**

06:00 **want to go there?**

No. Remember that I worked under Sigmund Freud, not, or rather his daughter, Anna Freud, for years.

**I don't want to analyse them.**

No, but other people will, mm. No that'd be a bit wet.

**Are they...**

Actually I've been probably too frank as it is, mm.

**Well I won't... I just...**

Yes so. Ask the question. Ask the question. I'll say no if you...

**Are they realistic to the point of you waking up in...**

Of course, yes.

**And screaming or...**

Not screaming or anything, no, but you know I'm very conscious of them and so forth, oh yes.

**Have there been any other kind of habits that you've picked up during your war prisoner of war experience that you've been unable to get rid of?**

Well I won't call them habits but they're ways of life

- 07:00 and ways of... they're values and ways of behaviour of course. But whether I had them before in a in a lesser state shall we say... But I am as I am as a result of the war, but not entirely so. The... My pre-war conditioning was to a certain extent solidified but to others, to other,
- 07:30 in other aspects it became widely divergent so that in terms of um... My conceptualisation widened considerably, my set of values, my set of viewing of other people, the whole concept of me as a person to myself is vastly different to

08:00 before to the before and after.

**Have you changed in any negative ways?**

Negative, what being? In the selfish sense?

**Well...**

Ah, negative being in what way?

**Things that caused you trouble in your in your later in your later life. Things like the dreams I guess. Are there any other...**

Um

- 08:30 no. Some say I'm... Won't say... Well very often it's been said I'm overconfident but, and overbearing. Wanting to, you know, take the lead all the time. Those sorts of aspects aren't always readily accepted by
- 09:00 by others and would be a direct result, I'd say, out of the wartime experience. But negative in well who's to know? Probably not. I've never been a really ambitious person in a monetary sense except well I suppose unconsciously I am because I've been quite successful, mm.
- 09:30 It all depends on how you define success, I guess.

**I know you've already sort of answered this question in the last one, but if you could maybe do again in just a sort of one statement. If you had to give me one statement, how could you say that being a prisoner of war has changed you?**

Oh I think it's made me a far more coordinated, confident person that

- 10:00 can mix readily, maybe not easily but readily, and it gave me a heightened sense of my own self and my own um power to achieve, for want of better words, so that before I'd always be thinking of what why I couldn't do something as opposed to now
- 10:30 I could only see what I can do, although just in... Recently I'm thinking I'm coming to realise the negative aspects of age rather than the experience.

**Have you been able to forgive the Japanese?**

I've never had a great hate against them. I've always been able to see that they were only doing a job. They towelled us because they were better in a fleet,

- 11:00 except in the last sinking I reckon we came off, we took more than, far more than we... They sank us and the... Take Java Sea show. As a fleet we did very well within our limited conditions of a fleet but we got towelled up just the same, mm. But in terms of myself I'm certainly...
- 11:30 I can cer... I can except myself quite readily.

**Do you ever think about those who didn't come back?**

Yes, ah, I started to go round to various people that I knew quite closely that didn't come back but I found with quite a number of them, in fact more than the other way, they didn't

- 12:00 really want to know. I wasn't entirely welcome because many of them had started up their lives, different life, because you're asking a twenty-one twenty-two-year-old girl who was married or engaged, had young children possibly, to not knowing whether her husband or fiancé was alive or dead at that age. Can you expect
- 12:30 them to really stay put for years when the years were flowing by? I don't blame them for one little minute. But they didn't want me to intrude into their lives by, you know, bringing up the past to a certain extent. Now that's overstatement, some... all won't be... weren't the same by any means. But others were and so I found that
- 13:00 it was probably best not to call. When I've met them since in other circumstances, like they've come to reunions and for years while we were reasonable numbers we had dances and all sorts of things and widows would come along and daughters and so forth and that was different altogether, but we always had to assess to what degree we would tell them really what happened. Sometimes it

13:30 wasn't fair on them to tell them, mm.

**Did you ever feel that the world Australia or the world had moved on without you in some respects?**

Oh no. I felt I'd caught up to the world, yeah, but I... With songs. And came back and the Americans had taken over Sydney so that... But no, there was no feeling of that being left behind

14:00 or, "Oh, I've been overlooked," or anything of that nature. I was grateful very grateful for the government assistance scheme, the Commonwealth Government assist... Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. I was very grateful for that, mm.

**Was your need to get ahead and to study and to make something of your life in partly a response to lost time?**

Oh yeah. Yes,

14:30 very conscious of lost time. I started university when I was about twenty-five and a half, almost you know getting on to twenty-six as it were, and so I didn't graduate first degree till I was about thirty and so I was conscious that I had to make up because you saw people that I won't say took advantage of

15:00 it but they grasped the opportunity that was there when so many people were away that gave them, I thought, an added advantage. Still do, for that matter, particularly in the academic world. Since I moved, when I moved into the academic world and I was involved as a fringe dweller in the academic world in England. Like I was

15:30 Rowntrees being what it was, they were asked quite frequently to supply lecturers at Sheffield and Hull or Leeds, Durham. A couple of occasions down to London. So that I was mixing it with the academics. We had been full-time academic in the UK as well as always being

16:00 associated when I came back. Again as outsiders. I was never really full-time academic until I started, until I retired.

**The academic world is fairly comfortable and insular in a way.**

Yes.

**Did you ever feel that your experiences just made it impossible for you to deal with these people?**

Yes. Many a vigorous discussion has taken place along those lines,

16:30 particularly with the PhD. You know to physical, you know not physical, but ding-dong arguments because not being the academics, not being able to appreciate, to see at times what was so obvious to me in terms of industrial attitudes or people at work attitudes compared to academic people at work.

17:00 They certainly did develop a different set of outlooks and values that make them to me quite insular, quite narrow, and it's one of my aims in life to endeavour to change one particular group into a wider vision. And I maintain that the they won't get anywhere until they genuinely accept the integration of industry with the academic world.

17:30 Actually the department of education is, I think, is. And I'm only going on what I can read and discussions at seminars and so forth. That they are endeavouring to bring the two together in a closer combined and genuine way. There's a lot of lip service paid and the academics would all say always say that they are considering and take into account industry's

18:00 attitude but they don't genuinely. They retreat back, you know. That's a generalised statement but hey, I suppose can be questioned often.

**We're into the last couple of questions. You're talking about your wartime experiences now with us, and for that we're very grateful. Have you had much cause in your life to this point to actually talk about your experiences during the war?**

Not really. I've been asked

18:30 from time to time to give a lecture but I've tended to stay away from it. I haven't encouraged it by any means and certainly I haven't endeavoured to put anything on paper, and I certainly haven't talked about it in general terms, even to my own family.

**Can you explain that desire to stay away from it?**

19:00 No I can't. No I can't. But I just don't feel that I just haven't felt the inclination. I suppose that'd be it. But certainly a couple of my daughters in particular have tried hard but, oh, I've dodged it. I think because I realise the limitations of what I could express.

19:30 I realise... And I've read lots of the books, the publications, and I realise for want of a better term how thin they are. I've realised how biased they are. I've realised how fictionalised they are. I've realised all

the shortcomings and I knew that I would fall into the same category. I don't consider myself a good writer, although I've written

- 20:00 a lot of journal articles and I've done a lot of written work in my other life as a consultant. I've done a lot of work at both at government work and big company work. I've worked for the Commonwealth Bank for twenty years, IBM twenty years. Tip Top bakeries for twenty-five years, thirty years. Big companies often requiring big reports.
- 20:30 So that I've done a lot of writing but I know that I couldn't hope to cope with, coping with the with the language that would require that underlying feeling that only the good poets can achieve, and we didn't have good poets. We've had a couple of reasonable artists and
- 21:00 a couple of people that are reasonably good on fronting up in the verbal sense but we've, we haven't so far revealed, uncovered, a person that has really grasped that mistiness and reality that is required
- 21:30 with almost unreality, if that makes sense. That... And one would hope, couldn't hope, one, you couldn't hope to convey to people without having experienced it. We could talk about them to ourselves. Within ourselves. You'll find a you can't shut people up but so they're still working it out, which you can put down as a certain after a traumatic event
- 22:00 and it's good that they do and that's one reason of course we don't question each other. We only accept and listen and you know, "That's, oh gee, that's interesting." And but knowing at the same time there's a sorting out at some stage. Like I've raised it at a couple of seminars that there's very much a PhD to be done on taking all the publications that have appeared so far and structure them,
- 22:30 knock 'em into shape as a coordinated grouping, the best of all of them. The best being a conveyancing sense and maybe something would emerge from that, but I suspect not.

**If it's impossible to express, which I'm sure it is, the scope and reality of your experiences, how do you deal with having something inside you that that you can't express to others?**

Well as I do, you don't. You don't try.

- 23:00 Mm. So that this is the first time that I've been in this exercise, although I've given a number of overall... In fact the last one I gave down at the War Memorial on An... on 28th of February, you know, a I had the feeling even as I was giving it, and it went down very well, but as I was giving it I was thinking, "Geez, I've been pulled out of the
- 23:30 woodwork and dusted down just because there's the whiff of war over in Afghanistan," or wherever we were at the time.

**How do you feel about war?**

Oh well the glib statement is of course there shouldn't be war, but I've sadly reached the conclusion that we haven't learned how to not go to war. The way we demonstrate, for example, is a retreat to the cave.

- 24:00 We haven't learnt to even convey what we want except through mobs, marching up and down waving banners and so forth. What is civilisation? You know, you can go on and on because in a... We call ourselves civilised and yet at the same time we can go into Afghanistan. We can go over there. We can't find the loaded bomb now. One suspects
- 24:30 all sorts of other reasons and motivations and but the Middle East, the cockpit of Asia, has been almost continuous warfare as long as the written word has been there. From Egyptian times when they did Ancient History 1 it opened a vast world to me. I was riding there with the Assyrians and I was riding there with the Egyptians and it was marvellous. Have you done Ancient History 1? It
- 25:00 takes you into a different world. And I dodged Rome altogether. I didn't open a book on Rome. There was so much else around and so that from there some of those civilisations but they were at war most of the time. They only continued to be a civilisation as long as they were at war. And how long has it been since 1945
- 25:30 without war? Without people hopping into each other. We can't even survive as a society here. If you go near the trade unions, the tough ones, we're at war. We're at war still. Put Crean and Howard up against each other they're at war, mm.

**Was there any point then to the war that you were involved in?**

Very little. It certainly stopped that particular monster from taking over

- 26:00 but I should imagine a lot of people lived quite happily under Hitler. I would always say that it was worthwhile to go to war because I was taught and the set of values was such that Hitler was really wrong, was really a nasty. The same as the last couple of months. And the they'll always dig up the dirt. But on the other hand we have left
- 26:30 no water, no sewerage, no electricity, so that is that going to prevent war? Well it knocked out one little fella but what we've done, we've now got half a dozen round the Mediterranean alone that are very

much put out and they will always strive and struggle to out the big boy. We... If a person takes on the leadership role there'll always be

27:00 people that are trying to pull him down is as I see it, and I think that from now on there's going to be groups of people, as in Rome you know, when they start to come down, Rome fell. All of the other (UNCLEAR), for example, they all fell. A hundred years and that that will continue and I see nothing in the present situation

27:30 that will lead me to think it might be otherwise. Someone will always be having a go. Same as Japan. They'll have another go some time.

**How then in your lifetime do you feel about the society you live in? Do you think it's changed or has it changed for the better or are we trapped in a...**

How do you know? I can only recall my childhood. It was a happy one and yet we went right through the Depression.

28:00 My old man was out of work for two and a half years. How do you know? I was brought up in a house with no electricity, dirt floor in the kitchen, wooden stove. Happy kid, though. Happy. I've been contented with my lot all my life really and I so how do you advance society?

28:30 I really don't know and I certainly don't think the socialists know and I don't think the social welfare people know. And I've read an awful lot of material that strengthens my belief in that regard. They're just pushing a pushing a barrow in a particular way and good luck to them. The striving has to be there and I don't think we've advanced very far really.

29:00 **The last thing the archive would like to give you is an opportunity just to make any kind of statement you'd like. Keeping in mind the fact that this may be kept and shown to people in a hundred years' time, is there anything that your experiences in the twentieth century or your experience as an historian or a war veteran that... Any statement you'd like to make to people in the future?**

Not really, but for what it's worth

29:30 there should be an increasing tolerance. People should be have to learn to listen to other people, not necessarily to accept but to at least listen and to weigh and to judge. There has to be a minimising of the one-eyed outlook that most people develop, and in order to achieve that you have to

30:00 re-examine the way we educate people. It's a glib statement to say that education is at the centre of our civilisation, but we don't really understand education in the sense of knowing what is right and what should be taught, and what is the right way to go about our education, so that one hopes that

30:30 far more work will be done on improving and uncovering knowledge that will lead us into bettering our approaches to educating people, both in the home, in the school and in the their activity of growing up. But how we do it at the present time, I can't really see any major breakthrough. And

31:00 unless, until we learn to live with each other in the broadest sense I think we will continue almost to go backwards. I know it's a depressing thought but I can only see the bigger weapons that we've got and the more technical use that's being made of weapons of war and even weapons of civilisation. Our own civilisation. The more we are creating problems for

31:30 ourselves such as computers. I don't really think we've come to grips with the shortcomings of the computer world that we're now in and I only hope that the technologies that emerge would be more fitting for what we sometimes verbalise but don't really achieve.

32:00 **Well thank you very much. Thank thanks again for being part of this project.**