Australians at War Film Archive

William Lunney (Popeye) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **Thanks Bill for the interview, can you just give us a brief overview of your life from where you were born to where you are now?**

Well I was born in Marrickville and Sydney and I was only a baby when we shifted around all over Sydney. Went to school, in Auburn first, Maroubra

01:00 and a lot of schools, and ended up in Canterbury High School. Mr Howard [John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia] wasn't there at that time. But I left when I was thirteen and worked in a glass factory. Then I joined the small ships, I just heard about them. When I was at school at Arncliffe

01:30 I remember one day there, it was sixth class, we saw some aeroplanes come past the window. This was very unusual in those days because there weren't many aeroplanes flying around there, these were three Hawker Demons. And all of the kids rushed from one side of the room to the other, and the teacher joined us. Normally you would get the cane if you moved out of your seat but he didn't say a word about it. And we went over and we watched these planes. "Oh look at that. If this Mr Hitler gets any

02:00 trouble we've got these planes to fix him up." You know, we had no idea. And then another instance like that. A little reconnaissance came over and we raced down the back to our slit trenches, nearly everybody had them in those days, it was full of water so we didn't go in, and we saw this tiny little plane up above and we wondered why they didn't shoot it down. But we found out later it was too high and they couldn't reach it. But when you're

02:30 a kid you don't know these things. We were up at Woy Woy actually on holidays when war was declared. We heard [Robert] Menzies' [Prime Minister of Australia] little speech and adults were talking about who was going to go to the war, and we knew my father wouldn't go because he had had an accident and was unfit. And we thought we were too young we would

03:00 never go. Anyway as I say I left school at thirteen, I hated school, never realised I was going to become a school teacher. I worked in this glass factory and from there I learnt about the United States Army small ships. So I went down and found out you had to be sixteen, well I was only fifteen.

03:30 But I went to the manpower office and got a clearance from them but on the way back to the glass factory I read it and saw that they had sixteen, had fifteen sorry on the thing. So I went to the girls in the office and asked them to do a bit of cheating and they fiddled with the figures and turned it into sixteen. And then I had to have a letter from my parents giving their consent. So I got the lady

04:00 in the canteen her and her husband wrote it out for me. But the Yanks they weren't fussy so long as you could stand up. And on that point we had quite a lot of fellows with only one leg, five I think it was, two with one arm, a few that were blind, not completely blind but blind in one eye or something like that.

04:30 But the Americans were glad to just have anybody.

So the Americans weren't too fussy?

No because at that time, I am talking about 1943 when I joined up, although they had started in 42, most of our soldiers were overseas and anybody who was fit enough was already in the services. So they didn't have much to

05:00 choose from. That's why they weren't fussy about checking up on our ages. There were quite a few boys, well a lot who were just sixteen, some were like myself, hadn't really turned sixteen. But they didn't care so long as you could do something. And you know people with one arm and a few with one leg,

05:30 oh I am a bit lost here.

So you served in the, is it the merchant navy?

It is in a way it is the same as the merchant navy we worked for the American Army, but we were not inducted soldiers. Even though they gave us a so-called uniform, a couple of shirts and pants and that was all it was. A lot of them bought fancy caps and that sort of thing, I never got around to that.

06:00 It's not very well known but the American Army owned more ships than, I think it is true to say all of the services in the world put together. Now that might not be true, but certainly they had miles more than the American Navy and people just don't know that. They think army, in fact often when we were doing this book

06:30 it said this ship went to the American Navy, well it wasn't it was the army. And their purpose was to supply their armies and as it happened our army too, with guns ammunition and all of that sort of thing. Anyway we boys were only fifteen and sixteen and so on. And we went down to Walsh Bay in Sydney and did a training course. I joined up in May 43

07:00 and we did several months training. You know learning Morse code and flags, rules of the road. Funny it's the sea and they call it rules of the road. And they would take us out in a little boat for machine gun practice, and one day we might turn on the gun and a target used to bob up and down and as soon as she would pop up you would let it go you know. And

07:30 one time I am sitting all lined up waiting for this target to come up and it was an albatross that come up and I blew its wing off before I realised. And the boson who was an old sailor from the north east coast of America. Oh he screamed because you know the old story of the albatross

08:00 from Coleridge's poem and the belief that if you killed an albatross it would bring bad luck. And the poor thing, I felt sorry for it, I had blown its wing off and I wanted to kill it and put it out of its misery and he raced up and grabbed me and pulled me off the gun and signalled the skipper, "Get back to port." Oh he was really furious, and frightened I think too. So anyway we did our training there, but once we got the so-called uniform, the khaki shirt

08:30 and pants we used to stroll up town in Sydney and you probably know that across from the Town Hall used to be called Beberfaulds corner ['Beberfaulds' was a building on the corner of George Street], it used to be Beberfaulds in those days. And it was choc-a-block with girls, the whole block, all of the way around there to Hyde Park. And the Yanks would just walk up, sometimes they would say, "Hi." To the girls, sometimes they wouldn't even bother they would just put their arm in a girl's arm and go up to Hyde Park or a hotel.

09:00 And of course we thought we would do the same you see? We have got this American uniform on. And some of the girls said, "Go home to your mummy little boy." And some of those girls were about thirteen, I am not joking, not exaggerating. But they thought they were old because they had lipstick on you see? It was all good fun and we enjoyed the training and all of that sort of thing. But then in August of 43 we were assigned to a ship called the Mactan..

09:30 It had a very colourful history, it was made in England for the Mount Lyle mine in Tasmania but by the time it got out here the strikes, that's why they wanted it the other ships were on strikes and they wanted their own. By the time they got out here the strikes had been settled. So they sold it to New Zealand and they called it the Moora and then later it was sold to China.

10:00 And they changed the name again, I can't think of the name now. And then to a Filipino company and they called it the Mactan after a little island in the Philippines where what's his name? First circumnavigated the world? He was speared there on that island Mactan. Stupid I can't think of his name.

10:30 I will think of it later. Ferdinand Magellan, that's it. And they said he circumnavigated the world because he came around half way one way and then half way the other way. And that's where he ended up. But she was pretty old by that time and pretty rotten too. Steel but you could put a chipping hammer through the deck

11:00 it was that bad. Anyway they did it up and we joined it. My first job, I was officially an apprentice seaman, the American Army, had that I don't know that anywhere else in the world had that but if you were on an Australian ship you would be a deck boy. Anyway what I was a galley boy, peeling spuds [potatoes], that was my going into war with a spud peeler.

11:30 And we went up to New Guinea. Stopped off in Brisbane for a short time and the Cairns, and I will never forget going through the straight, just below Milne Bay anyway, China Straits that's what they call it. And so

12:00 beautiful I had never been to the tropics before. Everything was so green, green everywhere. And the water was flat like a mirror, and you could see down thirty feet, you could see a coin thirty feet down. And you would see the natives paddling around in their little, I have forgotten the name of it. Like outrigger canoes, and

12:30 oh it was like being in heaven you know. And then we went into Milne Bay. And I stayed on the Mactan for a few weeks, not very long, and they put me onto a trawler, the Bundaberg and we went further north. The Japs were in, no they had just chased them out of Buna by the time we got there. And we

went up to Oro Bay. And on the way it is very tricky, lots and lots of reefs

13:00 and that's why they, I should have started at the beginning. After Pearl Harbour is that all right to double back? After Pearl harbour the Americans were in the Philippines at that stage and they sent Macarthur back to Australia, and what they needed was lots of little ships with shallow draughts to get through the coral reefs.

13:30 So this little Bundaberg little fishing trawler, we had to get through these reefs, it was like following a snake through there. The skipper put me up in the bow and call as soon as the water changed and I would say, "A little bit to starboard, bit port. Steady." And at one stage an Australian Naval Patrol boat came up

14:00 and he pointed the gun in our direction, he was outside the reef actually, but still well within shooting range you know. And he was signalling us, and of course we had learnt signalling at school in Sydney and I turned around and yelled to the skipper, "That navy boat wants our code, today's code." And he said, "Fuck the code you keep your bloody eyes on that water." And I did.

14:30 And anyway we didn't get shot or else I wouldn't be here. And we got to Oro Bay and they put me on another ship the Curie Moral which was an old Lever Brothers island boat. And she was nice, the boson was a fellow we all called Lofty, very tall red headed, with a big red beard. And I can never ever remember his surname because everyone just called him Lofty.

15:00 And as I walked the board he said, "What's your name?" I said, "Bill Lunney." He said, "Lunney you don't start that with a D do you?" That was my initial. He was a very good boson, very good seaman and later on, I am sort of jumping all over the place here. One day, it was Sunday morning and we had all gone down after breakfast

15:30 and there was some honey on the table, oh we hadn't seen honey, you know I had only been up there a month or something. But all of the other blokes that had been there a long time, oh they were berserk when they saw this honey and were hoeing into it. And just then some planes came over and we heard shooting, "Japs!" And we had had no alert, nothing. And we had a

16:00 mad Canadian, he was a funny bugger. Used to work for, who was the famous gangster in America? Oh I will think of it later. Everybody knows him. Anyway he used to unload whisky off the railways on the border of Canada. And he said, "Oh they are just having a tryout."

16:30 Because they used to sometimes go out and have a press of the trigger just to make sure that their guns were working properly. But the next minute we saw a plane spin down into the reef and we thought that's not a tryout and we looked up and there was sixty Japanese planes, no more than sixty because there was sixty shot down. And so we were, we thought it was fun because we were only boys you see? Seeing these dog fights but of course people were being killed in them. And they were coming down one after the other.

17:00 The Americans had the Lightning fighter planes there, the twin tail one, and they were very fast. Not as manoeuvrable as the Zeroes but what they would do they would have two come together. The first one would dive down a terrific dive and if he missed the bloke behind him would get him. So it wasn't long and they got the whole,

17:30 well sixty of them they got, incredible. Anyway on the Bundaberg I just can't remember where we went. Up to, I just can't remember. Up north somewhere, and what we were doing, all of the little ships used to take matting for the airstrips for the planes to land on. Ammunition. High octane petrol for the motor torpedo boats and

18:00 planes. Food. Tonnes and tonnes of apricots, dried apricots which we used to make beaut jungle juice out of. And we used to bring wounded back or dead people back. All of those sorts of things. As the front moved up we would move up with it and bring all of these things that we had to back.

18:30 While I was on the Curie Moral that's right we went up to Morotai. That was very strange because when we left Oro Bay that was very busy, like Pitt Street on Friday night, ships of all sorts there, loading, unloading, everyone was busy, shouting at one another across the bay.

19:00 And when we got to Morotai it was dead quiet. And I couldn't understand the quiet and I asked him and he said, "Oh mate we have had a bit of trouble today there was a sniper in the tree up there, and he had been shooting at us and he got one bloke this morning and we got him. But", he said, "There was two torpedo boats up in the creek." And they were almost like a tunnel, you know the overgrowth of the jungle,

19:30 but the Japs knew exactly where they were and came in and bombed both of them, strafed them and shot them up. And there was a young bloke there, Australian soldier. He come up to me, he was about eighteen. And he said, "Mate have you got any bread." And I said, "Yeah the cook's just baked some. Come down to the galley and I will get you some." So he came down and I got him half a loaf of nice fresh hot bread. And I said, "Hang on I will get you some butter to go with it."

20:00 We used to get that tinned butter, tropical butter, and I said, "Oh don't worry about that that's fine." And he hoed into that bread and I guarantee he had it down in about thirty seconds. I had never seen

anybody wolf it down like that. And that's when he told me about the sniper and the torpedo boats. And he had the job, he had to go over and clean the sides of it down. And, "Mate have you ever cleaned human offal the…? It was really horrible."

20:30 This is why everyone was so quiet. Because there were hills just behind the bay and the Nips [Japanese] used to come over and they could just drop in without and invitation sort of thing. Anyway after a while I went ashore and I saw some fellows digging a slit trench and another one that was nearly full of water. And the

21:00 alert there was three shots usually out of a Bofor gun. And I head this Bofor go off, bang, bang, bang. And that's the most frightened I have ever been in my life. And the irony was nothing happened, they didn't come, but I near pooped myself you know. I stood there and I froze, I couldn't move. And I saw this, there was an American Negro soldier there and I think he left the

21:30 pick in the air I think he was in the slit trench before the pick was. And there was water in it and he dived in it anyway. And there was soldiers everywhere, scarpering, diving in slit trenches, and I stood out in the open just absolutely frozen. And I suppose it seemed a long long time but it was probably thirty seconds and then I said, "Oh Bill you stupid bastard." And I thought I will go back to the ship, and then I thought well no that will be the first thing that they hit.

22:00 And then oh what the hell if you're going to get hit, you're going to get hit. And I was right then my muscles unfroze and I was okay. But it's funny how it feels, suddenly hits you, you know. But it never ever happened again even though other times were a lot worse than that. Anyway when we got back from Morotai I was put on another ship, oh the Hilda Noing [?] a ketch, lovely ship, my favourite ship. I will show you a photo of that.

22:30 And the only thing, we had a skipper who was fond of opera. The only think we had in common, I liked opera and he liked opera. But anything else, he used to be a commodore from a yachting club in Sydney you know, and oh he used to bung it on. One day a mate and I we went ashore in a little boat and ran around and had a swim, and I said,

23:00 "You row back and I will swim." I swam back and just as I got aboard, as I was climbing up I heard this "Phsss." And I turned around and there was a bloody big croc, and I mean really big croc, over twenty feet. They were enormous crocs there. Anyway I got in all right and just then this skipper, this pompous bugger came up and he said, "You should know better than to go swimming, don't you know it is full of sharks?"

23:30 I should have said, "No I thought the crocodiles had eaten them all." Anyway I didn't say anything and he, one day we were talking about limes, one of the natives told him they had lime trees ashore. So I went ashore and got him some limes and when I come back to the edge of the water, three big conga eels, oh my God they are enormous. They were in the water, and I was standing on the,

24:00 you know eighteen inches between us, frightened the hell out of me. But they can't get on land, there was no reason to be frightened, just when they pop out of the water, their great big mouth you see? Anyway when I got back to the ship the skipper was furious, he had started up the engines, and said, "If you were two minutes later you would have been here, we would have left you we would have been on our way."

24:30 And I thought you ungrateful bastard, here I am going ashore through the jungle getting you limes that you wanted. Anyway when I got back I went to the office and said, "I want to get another ship." I couldn't stand this bugger. And he laughed and said, "Yes I know all about it." And I said, "How do you know that?" He said, "I am censoring, I have read the letters." He had read the letters you see?

25:00 Anyway he said, "It is all right we're putting you on another ship anyway." So we went on a,

Actually just let me ask, that crocodile how close was that?

Oh a foot.

You only just made it?

Yeah that's right it was only a ketch remember and the side wasn't very far out of the water and just as I was getting over the edge

25:30 you know my feet must have been half way down and he was out of the water because I heard him snort sort of thing, yeah. That didn't frighten me like those three shots out of that Bofor gun did, it's funny. We saw some big crocs up there, some of them we estimate was twenty-two feet.

Lets just come back to your growing up years, can you share with me your early memories of childhood and growing up?

26:00 Yeah well I suppose the most important thing in my life he was brutal very cruel yeah. For example one day, normally if he was belting somebody he would belt everyone, the whole family. Even my newborn brother who had just come out of the hospital ten days old.

26:30 Because he was crying he went to belt him, just with his hand, but my mother jumped in between them

to stop him. I think it would killed him really, I mean that. So he belted the hell out of her and then he went right around the family. He belted everybody. One day for example I told you I left school when I was thirteen, I went to Canterbury High and I used to

27:00 wag it [truant from school] because I told you I hated school by that stage. Very disappointing too because the year before, you had an external exam in sixth class in those days and I failed and I couldn't understand why because I knew one of the best students there. And my mother went down and saw the headmaster and he told her that I had got one of the highest passes in the state but they had kept me back because I was young. And I felt cheated you know.

27:30 Whether it was right or wrong, but that's the way I felt about it. Then I went to a different school the next year, and ironically we had a real good teacher there, used to read us real good blood and thunder stories and played the flute and we loved the music. But I had lost interest in school. And the background to that was that my father had become increasingly violent.

28:00 Really terribly violent, wonder he didn't kill somebody and I just got sick of it, I just wanted to be out of it you know. My mother had eight children and it was terrible for her. Anyway the next year they sent me to Canterbury High, well I say Canterbury High but it was Canterbury High School annex,

28:30 it was part of the school but it was for the duds you know? And I felt bad about that too. So I just, and we had some dreadful teachers there. Some of them were all right, but we had some dreadful teachers there. It would be quite common to get twenty, thirty cuts of the cane in a day you know, for trivial things really.

29:00 So I used to wop it with two or three other blokes and we would go into the city, into a Woollies [Woolworths] Store or a Coles store and we would steal mostly swimming trunks because they would be easy to get away with, and we would go to another Woollies Store, Coles Store whatever it happened to be and one of us would take them up to the boss man and say, "My mother bought me a pair of trunks

29:30 for my birthday and my father bought me a pair too. And Mum says can we take these back?" And they always did, sometimes they queried you a bit, but usually they would just give you the money and that was it. So we had two and six and we would go to the pictures, go and buy chocolate, on some days. On other days we would slip under the barrier at ferry wharf, go to Manly and a mate of mine had discovered a way to get in, I

30:00 don't know if they still have it, an amusement thing. Do they still have it there? No. But they had all of these pinball machines and that sort of thing. But outside there was a big box, if you could call it that, attached to the wall, and that was for the electricians to come. They had oh a dozen or more metres, and they had to leave it open for him.

30:30 And this mate of mine found that you could climb up the top and get over to the ceiling of this amusement parlour and the ceiling was only canvas so we just got a razor blade and cut a slit down and got in. You couldn't get into the machines, but there was stacks and stacks of tokens, that are supposed to be two shilling pieces, they

31:00 must have been the same weight or something. And we used to get stacks of these tokens and when we got out, there used to be Cadbury's chocolate machines, and Wrigley's chewing gum machines, and stamp machines, so we would get these and sell the stamps and sell a lot of the chewing gum and chocolates and so on. And then we would go over to Taronga Park to the zoo.

31:30 And we used to steal guinea pigs. Stick them in our shirt, our shirts were all full of poop when we got home. Terrible mess, but we would sell them for a shilling each, so we were well funded. But my father caught me one day, one Saturday morning. They used to deliver mail on Saturday mornings in those days. And I always used to get the mail and if it had OHMS [On His Majesty's Service] I knew where they came from and I would write a note back

32:00 to the school because my writing was very similar to my mother's and in fact she used to get me to write the note and she would sign them. And I could write her signature and it would take a pretty good person to tell the difference. Anyway this Saturday morning the postie [postman] blew his whistle and my sister went out to get the mail. And I am thinking don't you let him see,

32:30 I knew it was coming you see? And sure enough she handed it to my father. And he read it. "You have been playing the wag." And he grabbed me, lifted me over his head and threw me from one end of the hall to the other, you know a normal length hall, and he raced up and put the boot into me. Kicked my ribs in. And when I eventually got up he knocked me down and kicked me again. The upshot was I couldn't go to school, that was Saturday morning,

33:00 until the following Thursday because I couldn't walk. And when I got to school the headmaster, he wrote a note to say I had been whopping it you see? The headmaster gave me six, and when I got into class I got another six, all day, almost every teacher cracked me with the cane. Anyway it didn't stop me wagging. And it was not long after that, well a year later I left school when I was thirteen.

33:30 And then I got offered my first job was with a boot maker in punchbowl, mending boots and this sort of thing, and then I got this job. Well the reason I got the job at the glassworks, I had a big fight with my father that day, it got to the point when I couldn't stand it any longer, so we had a big stand up punch

up, and even though I was only thirteen, I was a pretty good fighter, I played football and that sort of thing.

34:00 Toward the end I was winning, I had him beaten, I cut his face and so on and I just thought this is stupid, what are we doing this for? And I just ran and jumped over the fence at the front and went to a mate's place and his people put me up and that's when I got the job at the glass factory.

Your two mates that you were whopping it with,

34:30 **who were they and where did you know them from?**

Oh because they were at school in the same class, and one of them Bernie, his father, he had just joined up. He had been on the dole as far as I could tell right through his life, right through the Depression and this is in 41 I think by then and so it was good for him. He had a good job and had plenty of money

35:00 and had never been so well off in his life. The other boy, Curry was his surname, David Curry, he got killed later on in Borneo. Bernie joined the army too but I don't know where he went or what happened to him. All I know is he ended up in gaol later on for stealing. Oh they came from broken homes too, bad homes.

35:30 So I suppose it is not really surprising.

What did your dad do?

He was a carpenter or what they called a carriage builder on the New South Wales railways but he had had an accident when he was younger. By younger I mean just a few years after he was married, yeah it must have been three or four years after he was married. He played football, and he was a pretty good footballer, and he was a champion boxer on the

36:00 north coast. You don't have those sort of things anymore these days but in those days every little town had their boxers and boxing championships and that sort of thing. And they were in a car coming home, too many of them in a car, all drunk. Tipped the car over, he got an inch and five eighths out of his pelvis and broke twenty bones in his foot. And he was in a bad way and they thought he was going to die. They didn't bother fixing the

36:30 bones and that because they thought he had no chance of living. But the doctor said afterwards it was just because he was in such good shape, that's what pulled him through. But the problem was, we're pretty sure he had brain damage as a result of that accident, that's why he became so aggressive and so moody and that. And on top of that he had a lot of pain and he had to still work.

37:00 And then he was off work I think it was nearly twelve months at one stage. And in those days you got half pay for the first half and then you got nothing, and my mother used to go out and scrub floors and as I said she had, well she didn't have eight children at that stage she had four, well my brother he was three years younger than me, so four

37:30 certainly under five years anyway, I think four years it was. Because the girls were twins, so she had a real handful you know.

We'll just stop there.

37:46 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:30 **Bill can you tell me about your mum, what she was like?**

Yes her grandfather was a New Zealander he had a shipping company, when I say shipping company two or three ships up and down the New Zealand coast. And

01:00 Her grandmother was a Maori and her half Maori half pakeha. But her mother died I think while she was in childbirth so Mum didn't really have a mother. And she got to meet my father, he played football and that's where she met him. There somehow or other. And they got married. Her father, first of all was a shearer's

01:30 cook and then he bought himself a little utility and used to deliver milk. You know in those days they had the milkman all came around to your door. She didn't really see a lot of her father, he was very nice, I was very fond of him. Poor bugger he died of cancer when he was only fifty-one. My Mum had it hard, she

02:00 had a brother who eventually became a Tech teacher, TAFE [Technical and Further Education] as you call it now, but they led fairly separate lives you know. Lonely life. And then when they got married it was all right for a while until my father had that accident coming home from football and then gradually, the very first thing I can remember in my life, I suppose it is not about my mother.

02:30 But we lived at an inner suburb in Sydney, I think Macdonaldtown or something like that. And we had been away for a holiday and we came home and my mother had left some milk out on the table and my father, he just did his nana ['banana' – got angry] in a flash you know. Cranky because she had left this out. Picked it up and threw it all over her. And I was only little, two I think, but it

03:00 really struck me as a terrible thing to do. But she was a bright woman. I think she went to third year of high school which was in those days for women pretty unusual you know. Mostly if they got to sixth class that was about it, they could leave in sixth class if they wanted to in those times. She,

03:30 we started a shop once at Lakemba making babies' clothes, she was a very good at knitting and sewing, as most women were in those days. Used to crochet these little babies dresses. But there apparently wasn't much money, I don't know what happened, but my father was always moving, I don't know why but we would no sooner be in one place then we move to somewhere else.

04:00 I don't know, it sounds stupid I can't tell you, she was always busy, well if you have got eight children you have got to be busy. She was kind, she was good. I think her whole life was governed by my father's brutality.

04:30 **Thanks Clare. So your dad and your mum you said your dad on occasions was a bit violent towards your mum, how did your mum cope?**

I don't know really, it was very very difficult. She, see in those days I will give you one example. My uncle, my father's brother was over visiting us, and he lived

05:00 at Hurstville and during the conversation that night. I can't remember what was said but she said, "Oh I got whacked today for talking out of turn." And it was a trivial little thing, nothing, and my father glared at her, and I thought oh my God, no. It is on again tonight. And sure enough as soon as my

05:30 uncle left he started, and he belted her and belted her. But he hit her below the shoulders and didn't mark her face and the next day my mother took me and we went up to Daceyville Police Station and she lifted her dress and I was really embarrassed to see my mother, she had underclothes on, but nevertheless, I was about eleven and it was very embarrassing for me.

06:00 But the policeman was shocked and they said, "Oh God tell us where he is we'll pick him up." And my mother said, "What will you do?" And they said, "Oh he will be in Long Bay gaol this afternoon." And she said, "I couldn't do that." And I thought what the hell are we here for? But it was really cruel and they said, "Well you go back and we can't do anything." So we got on the train and we got up to Newcastle

06:30 where my grandfather lived at Dennison Street, nearly in Newcastle. And she showed my grandmother, his mother her shocking bruise you know, and my grandmother said, "Well you must have deserved it." That was the attitude in those days, you didn't discuss it, you didn't tell anyone that your husband beat you up or anything like that.

07:00 Women were supposed to just mind their own business, keep out of sight. And people just overlooked it, they just pretended they didn't well that was the normal thing, everybody did that didn't they. Eventually when the war came she left him, and she had a little shop for a while and ran that but very badly.

07:30 And ran it down and then she moved out to Maroubra and rented a cottage and it was very nice there and when I came back from the war that's where they were living and it was really lovely. She found it hard to settle down to earn money, to look after all of those kids, and gradually they got farmed out to uncles and cousins and I was

08:00 at sea of course. So it wasn't very nice.

Your extended family was then supportive of your mum?

Not really. Her brother was but then he also had a big family so he couldn't really do much for her. None of them had much money so no she was,

08:30 she just had to fend for herself. That's why the kids were farmed out to uncles and aunts, it was not like they offered or were kind or generous, not that they weren't, but it was just did was absolutely necessary that all. And the kids were all over the place different places. So we never really grew up as a family which is a pity because, well

09:00 three of them are dead now. I was the eldest but two sisters are in America, my mother is ninety-four now, she is in America. With one sister, unfortunately just recently she had a bad fall and split her femur, split it right down the middle. Yeah and she has got gangrene in her feet now and not expected to live very much longer, doubtful whether she will live until Christmas.

09:30 She had a hard life, there were times when she was quite happy, but never for very long periods.

And what happened to your dad after your mum left him?

Well he eventually went up to Queensland and the twin boys they were staying with him at this stage and the police picked them up one day walking down the street, because it was late at night and they were wondering what they were doing

10:00 out on their own that late. Anyway on the way back one of them tried to jump out of the police car and the policeman grabbed him and the sergeant turned to him and said, “Now listen what's this all about? We have seen plenty of boys running away from home but I have never seen one trying to jump out of a car doing forty-five miles and hour.”

10:30 And he told them, how my father was treating them. So when they got back to his house the policeman said, “You stay here in the car I will be back in a little while.” And Bruce told me that as he walked up the, you know those Queensland houses up on stilts, he said as he was walking up he saw him undoing his belt, you know the belts with the big buckles in those days. And he didn’t see his father for four or five days.

11:00 The policeman just belted the hell out of him, but he didn’t have any trouble with him after that. Anyway eventually I went and saw him, I was boxed up in Brisbane at that time and I actually stayed with him for a while. But it was hopeless. I said to him one day, “Don’t you think some of it could have been your trouble?” “No.” “Not even a little bit?” “No.” I said, “Would fifty percent of it be your fault?” “No.” “Ten percent?”

11:30 “No.” And he really meant it. Anyway I could see it was hopeless for the boys there, and so I talked him into bringing them back to Sydney and my mother by that stage had married another fellow and the boys went out and stayed with them so that was much better for them. And he died when he was sixty, sixty-one something like that. Heart trouble.

12:00 I have got heart trouble too, but I am battling it all right now. He died a lonely man, an unhappy man. And as I say my mother is now ninety-four, but she won’t live to ninety-five that’s for certain.

And what are your memories of the Depression?

12:30 Well we were lucky because my father had a job all through the Depression, he worked on the railway and he got four pound something a week which was pretty good average wage in those days. And so until his accident we were never short of food or anything like that. Some of my mates their fathers,

13:00 they were on the dole or on relief work, two weeks on two weeks off. And they used to come to school with no lunch at all or sometimes just with bread and dripping. We often had bread and dripping too because although my father had wages but he also had eight kids to feed. So you know we, there was pretty slim pickings you know.

13:30 But actually I didn’t mind bread and dripping, there was a lot of kids had it those days. So it wasn’t all that bad for us, but we saw a lot of other, for instance down at Ultimo I saw kids picking stuff out of garbage bins and that sort of thing. People couldn’t afford to go to the doctor. My grandfather for example. He was fifty-one when he died from cancer. But they found out had he gone to the doctor years before

14:00 he could have been saved. He just left it far too long. I think that happened to a lot of people, their lives were cut short, and you also met a lot of people those days with tuberculosis. TB [Tuberculosis]. And a lot of them died of course also at school your mates would go off and you wouldn’t see them for quite a while and they would come back with their hair shaved because they had scarlet fever.

14:30 Or many of them got diphtheria and died, a lot with scarlet fever died too. A lot of them got, what do you call that disease where it affects your limbs?

Polio?

Some of them would go up to Sister Kenny up in Queensland. A lot of them died. That’s a thing you don’t see these days.

15:00 Lots of your school mates you know and a lot of them came back crippled. I know one kid, his legs were amputated at the knees and he had little pads, not artificial legs but pads, and he used to jump off of a fence two foot high and onto these pads, and oh God when I saw him I thought how do you to that?

15:30 And of course we all used to walk to school, we never wore shoes. And the milkman used to deliver I know that has got nothing to do with the Depression as such. I went to work for a milk cart for a while too. Used to have a big tank and you poured the milk into a jug or canister was the thing and you went in and people would leave their jug on the veranda or something,

16:00 and you would fill the jug up and put a little cloth thing over the top to keep the flies off. And the baker used to come to bring lovely fresh bread you know. That’s the funny thing one day, we used to have billycarts and one day in Maroubra where we lived there was a very steep hill and our street was at right angles to this. And you would come down the street and you had to turn. And on one corner was the school teacher’s house, and we used to turn and

16:30 chop up his lawn. He wasn’t very happy about that. And the baker used to come down and he would stop just around the corner and one mate was coming down in the billycart and he had his little brother

in the cart and he saw the hub you know the axle hub and ducked but his little brother didn't see it. And straight into it bang, out cold. And we took him into our place and mother came out and his mother came down,

17:00 only the next street, about half a dozen houses away. But he was all right, I don't think he had too many brains to start with. But we used to have fun with this. And we used to have gang fights, we all had gangs, everyone was in a gang. And you would, at school you would say well I will meet you up in the sand hills at four o'clock you know? And you would all be up there with these wooden swords or stuff they would call cocoa, I don't know if you have

17:30 seen it? In the sand it's a sort of, one of the first stages I think of sandstone, brown, rock bit it is very soft rock. But it hurt you when it hit you sort of thing and we used to play games, cowboys and Indians and pretend guns. We had bonfires on bonfire night.

18:00 And there was a clothes prop man used to come around, because in those days there was no washing machines or anything like that, and you just had two posts in the yard with wire between them. They would take saplings out of the woods with a fork in them and they would stick that into the ground with the wire in the fork to hold the cloths up. And the clothes prop man used to come around

18:30 and he would be saying, "Clothes props, clothes props!" And we would yell out, "Hey Mister what do you feed your horse on?" "Clothes props, clothes props!" "Hey Mister what do you feed your wife on?" "Clothes props. Clothes props!" He must have got sick of it because everywhere they went the kids did that. And my father grew dahlias and on the weekends my brother and I we used to go around selling these dahlias for a shilling a bunch which wasn't bad you know.

19:00 We didn't mind that. And we used to have to dig in the garden whether we liked it or not. You just did what you were told and nobody thought about skateboards which hadn't been invented of course and the same with washing machines, they hadn't been invented. You would have a big copper and my mother would boil the water up, get wood put it underneath it, heat it up, get the clothes

19:30 put the clothes in with a clothes stick. And there was the Rawleigh man used to come around with bobby pins and soap and all sorts of things like that selling them. And my sister at one stage got some water and put some soap flakes in it and shook it up and put it in a great big suitcase, these little bottles of hair oil, whatever you call it, take it

20:00 around and you should have listened to her. "Oh this makes your hair all smooth and glossy, it makes your hair feel lovely." And people used to buy it, they knew what it was but they would pay sixpence for it you know. My grandma here in Newcastle she used to give us a penny for the tram fare down to the beach. But we used to spend it, we would buy some chocolate or lollies or something like that,

20:30 and walk. And she was a great one, as most grannies were in those days to give you some slats or castor oil which we hated. And what was the other thing? What the hell? I am sort I can't think of the name of it. Something tea. Senna tea that was it.

21:00 And it was better than castor oil, it didn't taste as bad as castor oil and it took a lot longer to work. But when it did work it worked very suddenly and on this particular day we walked up to the beach from Hamilton, just in our bathers, that was fine we had a swim and on our way back we were passing the Star Theatre, which is not there anymore, but up the top of Hunter Street and just as we were passing the Star Theatre

21:30 you wouldn't believe it but my two sisters, my brother and myself but this bloody Senna Tea began to work. And we were walking along and, "Phht, phht, phht." Down our legs and people walking past were holding their noses and we were leaving a great brown trail. There was nothing we could do about it, and we just had to keep walking until we got back to Hamilton. Dear oh dear we were not very popular.

22:00 And we used to sell bottles, all of your bottles. The bottlo used to come around too. At Grandma's in Hamilton there was a bottle yard not far away down in Hunter Street and we used to take these bottles down to the bottle yard and they would count them up and I think it was about a penny each they would give you for them. Of course we never got any of this it all went back to my grandmother or home to my mother. Because

22:30 the idea of pocket money didn't exist in those days. And the same with paper, you saved up all of your newspaper, well you used to cut it up into little squares and put it in on a hook in the toilet and that's what you used, and it was very annoying too because you would be reading something and it would be very interesting and you would get to the end and look for the next and it was gone. Apart from that it wasn't very soft. But the newspapers

23:00 you saved them up and we would take them down to the fish shop, and he would go through them and so long as they were nice and clean he would pay you for them. But if there was one or two pages that wasn't quite up to scratch, you would lose the lot you know. I know my grandfather, my father's father that is, he lived in Newcastle before he died and he had all

23:30 of his teeth taken out at one stage without anaesthetic. I couldn't believe it, tough in those days. And it was the same with, well years later now I am getting after the war actually, I had a horse fall on me broke my thigh, this was in South Australia up

24:00 in the Flinders Ranges. And they didn't have pins and bolts and that sort of thing, so they just, the old mate and doctor and nurse got on the end of it and I held on to the end of the bed and we all pulled, they did give me a local anaesthetic but you wouldn't think so, and they just pulled it as straight as they could but it was still and inch and five eights by the time they finished, separated and it is still that way.

24:30 And I was there four and a half months, couldn't move and then another six months on crutches. Because they didn't have all of these modern things like plates and pins, modern anaesthetics. I mean they had anaesthetics but they weren't as good as they are today. That sort of thing, so it was a pretty rough old life. But on the other hand we used to go down swimming, there was a lot of freedom that children don't

25:00 have these days. Running around in the paddocks, going to, we used to play a game called races. There was a fellow called Cyril Angles who used to call the races when they were on you know and we used to all give ourselves numbers. And I would be Phar Lap [famous race horse] and the next bloke would be someone else and, "Away !" And this bloke would call this out as we were running around the paddock, you couldn't get kids to do it these days but

25:30 we used to think it was wonderful you know. But one nasty thing we shouldn't admit to but we used to make a great big bonfire, get a great big bonfire months ahead of the bonfire you know and if you didn't like somebody you would sneak around one night and set fire to his bonfire, he had no bonfire. But on the whole kids were pretty good to one another. A lot of fights, there were a lot of fights. But they were generally pretty straight up and down fair fights,

26:00 and the same in football. It was pretty rugged, nobody minds throwing a punch but I don't know, I think kids are worse off today than they were then because of the freedom and the space and the open air. Making your own fun.

So after you left school you went and did some leather work? Can you tell me briefly about that?

26:30 Well that was a little shop at Punchbowl just up from the railway station, just one man there. And he used to mend shoes and he was a very good boot maker, he was really a boot repairer but occasionally he did make shoes. So I went and he taught me how to do it you know. I used to run messages for him

27:00 and bring his lunch back and that sort of thing. And but he showed me how to, you know you rip the old soles off and take the old nails out and cut out a new sole for it and tack it on. I learned the whole lot, I didn't replace uppers, I would have eventually but I didn't stay there long enough. Anyway he sacked me eventually in the end, I was too slow.

27:30 I was a dreamer. You know I wasn't really madly in love with mending boots and I used to think about, the war was on by that time, this was 1941 I think, 42. And I was always thinking about what was going on overseas with the war and all this and I wasn't paying attention to my job. I was doing well but slowly. He wanted somebody that would get onto it and go you know?

28:00 So anyway he palmed me off to another bookmaker at Bankstown who sacked me for the same reason. Then I had the blue with my father and ran away and worked at the glass company. In the end I heard about these small ships and I wanted to work on them so I asked the manager if I could leave and he said, "No you silly little bugger you don't want to go up there, you leave that to the men to do the fighting. You stay here."

28:30 I said, "Well I am going to go whether you like it or not." I said, "If you refuse," because you couldn't just leave a job you had to go through manpower. He said, "You won't go because I won't get you the manpower clearance." And I said, "Well in that case I will come to work every day, I will sit down", because we packed glass into boxes. I said, "I will sit down and I will talk to the other blokes." Which you weren't allowed to do by the way,

29:00 a foreman used to stand there all day and watch you, and if you started talking he would come up and stand next to you and give you a warning. If you wanted to go to the dunny [toilet] you had to put your hand up like kids at school and get permission. And he would put the clock on you, if you were more that three minutes he would be down banging on the door to get you out. And no lunchroom or anything like that you had to sit on the boxes and eat your lunch. Anyway I said to the manager, "Well I will come in every day but I will just sit there. I

29:30 won't work and you will have to sack me." "All right you silly little bugger", he said, "if you are determined to go up there and get yourself killed you go." So I went down to the manpower office and as I told you before I got my clearance and fudged my age and I got this married couple to write out a permission note for me. The only snag when I went down to enlist at Walsh Bay I didn't have a document of identity. Everybody sixteen years of age had to have this, you had to have it on you all of the time.

30:00 And he asked me for it and I said, "I haven't got it, I applied for this six months ago, you wouldn't believe the red tape in this country." "I goddamn believe it, man I seen so much goddamn red tape." He didn't mind believing me at all. I was in and I really enjoyed that, tying knots and learning about ships

and the rules of the road.

30:30 Signalling and all of that. There was one bloke there, red headed, he was a funny fellow. Freckled face kid. He used to send messages with semaphore, and he would say things like, “Have you stopped pulling yourself?” And the officer captain one day he walked up and he read it. And he signalled back,

31:00 “That’s disgraceful, that’s filthy.” And the kid flagged back, “You would know sir.” Anyway he dropped it at that. But they were a funny mob.

So why did you actually join the Yanks?

Because I tried to join the Australian Merchant Navy first but you were very limited

31:30 call for them. You had to go down every day and I couldn’t because I had to work because I had to keep myself and I couldn’t afford to take more that a day or so off. I forget how much I earned there, two pounds a week, the other job, mending boots I got one pound a week which I gave to my mother so I didn’t really get anything. Then I sold chocolates at the picture show

32:00 at night, two and six a week for that. I was allowed to keep that, and then I used to deliver papers, you know go around and blow your whistle and people would come out and you would sell them. I am sorry I have gotten lost.

What interested you in joining the Yanks?

Well mainly because I used to go

32:30 down every day to the pick up place for the Australian Merchant Navy and there was always a long list and you were on the end of the list. And you would wait a long time to get a ship, because I was a first tripper you see, once you got a trip it was all right but getting that first ship was very difficult, you could wait months. So one of the blokes down there one day, I was frustrated because I couldn’t take time off work and I knew it would be a long time

33:00 and he said, “Go down to the Yanks, down to Walsh bay they will take you on.” So I did I went and got this permission from my parents in inverted commas and got clearance from manpower and went down and no fuss. They took me on, believed me, they didn’t bother to check on anything you know. Apart from that it was good money, I think I got

33:30 thirty-three pound a month, which my father when he found out he said, “Gosh that’s more than I earn.” Which it was, it was a lot of money in those days.

Did you ever consider trying to join the army?

Yeah I tried to join the navy actually but, because I am small and look young for my age rather than older they said, “No you come back when you grow up.”

34:00 If I had have been seventeen I could have got in but.

So what interested you about the sea?

I don’t really know it think it was just the idea of getting away. I think the whole thing behind it all, I hated school, before that last year or two I liked school and I was good at school but I got jack of it in the end.

34:30 That’s why I was wagging it all of the time, and I think the sea just, the sea and the land farms I liked. Holidays when I was still at school we used to go up to Lismore and work on a farm there and I loved it there, used to hitch up horses and plough. Pick beans and peas and milk cows and round up the cows

35:00 and I really loved that. And so if there had been a job on a farm I would have probably taken that, but the sea looked to be a possibility, and the adventure of course you know. I mean we say we were patriotic and we went to save our country and there is an element of truth in that it is not all fiction, I think a lot of people genuinely cared because the Japs at that time you have got to remember that the subs had got into the harbour and they sunk the [HMAS] Kuttabul

35:30 twenty-two people killed on that. And it was a miracle that they didn’t do a lot more damage. One torpedo went underneath the American cruiser the, called after an American city. Can’t think of it now. But I think there was a genuine element of patriotism there you wanted to do something to help save your country. And as I said

36:00 Jap planes had already flown over, only a reconnaissance plane. But Sydney was shelled, one lady down at the Eastern suburbs she woke up one night and didn’t know what was going on, her room was full of dust. And she looked up and she saw a big hole in the wall and the end of her bed and she looked up above her bed and there was a three-inch naval shell stuck, it didn’t go off but here it was stuck half way in the wall.

36:30 But the trams kept running and the ferries kept running, it was incredible. But everybody the next morning knew that these submarines had been in the harbour and the big submarines had been shelling all around the place. And then they come up here and shelled Newcastle. I heard a story on the radio

one day about a fellow, he worked on the guns up at Fort Scratchley.

37:00 As soon as the sub popped up he started shelling all around, what they were trying to do was get the steelworks, but they missed they got all around the place and didn't do any real harm. Anyway he got the phone call and whacked his clothes on and he was still getting dressed and they had the taxi sent out for him and he is still half dressed getting into the taxi and raced up and they got up to the top of Scots Street, Parnell Place,

37:30 And a shell fell in Parnell Place and the taxi driver said, "Sorry mate this is as far as I am going, you will have to walk the rest." That's not far from Fort Scratchley so he ran up there, and they pumped a few shells out, they chased the sub about anyway they didn't hit it but it got too hot for the sub and they had to clear out. A lot of people don't know that Townsville was shelled,

38:00 several places on the west coast were shelled. Broome. There was a plane sunk in the harbour there that had a lot of gold on it. There was a lot of stories about that, they found some of it but most of it never ever turned up and there are all sorts of stories about who got it you know. A lot of people didn't realise that even the Japs actually

38:30 landed south of Darwin, a small group of them. You know we were all aware of the war. Cars for example had little covers over them with little slits in them so the lights just pointed down to the road so you couldn't if you were fifty yards in front you wouldn't see it you had to be up very close to see it and they couldn't be

39:00 seen from up in the air. And of course lights were off at night. Either a black out or a brown out and you had curtains over your windows and all of that sort of thing. You were aware of it, petrol was rationed. Food was rationed, cigarettes which didn't bother me. But all sorts of things were rationed, it was very difficult to get things.

39:30 Butter I remember. So the war was all around you, you knew it was on and not only that but lots of jobs were closed down because people were needed for something else and lots of women were working in factories. Women had never worked. My mother for example, she got a job during the war at, I forget what they called it,

40:00 the electricity department in Sydney, underneath the Town Hall they had a big workshop there. She was repairing meters, electricity meters, she was earning more than my father, he wasn't very happy about that either.

We'll just stop there.

40:24 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:31 **I am just interested Bill in what you were expecting from a life at sea?**

Oh I don't know when I first went you know we had had this gunnery training and I thought I would be on a machine gun on a ship shooting planes every day.

01:00 All of this sort of thing, I thought it would be all exciting and adventurous and it was largely too. But a lot of it was just very dull routine work you know. Lots of interesting things too, we used to get some wire from the signallers that used to run wire from one place to another for the telephones. And we would put a couple of big shark hooks on and a bit of

01:30 bandage, red or white bandage. I don't think the colour really mattered actually, and just throw that over the stern and these little boats mostly only did about six knots so it wasn't all that fast. And we could hook onto a big king fish or some marlin at times the biggest fish that I caught, I will tell you the truth about it, I threw this line over, this is

02:00 Lae coming out of Lae. There were lots of logs floating down because they had had a lot of rain and I looked to stern and I saw this big thing rolling, I thought it was a log with branches, rolling over. Anyway I couldn't pull up so I called up to the skipper and asked him to stop the boat and I tried to pull it and I couldn't. And I got a couple of other

02:30 blokes and it ended up there was four of us on the line pulling for all we were worth. And when it got close to the ship this log jumped up out of, about three or feet up and we realised that it was a big, well it was actually sail fish, beautiful thing. Later on we measure it from the tip of its spike to the tail, eight feet. It was a whopper. And it sort of jumped up out of the water. And so the four of us

03:00 gradually just sheer pull you know, God it was strong. Got it in close to the ship, in alongside and it had just sort of settled there, just gradually moved its flippers, it was probably the fight with us. And I realised that if we tried to lift it we would just tear the hook out of its mouth. So I went down and I got a 303 came back, put the 303 over the

03:30 side of the ship and bang. There was a small hole on one side of its head and blew away the whole side of its head on the other side. But we were able to get it up and we gave it to the soldiers ashore in camp. We couldn't weight it but we estimated it was about three hundred and fifty pounds, so that would have provided a few nights of steaks for the boys in camp, and they didn't get any fresh food so they would have been very happy.

04:00 Then one day for example we saw a big turtle there. And the mate on this, that's was the Hilda Noing that, and the mate got the ship's boat and I got in with him and he got a hand grenade and we were rowing out. This bloke by the way, his name was, oh I will think of it in a minute.

04:30 His father was the one that cut the ribbon on the harbour bridge you know when Lang wasn't it was supposed to do it and he galloped up. I can't think of his name. Anyway everybody knows who it was, and he had been in the Spanish Civil war but on the what is his name? The dictator's side, the government's side.

05:00 I can't, I know his name well. Anyway he was the dictator anyway and all of the good guys were fighting against him and he was a bit like Sadaam Hussein is these days. And he told us a story one day where he said firstly the government

05:30 troops would move into a town and firstly would rape all of the women and shoot most of the men and wreck the place and when they moved out the communists the other side would move in and do exactly the same thing. And he said they moved into a little village one time and through the window they saw a beautiful looking young girl and so they raced out and they grabbed her and they were very disappointed when they realised she was

06:00 eight month pregnant so they missed out on their little game and what they did they tied her wrist. And each wrist they tied to a sapling, pulled the sapling down bent it over, and bent the other one over. Not her wrists her legs tied to each sapling. And then cut it and let it go and it split her in two. Eight months pregnant. He was sort of almost boasting about it,

06:30 what great fun we had you know. I thought oh you're disgusting you know. Anyway he was the first mate and we just had to do what he told us. He wasn't much of a seaman either I can tell you. And we went out in this little boat and he had the hand grenade in his hand and he was going the wrong bloody way. And the skipper back on the ship, he was a Finn by the name of Ray Casperson. He said,

07:00 "The turtle is over that way Mister." He was going exactly the wrong direction. So he turned around and he lost site of it and he has got this bloody hand grenade and he had let the catch off and he was starting to panic then because he was thinking the thing was going to blow up in his hand. But he was a mile away from the turtle and it blew up harmlessly in the water.

How was the hand grenade going to help with the turtle?

Oh if you dropped it near it the concussion would have either killed it or knocked it

07:30 unconscious. And we just picked it up. Often used to do that just dropped one in the water and it would stun all of the fish around, there was a lot of good fish that way, really easy. As long as you don't drop it in the wrong place.

Did it take you long to find your sea legs?

Yes in a way I was seasick every time we left port for the first

08:00 well until we got to New Guinea and then I was right after that. The seas were calm up there mostly but from time to time you got big really terrible storms. One night on the same ship the Hilda Noing we left Oro Bay and were heading north up to Lae and this big storm came up very suddenly and all we could do, we just kept heading north

08:30 into the storm and the next morning, I keep think two hundred miles but that just seems too far, couldn't have been that. But it was a very long way. It took us all day anyway to make up the distance we had lost that night. And I was on the wheel and the wheel was on the stern of that ship and, I can't explain. You sat on a thing at the back and I couldn't move off because the

09:00 waves were coming right over us and I had to tie myself to this I am sorry I don't know the name of it. Like a little tunnel at the back with ribs and put the rope through these ribs and tied it around myself and I just had to stay there all night because it was too dangerous for anybody to get to the wheel to relieve me. That's wasn't real pleasant. But the next morning the sun came out and the sea was as calm as anything amazing.

09:30 So suddenly. I have forgotten what you asked me.

Sea legs?

Well every time we left port I would get seasick it was awful. The old saying that when you get seasick for ten minutes you're afraid you're going to die and for the next ten minutes you're afraid you won't. That's the way it feels it is horrible. When we got to New Guinea I was all right and after that I was all right too.

10:00 I could, the big seas down in the southern ocean, this is after the war on n iron boat, the seas were breaking right over and for two days you couldn't see the forward deck but I was used to it by then It didn't matter but one old fellow a Scotsman had been to sea all of his life and he still got sick every time he left. It was awful, and the boys used to tease him. They would say, "Oh Jock would you like a nice big greasy chop." And he would have to go out,

10:30 he never complained it was cruel but.

When a new guy joins a ship like that at an age where you were is there an inauguration process or anything like that?

No thank God. The only sort of trick like that, we had a boy called Irish he just joined us, first tripper. And the second mate used to cut our hair, we would sit on

11:00 the hatch and he had clippers and when this young bloke Irish joined us he sat, we all got a hair cut and his turn he sat on the hatch and the second mate got the clippers and went right through his hair, ploughed a furrow right down the middle of his hair. And everybody is laughing and he is wondering what it is all about and when he got a mirror and had a look he lost his temper completely. He chased the second mate around and round, he threatened to kill him

11:30 and do all sorts of things. But he had six months up there so his hair would have grown out before he went back south so it didn't really matter, but he was really upset. But there was no sort of, what do you call them initiation ceremonies? No nothing like that. At one stage there was a fellow they called Dig on another ship, the Duke Can I think it was and both he and I got three tropical diseases, dhobi itch on the

12:00 scrotum and what's the name of the other thing, you came out in little blisters, I can't remember the name of it. And tropical ringworm which was awful. And we had to get rid of this stuff and we were given some stuff, it looked

12:30 like iodine and smelt a bit like iodine. You put it on, you didn't feel it for about thirty seconds and then all of a sudden it would start to burn and it burnt like hell. So what Dig and I did we used to put this stuff on the top bunk and we would have a book up there, a book each and you would paint this stuff on as

13:00 quickly as possible and we would say, "Fanning commence." And we would grab the book and start fanning like mad. If you could fan fast enough it kept it cool. But Dig he went ashore one day and found a Japanese rifle I think it was and it had been booby trapped. And he got shrapnel all, not seriously thank goodness, didn't hit his eyes or anything, but he got peppered with shrapnel.

13:30 You had to be careful what you picked up up there.

How did you pick up these tropical diseases?

I don't know to be honest. I wasn't cavorting with the native women, I don't know how. But there were lots of them. Most people got some sort of disease, we all got malaria, I got mine when I was in hospital and that was a result of those diseases. They sent me ashore,

14:00 into a tent and the first aid station or whatever you call it was also in a big tent. And the doctor there, he was only a lieutenant, which means that he couldn't have completed his medical training or he would have been a captain. And he told this orderly, they were trying to get this iodine

14:30 type of stuff off my scrotum. And he said, "Try alcohol." And it didn't work. And he said, "Try ether." Now there was really no point I didn't mind I wasn't going out on a nude line or anything and I didn't mind if I had brown balls, I don't know really why they wanted to take this off. But anyway he said to the orderly, "Get rid of it." And he put this ether on and

15:00 oh my God I nearly jumped through the top of the tent. It was cruel. And I went back to my own tent and I couldn't sleep, all night I was awake it was really excruciating. Next morning I got up and they took me to the hospital, American Army hospital and they were really good doctors there, Doctor Davies was a Jewish doctor really good. Anyway they treated me

15:30 and eventually, it took about two weeks actually. One day I will never forget, I couldn't get out of bed for the first week and then when I could get out of bed you could imagine, my testicles had swollen up like a football and I am staggering down to the toilet with my legs about six feet apart. And as I am walking up a nurse says, "How are they Aussie?" And before I could say anything an American orderly said, "Aussie says he hopes

16:00 the pain goes but the size stays." But they were good in the hospital, we used to have fun. There was a lot of wounded back then, New Britain and some of them were in a bad way. A lot of them were just minor wounds. But they were a lot of fun.

Who were some of the people that you were in contact

16:30 **with and the experiences that you had heard that they had been in?**

One of the nurses actually, that same nurse that I just mentioned. When I was leaving the hospital she asked me next time I was back in port would I come and visit her. So the next time I went up, she is about twenty-six and I was sixteen anyway,

17:00 probably liked young guys, girls are like that aren't they? Anyway I got a lift with a truck a Negro truck. That's one thing I didn't like about Americans, there was no Negroes in their fighting forces, there are now but there weren't then. They drove trucks or unloaded cargo from ships, they cleaned out their latrines, they did all of the dirty jobs and the

17:30 heavy jobs you know. And I thought this is unfair. They lived in separate camps, didn't live with the white soldiers and anyway this fellow drove me in his truck and he was very pleasant, very nice. And I met this girl, Hedy was her name. Sat on a coconut log

18:00 on the beach right on the edge of the water, oh it was beautiful. There was a song at the time, 'Sleepy Lagoon', that's what it was called, this just reminded me of that with the moon over the calm water and the palm trees above us. It was really beautiful. And she came out and sat with me and then one of the orderlies came out and told me that she was wanted. And she said to me, "Sorry Aussie I have got to go but I will come back as soon as I can." And when she did come back it was to tell me

18:30 that she was needed and so I had to go home. Very sad. But meantime an American soldier came down and sat next to me. And at first he seemed quite normal but then he started to go off the bend, telling me he was in a trench and the Japs were surrounding them and his mate was in the trench with him got killed, and

19:00 he killed five Japs with his knife, and he had them fall on top of him you know. So he had this trench with his mate dead alongside of him and five Japs all piled on top of him or on top of them sort of thing. And it must have been an absolutely horrific experience. Finally his mates beat them off and he was rescued.

19:30 And he was told, or he thought he was told that he had to go back into action. And that's what started him off. And he said, "I ain't going back into no action that's too, I'll shoot myself. They think they're going, they can't take me back I know!" Oh he started to scream and go on. And pretty soon a couple of orderlies came out and put a, what do you call those things they put on?

A straight jacket?

20:00 Straight jacket yes. And they took him off. Oh gee I was glad, because I was frightened really I didn't know what he was going to do, I was frightened really, he was raving off his head. I suppose it was not surprising. Anyway when the nurse came back she told me that they weren't sending him back into action, they were just trying to settle him down there a bit before they sent him back to the States. His war was over.

How were those kinds of things viewed, those kinds of reactions from soldiers?

20:30 I think we just felt very sorry for the people. It had an effect on you. I think more later on, I think it was years later that it got to you. For instance, not in New Guinea but years later I used to have a lot of terrible dreams, and Ruth my wife will tell you, even after we were married for a while I still had all of these terrible

21:00 dreams. One night, and I can remember this vividly, I dreamt I had a Tommy gun and I shot about a hundred people, and this is just a dream, and I am standing there with the gun in my hands and I am thinking, this is stupid why did I do that? They're going to come and take me away they're going to kill me they're going to hang me. And it was very vivid, even when I woke up I wasn't sure whether I was still dreaming or not.

21:30 And you discover after a while that it does bother you, you think it doesn't but it does. There was one incident there where they bombed the American headquarters which was only a tent and strangely enough it blew the tent down and knocked all of the blokes down inside, didn't kill any of them not even wounded. But there was a truck

22:00 about thirty yards away and the blast from the bomb hit that and the driver in that caught on fire and screamed and screamed and of course was dead you know. I didn't really see a lot, one ship for example we were on a place called Harvey Bay [Port Harvey] next to Oro Bay, first I will tell you we were in there for two weeks getting repairs and we were bombed every single night for those two weeks. And mostly it wasn't too bad,

22:30 but the thing is you don't know whether it is going to be you or not, even though nothing happens mostly. One particular night it was funny, we had this Canadian, he was a funny bastard, he worked up in Alaska and he worked for, I can't think of his name again.

23:00 Used to send illicit liquor, they would take it off the trains and send it, you know during the bloody, the speakeasies they used to buy it. And he used to tell us all sorts of tales about Alaska and he used to think it was the best place on earth and when we were under

23:30 attack he used to, he would say, "Oh listen that bomb." "That wasn't a bomb that was ack-ack." "Oh that one, that's a bomb." "Ack-ack." "That one is that ack-ack?" "No that's a bomb." And this would go on

and you wouldn't believe, by the law of averages you would have to be right sometimes and the next thing, they did drop a bomb right alongside of us. Now this ship is

24:00 about two hundred and fifty tonnes, depends on how you measure it. And she rocked and almost went over. She went so far over that you thought we were going to go right over and the concussion hit us. Oh it was very very hot, the shrapnel fortunately went over us, you could hear it, phew. Went right over us, and then the waves came up from the explosion, and that went all over us. And the ship rocked,

24:30 and it was a reasonably big ship, and it rocked and rocked until it eventually came back to an even keel. And the first mate, who I will tell you a bit about him, he is very interesting. Very fascinating man. He came down, in the dark of course this big boson Lofty with the red hair and the red beard, he is there in the dark. And

25:00 the first mate said, "Everybody all right boson, anybody hurt?" And the boson says, "Yes mister I am hurt." And, "Oh Boson what's the matter, what's happened?" He said, "Well there is all of these naked boys lying here on the deck and I had to fall on that cold hard deck." So everybody laughed and that sort of eased the tension and everyone was all right. There was no harm done the ship wasn't damaged, you can harp on it afterwards, it is silly to

25:30 say that you're not scared at the time because you are.

Bill where was that?

That was in Harvey Bay which is a little bay next to Oro Bay. Which is just south of Buna. Ships went into there for repairs at that time. One day another young boy, sixteen year old, two of them, that one was from Tasmania I can't remember where the other one was from.

26:00 But we went up the hill, it was just a little bay with the hill on one side and the ocean on the other, and we went to the top of this hill and a raid come on and this bloke said, "Come on let's get back to the ship." And I said, "No that's the worst place to be, that's what they're here for to bomb the ship." Lets stay here and we can get a birds eye view of the whole show." So we did and it sounds

26:30 nasty and we actually cheered and clapped when they would shoot down a plane, and if it was one of ours we would boo and if it was one of theirs we would cheer. And we were watching this, it was a really big dog fight, I don't know how many but there was probably thirty or forty planes involved, and then all of a sudden two planes came from the other direction and they were coming right for us, really low, we thought about fifty feet.

27:00 That's probably an exaggeration, it was probably more like a hundred feet but still very low. And we ducked, I mean it sounds silly because they weren't going to hit us. But then on the on the other hand we thought they might shoot at us, and then we thought well that's stupid, they're not going to shoot us. What was happening was a Mitsubishi Betty and an American Mitchell bomber, both medium bombers, very much like each other in some ways. And they were side by side, shooting at each other a hundred

27:30 yards apart, point blank. You would have thought that they would blow each other up, but somehow or other they went over us shooting like mad and over the hill we were on and that led into Oro Bay, now Oro Bay had anti-aircraft guns, Bofor guns, machine guns, everything all around the bay and as soon as they went over there it was all opened up on them you know.

28:00 And the yanks shot down the American plane and let the Jap go. But I suppose you can't help that, they come over so quickly and you can't see it. Another day I was in Oro Bay there and I saw an American plane and again it was a Mitchell Bomber, he came up the harbour and there was an Australian gunner on this American Liberty ship. He saw him come in

28:30 and he raced up and grabbed a hold of the Bofor gun and opened up full drum at about sixty-five rounds of explosive bullets. Hit this plane and blew it to bits. They found out afterwards it was an American plane, he shouldn't be coming up the harbour, he was meant to come around another way. That was one way they could be sure that they weren't Americans. But unfortunately the pilot had been wounded,

29:00 he was having a hell of a job to get the plane in and he only had another mile to go and he would have been landed. But this Australian, he wasn't a gunner he was an Australian soldier that happened to be on there he didn't know, he knew that only Japanese planes came in up the harbour, so he let go and it was just an unfortunate mistake.

Where were you at this time?

I was on ship nearby.

29:30 Another day I saw, I think it was a terrible thing, a ship, wouldn't be a hundred yards away, maybe fifty yards away was being dive bombed. And one of the dive bombers, I think there was three altogether, was hit by the gunners on that ship. And I saw the thing hit and saw the pilot

30:00 bail out and he came down in his parachute and had a Mae West [life jacket], I don't know what the Japs called them but you know what I mean, the things they float on. And he let go of his parachute and he was just floating there, I could see his face clearly enough that, we say their Japanese and they all look alike but I reckon if I had seen him ashore an hour or two later out of a hundred blokes I reckoned I

could have picked him out, he was that close.

30:30 Anyway he was not harmed, he was just floating around. And one of the yanks on a, not the ship that shot him down but another little Higgins boat took the tow rope, made it into a noose, threw it around his neck, fastened it to a boat, whistled to his mate who revved the motor up and away they went into shore with his noose around his neck. Now by the time he got to shore he was either drowned or strangled, one or the other. Now if I had been on a

31:00 gun that day I would have been doing my best to shoot him down and would have felt that I had done the right thing if I had shot him. But I just thought when it is over, when the man is out of the war it is murder I reckon. And I didn't like that at all. I thought that was just, you know two wrongs don't make a right. They say well think of all of the horrible things the Japs did and they did, they did some cruel

31:30 things but, there was another thing too that bothered me. When we were on the Duke Can we were taking one hundred 9th Divvy [Division] blokes back to the front. They had all been wounded, brought back, patched up and we were taking them all back up to the front. And I was talking to some of the blokes there, these were all 9th Divvy, they were all back from the Middle East. And I said, "Which is worse the Middle East or New Guinea?"

32:00 And they said, "Oh New Guinea no doubt about it." And I said, "Why I thought it would be worse in the Middle East." "No", he said, "Over there if you put your head up you got it blown off but you know it and when you had done your turn you went back to Cairo and had a good time. But here all you have got is wet jungle, insects, mosquitoes, malaria, all of the goddamn tropical disease and

32:30 rotten food, no fresh food. Slogging it out in the jungle and you can't see where the enemy is," and they just hated it, and I can understand because I used to go off in the jungle occasionally and it is almost frightening to walk through it and it is black in there. And I said to him, "How come you fellows don't take prisoners? We haven't seen a prisoner since we have been here." "Well," they said, and they looked at

33:00 one another, "you take a prisoner and you have got to take him back and it might be a two day trek to get back to your own mob. And if you don't watch him twenty-four hours a day he will kill you", he said, "I had a mate hit on the head with a big stone and killed. You just have to watch them all of the time. And that's two of them taken away from your mates and on top of that you risk your life for these buggers.

33:30 So," he said, "what seems to happen is you get out of sight of the rest of your mates and they are buggers for escaping you know, and if they try to escape then we have to shoot them you know?" And I thought oh Jesus that's cold blooded, but on the other hand you can understand that, it wasn't just being cruel, it was for a reason that. And then there was an intelligence officer

34:00 there and he had joined in the conversation and brought out a letter out of his pocket and said,, "Here have a listen to this." And he read it out to us, somebody mentioned about these three men patrols, how horrible they were, they had to sneak through the jungle, mainly night time, it was dark anyway. Could be raining as it usually was and dark and they would get into the Jap camp and

34:30 pick out any letters or notices, anything they could find that might be of some value to the intelligence blokes, and in this letter this young Japanese bloke told how he hated the American, the bombing was really full on at this stage. And he said what was worse

35:00 was these three man patrols by the Australian Army. He said he woke up one morning and found his mate in the next bed had his throat cut. And this frightened the life out of him to think that they had been in there in the night, cut his throat and gone and he didn't wake up. And there was a photo in there of a lovely young girl about twenty-four, twenty-five.

35:30 And two lovely little kiddies, and this letter was to his wife and he told her about this, about these patrols and the American bombing and about the jungle and all of the diseases and this sort of thing. And he said he doesn't understand what the war is all about. He said all he wants to do is just be home with his wife,

36:00 and kids. And I thought yeah, all of these soldiers, a hundred soldiers there, they were just going back up into it after being wounded, and I thought that's all these poor buggers want to do too. And for the first time I realised that these Japanese were just the same as us, they were just flesh and blood. Certainly I can tell you a dozen terrible cruel

36:30 incidents, but as I said before two wrongs don't make a right. And I think the whole thing should never have happened, and it happened because of greed, as all wars start off, greed, want of power, this sort of thing. Because the Japanese were being excluded from trade, the Americans and the British were pushing them out, they were taking over their trade. You know

37:00 they shouldn't have started the war but on the other hand if someone is pushing you around treading on you what are you supposed to do? Sit back and do nothing. I don't condone their cruelty, that was horrible. At Buna for example they got some nurses and they tied them to trees,

37:30 and bayoneted, them, chopped their tits off and then bayoneted them to death. Oh they were cruel. And I, on the radio, this wasn't at the war, this was here on the radio I heard one fellow talking about in Singapore there were twenty-two Jap soldiers, they had one girl down on the ground and they were raping her one after the other. And he had his turn and when he got off he turned back to get on the end of the line again but he vomited, it had made him sick.

38:00 But he had been trained not to give in to weakness, he had to be strong, he had to be cruel. And people used to say they were born that way too. That's bullshit, nobody is born that way you're taught that way and that's what's wrong with the bloody world. Anyway I am sorry I got lost.

Tell me more about these three

38:30 **men patrols, what more do you know about that?**

Not a lot really, just what they told me. They would take turns the lieutenant would just go right it's your turn tonight, you, you and you. And they just crept from their tent through the jungle to the Japanese camp and just carefully snuck into the camp, very dangerously and terrible thing

39:00 because as one of these blokes said, the Jap said it used to frighten the life out of him, and he said,, "Yeah I tell you what it frightens the life out of us too mate. Sneaking in there and you don't know if they can see you or not." The object of it was to get any kind of material that the intelligence unit can use to know the number of their unit or where they are headed for and what they are doing, terrible job but they just had to take their turn at it.

39:30 That's really all I can tell you about it. I think one of the worst jobs in the war. And the soldiers I felt sorry for them, the conditions in the jungle and that's what all of these blokes said when I asked them, "Where would you rather be the Middle East or here?" everybody without exception said they would rather be in the Middle East. It was horrible you know,

40:00 I know at one place, I can't think of the name now but they tried to, one of the first places they landed troops and the Americans couldn't cross this creek and so they came back and our little ships came and picked them up and took them a bit further. But this commando who lives near here we are going to write about him in the book, even though he

40:30 wasn't on the small ships but he was carried up by small ship. They managed to cross that same creek, they were up to their shoulders with packs and everything on, they were commandoes. But the Yanks to begin with they were like cowboys and Indians sort of thing, they didn't really know much about war or what they were doing. They have admitted that to me, told me that.

I would actually like to get more on that but we are at the end of

41:00 **this tape.**

Oh I see.

Tape 4

00:47 The Duke of Kent was just an old barge that they fitted out you know we had an old

01:00 paddle wheeler, we had ferries, one from Sydney the Koondoola who was also when we were here in Newcastle we used to drive it onto the old Koondoola and go across to the harbour every day on that. And there was another one, the Bingara that I was on at one stage with Harold, Sydney ferry. All sorts, had ketches, the Duke of Kent

01:30 was I think a mud barge and we used to take it out, plonk it in and just dump it. I'm not sure but something like that anyway. Anyway, as we said it was only 100 ft long I think was it? Roughly? And we had 100 9th Divvy soldiers living on that, so very crammed, and the only time in New Guinea that I ever saw soldiers fight – anybody fight,

02:00 except you know putting on a show in the ring, one fella trod on another fella's face because there wasn't enough room to lie down and he'd slipped down onto the deck, and the water was washing over the deck too. He was just so tired, he just slept there and another fella trying to get to the side of the ship to have a leak, he trod on his face you know with big hob-nail boots and he jumped up and threw a punch and that's about all there was to it actually, but

02:30 it was so unusual to see these people fight one another, but he being asleep he was so tired and grumpy and he couldn't really help it you know. Anyway our skipper realised these poor blokes had had too much, so he pulled in to a little un-named bay, it was beautiful, just a little circular bay with a lovely, lovely beach there, and a mate and I with 2 boats

03:00 we ferried them ashore. The soldiers rode and we operated the rudder and a very – I shouldn't tell you

this but – at one stage we're going in and I'm saying to the blokes I said, "No, more on the port side, pull harder," and he says, "Well we're pulling as hard as we can," and he said, "are you sure it's not the rudder?" And I suddenly realised that I was turning the rudder the wrong way. Me a sailor and there's

03:30 soldiers telling me what. Oh I felt silly, I bet my face went red. But anyway, they were good natured and we got in and they really enjoyed it, they were able to have a swim and run around on the sand. They were like kids playing you know, it was such a relief for them. And the cook came ashore and made a big fire, a kerosene tin and he put some onions and bully beef and some stuff in there and made a big stew for them, and oh, they were really happy, it was

04:00 great. And then again of course the poor buggers had to go back on the ship and we had to take them back up to the front line.

So who were these troops and where did they come from?

Well, we picked them up at Oro Bay, they'd been in hospital there in the American hospital being patched up you know and we were just taking them back up to the front.

04:30 I'm not sure but I think at that time it was just slightly north of Lae I think, from memory. We were close enough I know at the time anyway, we could hear the guns, the big guns firing back in with the Japs. I don't know really, 15 miles away, something like that. I can't remember exactly. Oh I felt sorry for the poor buggers, going back into it again but they were all

05:00 cheerful, they were all really good. The only time I ever saw anybody cowardly, if you'd call it that and I don't think that it really is cowardice actually. We left Buna I think, on I don't know, it doesn't matter, I've forgotten what ship it was now. I think it was the Duke of Kent, that's right,

05:30 and we were one man short and so the American Army officers ashore rounded up one of their own soldiers and set him down. He came aboard, I've never seen anything like it – "Howdy, guys! My name's Hank, no no call me Chi, mate you call me Chi 'cause I'm from Chicago," and he said, "Would you like these" what were they, chewing gum or something, "I get these sent out from the States for me," and we thought well they look like just the

06:00 same ones we get from the PX [American canteen unit] store you know. And on his cabin he's got photos of Hedy Lamar and Ginger Rogers and all these movie stars and, "You know I was married to Hedy for a while, but she's very pulchritudinous", was a word he liked to use, "but you know I got a bit fed up with her after a while, and so then I went over and I married Carol Lombard."

06:30 And he went on about all these half a dozen movie stars and that he'd married them all and then he'd divorced them all and then he said, "If you guys want me to do your watch, if you don't feel like doing your watch you just tell me, tell old Chi, Chi'll do it for you. It'll be all right, Chi'll do your watch for you," and then he'd tell us he was first mate on a Laker, you know on a ship from the Great Lakes in America, and he knew all about the sea, and he had had years of experience. Soon as we up anchored and away

07:00 we weren't even out of the harbour he disappeared, we couldn't find him. We got out the harbour, out into the sea and we looked all over the ship and we couldn't find him. We knew he hadn't gone ashore, but he just got lost. We found him the next day just curled up under the mess room table right up in a corner and I said to the skipper, "What's the matter with him?"

07:30 He said, "Oh son," he said, "It's a terrible disease called fear," and that was it. He didn't appear for the rest of the trip. We got up to Lae, or somewhere up just north of Lae I think and all of a sudden he appeared. All dressed, duffle bag on. Goes up to the side of the ship, there's a little boat with an, outboard motor going by and he yells out to him and there's an Aussie soldier there

08:00 and he couldn't hear him so he switches his motor off and he asked him, he said, "Could you take me ashore," and he says, "Sure buddy, hop in," so he pulled over and he hopped in and as he's leaving we could hear him saying, "Is there a priest ashore here?" He wanted to go to confession. Poor bugger he was just terrified, he just couldn't face it you know? But that's the only time I ever saw anybody really that didn't want to face it, you know?

08:30 **How old was he?**

Oh he would have been about 30, 28. About 28 I'd say. He was a regular army bloke. But I suppose he wanted to get back to all those lovely wives he had in America! It's funny, you could hardly believe any word, he was so bare faced, he obviously wasn't aware of how silly he was being.

What was your impression of the American troops overall?

Well, we

09:00 got along very well with them but our impression both of the sailors and we had a lot of them on the ships towards the end of the war especially, I think it's summed up best by a talk I had with one soldier who'd been in the Buna campaign and he said to me, "Digger," he said, Oh, how did he put it?

09:30 "I'll tell you frankly, we didn't know anything about it, we were told these things and none of them were right, we just weren't trained for this kind of warfare," and he said, "we just did everything wrong," but

he said, " we learnt from the Australian diggers. They've been at war for a long time over in the Middle East and so when they got there they were already hardened soldiers," and he said, "They taught us."

10:00 And he said, "I think you'll find that now, the ones that have been through that are good soldiers," and that was the impression we had. The ones that had had some experience there were just as good as anybody else. The first ones they just weren't. Because they, the jungle, the Japs, everything. You see the Japs were very experienced soldiers too. They'd had years of fighting, and they were very good soldiers.

10:30 No, the Americans for a start were bad. And on our ships, for example the Americans had come in and joined our crews, they'd only done what we used to call them 30 day wonders. They'd only done a 30 day course in America, and you don't really know anything about ships and seamanship and that sort of thing, and some of them were really horrible, put us up on reefs and did all sorts of stupid things. But again most of those learnt after a time.

11:00 Did a lot of damage before they got there though.

I just want to go back a little bit because you've mentioned a couple of names of some of the guys that were on the crew, can you just describe the way that everything worked on the ship and who was who and that kind of thing?

Well it varied a lot depending on the size of the ship, for example a little trawler like the Bundaberg or the

11:30 (UNCLEAR Hildernalling) which I liked and was on and was my favourite ship. We had the skipper, the first mate that bloke that you know was in the Spanish Civil War. Two officers, there was one engineer, an AB [Able Seaman] and myself. So what's that, 1,2,3,4 is it?

12:00 5 is it?

So, you were on various different vessels but with the same core group you would sort of hop from ship to ship?

Yeah that's right. On bigger ships they would have, you know like the Kumaru, you'd have the skipper, first, second, third mate and then the boatswain and then the ABs and then down below you'd have the chief engineer and probably two other engineers as well and maybe an

12:30 oiler or something like that. Oh and you'd probably have about 3, I can't remember, 3 maybe 4 ABs something like that, maybe more, 5.

So what was you're crew like? What were they like as people?

Well, they varied. Some of them you wouldn't want to live with, but on a ship you got along all right. You mightn't have thought much of them as persons, but you got along. But generally speaking

13:00 They were all good company and you got along with them. But as I say there's a lot of them you wouldn't want to live with. Some of them were very nasty. One bloke, for example had been accused of murdering somebody, not a smaller ship, but on a merchant ship. It was never proven but these two fellas were working together and one of them went over the side and was never found and

13:30 It could have happened accidentally but there was good reason for believing that he actually tossed him over and killed him. But that was pretty rare. Some of them especially when they got ashore they'd come to blows. That would happen quite often, they'd get a few grogs [alcohol] in them, but at sea you'd never see anybody fight and generally speaking they got on pretty well. Mostly they were pretty good mates actually. You know very rarely

14:00 That you had nasties. Is that what you mean?

Yeah. You mentioned the first mate was quite a character. You said, "remind me to mention the first mate again".

Oh yes. His name was Syd Porteus. Now there's a book written by a mate of mine called, "Changing Horses". He lived up in Queensland, in Toowoomba

14:30 and it's all about Syd Porteus who started off in Victoria. When he left school he worked on stations and making hay and things like this you know, doing ordinary farm work, station work, that sort of thing. Then he did a couple of years in an art college, I can't think of

15:00 exactly what it was. A very well known one anyway. He worked with Sydney McCubbin, Sydney McCubbin was actually teaching him and he was quite a good artist. In that book, "Changing Horses" there was quite a few of his paintings. I mean he was not up to Sydney McCubbin's standards but nevertheless, I would be very pleased to be able to paint like that. Then he joined the Light Horse in World War 1,

15:30 went to Egypt, got bored with marching up and down the desert sort of thing and he wanted to get into action, so he stowed away on a ship to Gallipoli. When he got ashore they checked the roll and found that he shouldn't have been there. They put him on another ship and sent him straight back. But not

long after that he was sent to Syria and among other things he got a bullet through his jaw and he lay in the sun for hours

16:00 and as a result, one eye he eventually had to lose it and then got cancer of the eyelid and well that's how he came to lose it, and he had a horse called, "Jezebel", and just as they would get into trouble she would buck him off. He hated that Jezebel. But he gives a very vivid account of their fight against the Turks and the places they were

16:30 Mesopotamia which is Iraq today, and then after the war he came back and he got a job on a station, on a cattle station up in Queensland, married his first wife who was connected with a well to do family up there and they were very happy, they had one child and then poor woman she got,

17:00 oh I can't remember the disease. It's to do with childbirth anyway, and she died quite young. Later on he married another girl and they were quite happy, they had 2 children, and eventually she died too. I forget, quite suddenly the children were there with her, and saw her die. They had a boat up in North Queensland

17:30 that they used to take people out to the [Great] Barrier Reef on, and this was going very well until one day it caught fire. It wasn't insured so he lost the boat and had nothing. He went back to work on this station up there and eventually became the manager and then part owner. Did quite well at that, but when his second wife died and he later on married another

18:00 woman he was I think in his sixties by this time. I'm sure he was, and she was well into her fifties and they said, "Two lonely people", and they were very happy until he died.

So how did he happen to get on a crew for the ship, a small ship?

Well he joined the same as everybody did in Sydney, and he already had some experience

18:30 now we don't about the case, but we had a photo of him in our book in a merchant navy officer's uniform with some people that looked like somebody from East Asia or Malaysia or India or somewhere like that, we're not really sure, and we haven't been able to, it should be easy to identify

19:00 some of these old blokes that know these particular lines could, but we haven't so far been able to, but anyway, we don't know anything about that, just one of those things in his past. Obviously he was an officer, he'd had experience so that got him in. I think he started off as a second mate and then first mate and then he was on a number of ships and he happened to be on the Kumaru when I was on it and I'll never forget

19:30 one day, Kumaru, or one of the ships, I've forgotten, I've got mixed up now, but I know we were all over the side swimming and I said to him, "Why don't you come in, Mister?" And he said, "I would if I could but I don't know how to swim," and I said, "Really?" And he said, "No I never learnt," so I said, "Well hop in and I'll show you. Put a life jacket on". So he put a life jacket on and he climbed down the ladder, got in and I said, "Now you go like this, and like this, yes

20:00 that's right just keep bringing your arms over". I taught him to dog paddle, that's right. "Like this, you've got the idea now, I'll leave you while you just paddle around there and if you want me, just give me a yell". So I went in and swam a bit and I turned around and everybody's laughing, and I'm wondering what the joke is. I'm looking around and here he is swimming like Tarzan. He was a much better swimmer than I was. He was a very thoughtful, friendly fella, never lost his head, never abused anybody, but

20:30 he was a very good strict man. He made sure you did your job properly, he didn't have to rouse or shout and he was just like a wonderful man. It's a wonderful story that.

Had you heard many stories told about the Great War before?

Oh yes, I suppose so.

21:00 Nobody in my family had been in the Great War, only other people. Well since we've been writing this book we've read a lot of small ships had been in the Great War, fascinating stories.

What stories did he tell you about the Great War?

Oh, about being in Mesopotamia and especially about this horse Jezebel, he never stopped telling us about that!

21:30 and about the Turks and how they used to sneak up on them in the sand hills and how on the other hand how he got shot for example, and you know the probations, the hot sun, going without food. I can't remember very well but, actually he wrote beautiful prose. I've cut some out and we're going to

22:00 put it in our new book. Because he was a very artistic and as I said he did lovely paintings, and I think he could have been just as good as a writer. Oh, what am I talking about. He wrote 200 short stories for The Bulletin. He also wrote one, I think is his best novel, "Cattle Men," it's

22:30 Called. He won a prize of a thousand pounds in a competition in Queensland. Now a thousand pounds in those days were a year's wages. That's a lot of money, and it's a beautiful novel, it's really a terrific

novel. Regardless of who he was or anything, just as a novel it stands out. It can still be bought too, through someone, I forget just now, but we've got it in the book. And he wrote several children's stories, quite a

23:00 number of short stories. Oh a prolific writer. I don't know what I was thinking, I forgot all about that. I just remember this piece of prose in "Cattle Man," and he could really write, he was wonderful.

There must have been quite a lot of poetry and sea shanties and things that he came up with. Can you remember any?

Yes we've got some in the book, but most of them are not much chop [not very good]. They

23:30 rhyme but that's about all. One I remember on the Chippewa that was an old laker that I was on, they used to sing this song,

\n[Verse follows]\n "We're all aboard the Chippewa and nothing can be said,\n The boatswain is a bastard and we wish that he was dead".\n

I can't remember the rest of it now but that, you know there were a lot of those sorts of songs and of course there were the old sea songs, you know the "Maggie Mane" have you heard of that? Oh that's a very well known one.

"Maggie, Maggie Mane"

24:00 Oh May, rather, not Mane.

\n[Verse follows]\n "They have taken you away, for you popped so many whalers,\n or popped so many sailors, and stuck up so many whalers,"\n

I forget exactly what it is now, "You won't walk down Lime Street any more," that's in Liverpool, of course. And, The Good Ship Venus,

\n[Verse follows]\n "We were on the good ship Venus,\n By Christ you should have seen us,\n The figurehead was a whore in bed,"\n

24:30 I won't tell you the rest!

Come on!

\n[Verse follows]\n "Sucking a big pink penis,"\n ...and then it goes on with...\n "South of Buenos Aires,\n Where the crew fucked all the fairies,\n They got syph [syphilis] in Tenerife\n And the clap in the Canaries,"\n

and so on, there's verse after verse like that.

Can you remember the other verses? Can you remember the tune? Can you sing it?

Yeah,

25:00 \n[Verse follows]\n"The crew they were hard cases,\n

You could see it in their faces.\n They got to frigging in the rigging for the want of better places." ...\n "South of Buenos Aires, where the crew fucked all the fairies,\n They got the syph in Tenerife and the clap in the Canaries".\n

I can't remember, there were a lot of verses actually but I just can't, you know?

Any other sea

25:30 **shanties or war songs you can remember that you can sing me?**

Well one there's one in our first book about a big typhoon that happened at the end of '46 I think it was, when they were going up to Japan, and they made this big long poem about this big typhoon. It was a terrible typhoon, a lot of ships were wrecked in it. Quite a lot of lives were lost.

26:00 In one case, one ship was towing a big cement ship, they made these ships out of cement, they were quite big. They weren't really good ships though, they would crack and so on. And in this typhoon they just had to cut her loose. Quite a lot of them had to be cut loose because they would have dragged the ships under. There was one ship, the... bloody

26:30 memory, I can't remember the names of things. It's the names of things I get stuck on! They were towing two boats, one was called the Darwin and one was the Prina? Sorry I just can't remember exactly. It got rough and they dragged her under, both of them actually. Just one of those things. A lot of that happened, ships dragging another ship that

27:00 used the sails from Nelson Bay or from north of Nelson Bay, up around Tea Gardens around that way and stop at Nelson Bay, stop at Newcastle and then go on to Sydney, and they used to carry shell grit with them among other things. A lot of shell grit and a lot of Newcastle fellas used to stow away on it.

27:30 Get a free trip to Sydney. She would be towed back from New Guinea and the Carrie Anne, that was her name, she was being towed back from New Guinea, and just off Kempsey, Trial Bay, you know where the big Sydney ferries would end up being wrecked up there. She was

28:00 wrecked on the rocks there and there was only one man drowned. He was the cook I think, but all the rest were rescued, there was one Maori with one arm – you'd think he'd be drown, swimming with one arm but he got ashore. But he had a Gladstone bag,

28:30 and one of the fellas who still lives here, told me he made a bit of a rough count one day and he made about 7000 pounds in it, a lot of money. As he flew it over, 'cause he only had the one arm, he asked Jim, he said, "Look after it Jim, if you can save it Jim and pass it on to my wife if I drown". And so he swam ashore with his one arm, got over the rocks, but they never found the Gladstone bag. But 50

29:00 years later, Jim and another fella that was on the Carrie Anne, a mate of mine that lives down here, Keith Rowles, they went up there for his 50th anniversary of this event, you see, and they asked the locals did anybody ever find that Gladstone bag and he said that they all turned and looked at one another knowingly and one bloke said, "Well we don't know but there's two brothers here that didn't have a bean between them but

29:30 after that ship was wrecked they bought a new house and a new car, and they seemed to be doing very well." The poor fella worked all that time out in the war and hadn't spent a penny, and that should have gone to his wife.

I know you're a bit of a Coleridge fan, can you recite any of "The Ancient Mariner" for us?

Oh yeah.

30:00 Oh, God. Get me started. "All in a hot and copper sky and bloody sky at noon, right up above the mast it's standing, bigger than the moon." Oh God, I get lost. I'm sorry.

That's OK, We'll come back to it later.

30:30 **So, in terms of these ships that you were jumping, just so we can get an idea of geography, you were from Sydney, and then where did you go first?**

Yeah, out on the Mactan we went first to Townsville and then I think to Cairns and then I think straight to Milne Bay. We had a bit of an experience there too. Going through the China Straits, we got a signal that

31:00 there was a submarine there and didn't hit anything, but the destroyers all hived off and went after them and we could see the depth charges coming up out of the water, but to my knowledge they never got him, and he just got away and nothing happened but it was pretty close, he could have easily got one of them. And then we went to Milne

31:30 Bay to a place called, believe it or not, Waga Waga. It was spelt with one 'g' though, W-a-g-a W-a-g-a, and the Americans had a big camp there. For recreation we had a boxing tent, well it wasn't a tent, it was just a boxing ring out in the open, and I boxed up there and a mate from Liverpool, he was really terrific. He fought an American who was a division above him,

32:00 but he mad a mess of him, and he was a professional boxer too, this American. And not much else really… swimming. I remember one day swimming over the side of the Mactan and a fella from the other side of the ship walked across and said, "What are you fellas, don't you know this place is lousy with sharks?" "Oh, rubbish there's no sharks here". Over the other side to have a look. Over the other side was absolutely,

32:30 you could see sharks everywhere. I don't know why, maybe they were throwing the scraps from the galley on that side, but we got out of the water pretty quickly. And there was one boy at that same time who went down and didn't come up. Only young boy, 16, from Manly and they brought some professional divers up, a fella named Johnstone and other one a Maori name and scarred, and they went down and

33:00 eventually brought him up, dead of course, because he'd been down a long time. Everybody said he had epilepsy but we found out since that he had scarlet fever when he was young and affected his heart as it usually did with people who had scarlet fever, and he had a heart attack, that's what happened, at 16 years old. It's a terrible thing, nice young fella.

What stories did you, when you arrived at Milne Bay, at what stage was the war?

33:30 They'd already taken Buna, I didn't get there until August I think, or early September and Buna fell in December the year before, there was still a bit fighting going on in January, so it was quite a while after. Also at the beginning of the war, before I got there, the only ships, big ships, were the Dutch ships. We got a list of them in our book.

34:00 It's a beaut book by a friend of mine, named Lou Pronk. He was the liaison officer between the small ships and the Dutch KPM company and they took all the troops from Australia and all the supplies and everything, then gradually, they got some other ships and by about the time I got there, or just before

that, July I think the

34:30 Liberty ships started to come in. Then eventually more and more, there was quite a lot of Liberty ships. They used to bring of course huge cargos of supplies, but when I first got there it was mainly just, there were quite a few Liberty ships there by then, and there were still a lot of Dutch there. And we just, as I

35:00 said earlier, we moved up as the battle front moved up. We went to Buna first because that had been taken before we got there, and then up to I think keeping the Roosevelt Ridge was the big mountain that ran through there, I can't think of the name of the bay. The battle had just been over when we got there, there were no dead bodies,

35:30 well, I take that back, I'll tell you in a minute about the dead bodies. The battlefield was littered with rifles and Tommy guns and Japanese rifles and all sorts of things, you know. And there were soldiers going round making big piles of uniforms. Great, 6 foot high these big piles of uniforms. Stacks of ammunition boxes, full of ammunition. All sorts of things. The whole flat

36:00 area was littered with it. We were in there and I picked up a Japanese rifle and a Tommy gun and I was shooting off this Japanese rifle, just trying it out, and all of a sudden this voice beside me said, "What the God damn hell do you think you're doing there?" And I looked around and it was an American colonel and he said to me, "Haven't you got enough war around here without starting your own?" And I thought yeah I s'pose we have really. But I just trying to tell him. He said, "Well, if you're looking for some

36:30 shells," he said, "There's a box of them over there." So we took what we wanted. I got a ride with an American soldier in a truck and he was telling us about this war, and they had a real big battle. There was this Roosevelt Ridge was called after I think Delano Roosevelt, who was the, what do call them, the president at the time.

37:00 And because his nephew was fighting there, Archie Roosevelt who was a colonel at the time. He was always in the front line this bloke. This ridge, I couldn't understand what was the matter, it looked strange. Everything in New Guinea was as green as green could be, except along this ridge there was a big ribbon all along this ridge for a couple of miles, I suppose about

37:30 it was say two miles long and about a hundred yards deep, like a big black ribbon. It was really strange, I couldn't work out what it was. This bloke told me they couldn't take this ridge because the Japs they were tunnelled in there, they had tunnels all the way along this ridge and they were planted in there, and no amount of shooting would get them out. So, what they did, they brought the Bofors guns up, these are 40mm guns

38:00 mostly used for anti-aircraft and they lined them up and trained them and I think it was Archie Roosevelt, I'm not sure, but I'm pretty sure it was Archie Roosevelt who was in charge of this and they just lined them up and they'd take one section at a time. All these guns were trained on just this one section and they'd blow it out – there was nothing left. All the Japs in these trenches were killed one way or another, and they'd just shift along to another section

38:30 and then another section and just blow them up. There were still a few left somehow or other, but the troops had no trouble getting them out. This was quite a piece of artillery, you know? And this soldier took me, and I said, "Where are all the Japs now?" And he said, "Well man, I can show you where there's a lot of them," and I said, "Is it all right?" And he said, "Yeah I'll take you". It wasn't very far, about a mile or so, and he stopped and he

39:00 said, "There's his majesty's imperial soldiers." And I said, "Where, I can't see any soldiers?" And he said, "Step out". We got out of the truck and there was this putrid smell, Oh my God, it made you sick, you know. And then he explained, they were all in this big swamp. I don't know exactly how many, but he gave me to understand there'd be many dozens if not hundreds that got, trying to get through this swamp got shot,

39:30 and all the bodies had just dropped in there and just putrefied. Oh my God, it was awful, I was glad to get back on the ship. Have a bath and so on.

Could you see anything?

No, not a thing, only the reeds and the water. No it was very strange, not a thing, but jeez you could smell it. Oh, I've never in my life smelt anything so putrefied, it was really horrible, yeah.

Tape 5

00:49 **You were going to tell me something about…**

Yeah, I should have explained right from the beginning, when Pearl Harbour fell, the Yanks were in a bit of a fix because their

01:00 army was in the Philippines and they were being walloped by the Japanese. Macarthur was told to get

out and come to Australia because they claimed that his knowledge would be helpful and his experience, so he came out here in April. But before that there was a group of fellas that came out and they called them Mission X. I know it sounds like something out of a comic book or something but that's what they did call them. The leaders

01:30 were two Farnstocks brothers, they were friends of the President and from a very well-to-do family, and they had a schooner. They had a two masted one first, and they sold that and bought this three masted schooner and they were sailing around the Pacific collecting music from the islands. It's back in the Smithsonian Institute now but it sat for 50 years in a cupboard in

02:00 Mrs Farnstocks' home. All these old island tunes that have just disappeared now, rather like I can't remember her name of the woman in Scotland who saved all the old Scottish folk songs that would have disappeared off the face of the earth but for that. But, it's believed, we don't have any evidence for this but we're pretty sure, that the Farnstocks were also collecting, material for the

02:30 government because they knew there was a war coming so they were doing a little bit of spying on the side. But they didn't go to New Guinea, they didn't seem to think that the Japs would go to New Guinea for some reason.

What makes you think they were spying?

Well, only because we had been told that by some of the people. There's no special reason, I don't know to be

03:00 honest, except that it was rumour. I personally believe it but I really can't give you any evidence for it. They came out to Australia in February of '42 and set up an office in Melbourne in an old bank building I think. They had the first member of the small ship section in Australia

03:30 with a fella named Jack Savage, who's still alive in Sydney, and he's got an OAM [Order of Australia Medal] now, he was a marine surveyor, and his parents had a company in Williamstown, Victoria. They used to make boats, so when the Farnstocks got to Australia they asked

04:00 a naval officer here, I've forgotten his name now, who was helping them set up shop here, they said they wanted a marine surveyor and Jack was told, he went around to see Jack and he and Laddie Reday he was one of the mission X boys, he went around with him, and they went out to South Australia and then worked their way around Tasmania, Victoria and then up into New South Wales

04:30 commandeering ships. Some of them were ketches that took wheat from South Australia, a lot of them cray boats from Tasmania. The (Hildernoin UNCLEAR), I told you about that I was on, was built in Victoria but she was a cray boat in Tasmania. Then along up the coast they picked up fishing boats and that sort of thing wherever they could, a lot from around Eden and some out

05:00 of Sydney too, and then worked their way up the coast. Now at that time, as I said before the only important ships in New Guinea at that time were the Dutch ships that escaped from the Dutch East Indies. Some of their ships got back to Europe, to England I think but about a half of their fleet came to Australia and then up to New Guinea and

05:30 they were our mainstay of getting supplies up there, taking troops up there, that sort of thing. Frequently they would load cargo directly out of the Dutch ship into one of our ships, sometimes onto barges and then onto our ships. And we would take them up because they were small, they could get over the reefs and we could take them into small bays and things like that, directly up to where the soldiers were, wherever the

06:00 front went, they went up with them. Then, what can I say, the big push was on then for Buna, that was in late November, December '42. I wasn't up there at that stage. Now, they found that they just couldn't push the Japs out of their bunkers. They made bunkers by

06:30 just digging trenches and then putting coconut logs across them, and just leaving a slit open and even though both our soldiers and the American soldiers tried to get in they just couldn't, even with 25 pounders, they couldn't blast them out of these bunkers and the only thing that would do it they said, were the tanks. So they bought some Stuart tanks that were at that stage

07:00 used by the Australian troops, they were American tanks but they were used by the Australian troops in training, back here in Australia. They went up there and there two Dutch ships, one was the Karsick, and I've just forgotten the name of the other one. They tried first of all to take them up on barges, self propelled barges, but they just tipped over and went down.

07:30 They had to go and get them up out of the water. They could on bigger barges and they found that this was all right. So the Dutch ships took them up to Manora Bay and put them onto these big barges and then our little ships towed them out to a place called Harico, which was just south of Buna. From there our little ships towed them in to the beach at Harico, we had to do it at night time

08:00 and then they had to man handle them up the beach. I talked with one of the skippers, one of the ship's and took him aside and said, "How the hell did you manage those big tanks?" And he said, "We had about 45 men and just towed them, just pulled them up the beach until we were on firm enough sand and then the tanks would just, drove off, up onto the beach and into the jungle and they hid there

08:30 until they were needed. They were the ones that came down into Buna and what they did, they drove on up to these bunkers that the Japs had, they would fire their tank guns into it and usually Australian soldiers would walk behind the tanks and when they got close enough they would just run up and throw hand grenades and blow them up inside.

09:00 It was a hell of job, but bit-by-bit they did it. Those who were there, people that have written about it, who were actually there, say that they would never have shifted the Japs put of there but for those tanks. It was the Dutch ships and our little ships that got them up there, but nobody ever seems to know about, seems to write about that. Another thing I wanted to tell you about has nothing to do with the taking Buna which

09:30 was, Mayo, in her book, which she calls “Bloody Buna,” says this was the bloodiest and the hardest, toughest battle in New Guinea and I’d believe it too, from everything I’ve read and from what I’ve seen myself, I think it certainly was the hardest battle of all. Those who were there say the same thing. But I wanted to get back to another point, when I was on the,

10:00 must have been the Duke of Kent I think, we went up to Lae and at one point, I should tell you about all those seven Zeros that my friend shot down, but what actually happened was, there was one reconnaissance plane that came over way up too high. A machine gun wouldn’t reach it, you know couple of fire machine guns. Anyway, I’m on the gun

10:30 and I’m following this thing around, got the sights lined up, and he’s going around, and I just got too excited, too tense and I pressed the trips and off went a volley-- brrr. And all the blokes laughed, because they knew and I knew there was no hope if hitting that plane. So from then on everywhere we’d go there’d be a Japanese plane come up at about 50,000 ft, not literally that, but high, and then say, “Get him, Billy. Get him!”

11:00 It didn’t matter where we were or what it was, it just became a standard joke. When we were up in Dreger Harbour, which is just next to Finschhafen, I think I mentioned before, we used to make jungle juice out of those dried apricots or coconut juice or whatever we could find. Anything that would ferment and we’d throw some, what do you call it, the stuff in beer

11:30 yeast, that’s right, from the kitchen. And we’d throw that in, bubble it up and let it ferment for a couple of weeks and then we’d strain it off and let it set for another couple of weeks. It was pretty potent stuff! It wasn’t the best, but she used to give you a real kick. It was Christmas in

12:00 1943 and the Japs had been giving us a bit a hard time at this stage, and of course they’re not stupid, they knew that Christmas time was the time we’d be on the booze and we trotted out all this jungle juice and we got stuck into it and all had big heads, and the next morning, there was a mate of mine and myself we were up on the monkey bridge of this ship, right up the top

12:30 and he had a machine gun and I had one, we woke up when these planes came in and started dropping bombs. I got up and grabbed a tin hat and he said, “Hey you’ve got my tin hat, Billy,” and I said, “Bugger you, it’s mine!” I grabbed the nearest gun and he said, “You’ve got my gun, and I said, “Bugger you, it’s mine!” I started shooting and he said, “Watch out, you’ll kill somebody, you’re shooting all over the place”. Because I was still

13:00 hung over from this bloody jungle juice, my head was really big. We settled down and we started shooting straight and these planes were coming straight over the trees, very low, and it was only piccanniny daylight, you could see them but it wasn’t very clear. They were shooting straight at us and we were shooting straight at them, and they didn’t hit us, and we didn’t hit them. It’s amazing, you wouldn’t think it possible.

This is Christmas ’42?

13:30 No, ’43. We shot off a lot of rounds and they shot off a lot at us. They’d bombed the wharf alongside us and they shot up a few trucks and things ashore, but to the best of my knowledge they didn’t actually hit ships that time. Sort of strange, you watch the movies and see them hit this and hit that but it’s not so easy in real life. I can’t explain why we

14:00 couldn’t hit them. They were coming straight at us, down low, just over the tree tops. They should have hit us and we should have hit them but for some unknown reason we all missed. As I say, they hit the wharf and things ashore.

With a situation like that, what are the emotions that are running through the ship?

Well most of them are pretty busy, it depends on what they are doing

14:30 but, fairly tense. To my knowledge nobody ever got frightened. When you think back to what I said about being ashore and just hearing those three Bofors guns, and I mean nothing happened at all, but when you’re actually in action, you’re busy. Not everybody was on a gun, only the two of us actually. The skipper had his preoccupation

15:00 with what the ship and what he was doing, and we all had our jobs, so I think that’s the point, you’re busy and it doesn’t, you don’t really get emotional about it. For example when we were in port, I can’t

remember where, in Oro Bay I think, Tokyo Rose [Japanese Propagandist] used to regularly over

15:30 the radio, tell us, she'd say, "You boys have had it bad yesterday, didn't you. We killed a lot of your friends and we sunk a lot of your ships," and we'd laugh because we knew that there'd been no ships sunk and very few people had been killed. She said, "Oh, well boys, we'll be able to see you again tonight. At 11:00 we'll be there on the dot," and they were but we'd all go to bed

16:00 but it was too hot to sleep. Too hot to put clothes on, too and that's how when that bomb lobbed alongside the Kurama, and we were all in the nude. But the funny thing is we were all tense waiting for 11 o'clock to come and cracking jokes about it, and what we'd do to Tokyo Rose and all this sort of thing, but is was after the planes came

16:30 and they started the bombing and strafing that you relaxed. It was the waiting that was the biggest fear, if you like. I think it was pretty much the same for the soldiers in the field, though I can't really speak for them but from what I saw and what they told me, it was while they were waiting to go into action was the most frightening part. Once they were in action they were busy and it didn't seem

17:00 to have the same fear producing effect.

How many other incidences of bombing and strafing had you been in prior to that one you just described?

I'd already been at Harvey Bay at that time for 2 weeks, and we were bombed every single night that time, and we saw a lot of dog fights, a lot of planes shot down, and as I told you before, some that were very close to us. In fact in one case I was very cranky,

17:30 was it that incident I was telling you about where these dive bombers were bombing this little landing craft, and our gunners didn't fire. We had five American gunners on the Kurama and I'm wondering why the hell haven't they fired? Our boatswain, that -- Lofty again, he went up and he went, "What happened to you

18:00 fellas, why didn't you fire? Those chaps were straight out dead easy targets," and one of the gunners said, the sergeant gunner said, "Well, man, if we had've fired at them, we would have drawn their fire". I thought you bastards, what are we here for? There's a war not a picnic. I thought what a bloody cowardly thing to do. Anyway, that's just tough. As it

18:30 happened the little ship wasn't hit and they shot down one of the dive bombers, and I thought what a bastard of a thing, because you're all mates, you're friends, whether you're American or what. But you didn't see much of that. Mostly people just did what they had to do, regardless.

You mentioned earlier that you could tell the difference between ack-ack guns

19:00 **and bombs? How soon does it take to get to, to understand the difference?**

To understand the difference? Oh not long at all. You might say just a couple of weeks and you'd know. Except for this Canadian, he couldn't tell at all.

Can you describe the difference?

Yes. A bomb is a sort of, a bit more like thunder. A low, rolling kind of a sound.

19:30 "CRRUMP". It sort of rolls, "CRRRUMP", like that. Whereas ack-ack is a more of a sharper, bang.

Can you give me a sound? Sound different?

Oh, not really. Ack ack is sort of just "WHACK", like that. Where a bomb

20:00 is like a "CRUMP", a slow rolling sort of a sound. I'm not very good at that. You soon tell. It doesn't take you long to know the difference.

That's ok. You were telling me about... you were going to tell me something before we were going to talk about the tanks to Buna. Did

20:30 **you want to talk about something before that? Or did you want to tell me about the tanks at Buna?**

No, that's all. Just that it was very important and the Dutch ships just never did get any kudos for that. It was really, without them you couldn't have done it, and without the tanks, a lot of people who know a lot more than I do say it would have been impossible to take Buna. Some of the Americans, there was an American sergeant there who was

21:00 incredibly brave who pushed his way out through the Japanese lines and helped a lot. But even so, even with that kind of bravery and persistence, they couldn't. The Japs were very well dug in these bunkers. It was very, very hard to get them out of. It was like I was telling you in Tambu Bay, on Roosevelt Ridge, they just couldn't get them out of these

21:30 tunnels, the mountain. And it was only those Bofors guns and the concentrated effect of them that got them out.

Is it possible to give us an idea of just what kind of infrastructure in terms of civilians, or merchant navy, or civilian ships being involved with helping the armed forces? What was the sort of contribution that

22:00 **was being made at that point?**

Well, the most important was the fact that they took up supplies, food, ammunition, guns. Some of the guns on the cover of our first book, were three of our ships that went up there, that were taking among other things, 25 pounders and ammunition and they were all sunk. The Japanese came in and bombed them and strafed them and sunk the three of those. Oh, the three of them plus a Japanese barge that had

22:30 been captured, which had a hospital. The Australian Army 7th Division, this… commando, lives here. He was attached to that hospital but it was sunk at Hariko .

23:00 But that was what was important, getting the equipment and everything up to them. Guns, ammunition, matting for the airport, that was very, very important. Ammunition, food, also medicine, medical equipment, and troops. Because although our ships were very small,

23:30 they took a lot of troops up just the same. As I said, on the Duke of Kent we had a hundred 9th Divvy blokes. Now, a hundred's not very many but on the other hand when there's nothing else, it's a lot, and we had a lot of little ships. And they were all taking troops up. In some cases a lot of them were killed, in fact one of the Farnstock brothers was killed in the very first landing there, and sadly

24:00 it was an American plane that shot him up and killed him, coz they didn't think they were American ships, they thought they were Japanese. That happened quite a bit up there, because these were little fishing boats, they assumed they were Japanese, even though they had an American flag flying, but never the less, they were quite often mistaken. Other times, there was one of our ships that was shot up, destroyed by an American motor torpedo

24:30 boat. The same thing happened there.

Bill, as a civilian would you call it a civilian ship, or a merchant navy?

Yeah, it was really a merchant navy ship.

So, as that kind of a unit, as such, how does it work, what's the chain of command? How do you communicate with all the other people so that you know where to take things, and where to go and where to be?

Well we didn't have radios to start with, at all. So it

25:00 was all done either by signals, but mostly when you pulled into your port that you were coming out of, for us it was mostly Oro Bay, but a lot was still in Milne Bay, and further up in Finschhafen and Morotai, and later on Lae and further up, and you just got your orders from there. To begin with, there were no charts. There just hadn't been a survey done since I think the 1890s

25:30 something like that. So our blokes had to make our own charts and the first ones were made on rolls of toilet paper, of all things, because they just didn't have anything else to put them on. And then one skipper would tell the next bloke, "When you get outside here, there's a big reef here, watch out for that," and it was all word of mouth. There were some written instructions,

26:00 we've got some copied in the book there. But mostly it was just word of mouth, they were told where to go. And when they got up they got used to where these reefs were, and the channels through and that sort of thing. The small ships were part of section, we used to call them section – the small ships section, of the United States Army transportation service, which was later called the transportation…

26:30 Oh, it doesn't matter, just another word that means the same thing. Although the transportation service was the head organization, but the small ships, when the Farnstocks came out here in February '42, this section became a separate section altogether, and it was organised by well originally by the Farnstocks

27:00 and then some other fellas that were pretty cluey. Their headquarters were in the Grace Building in Sydney, which used to be the Grace Hotel at that time. Then there was another branch down in …I can't remember

27:30 Walsh Bay. I'm, sorry, if I can't remember that then I wouldn't know. They issued orders too, but the real headquarters were really in the old hotel.

Just in terms of what you're describing, giving orders and things being word of

28:00 **mouth, how did you actually get the orders, and how were they exchanged word of mouth if there was no radio?**

Well, you couldn't. It was just when you got into port that's all. I mean when you left port, you were given orders to go to so and so and you'd have a particular cargo you'd have to off, or you'd have to go

pick up some wounded soldiers or something like that, and that was it. You knew nothing until you got back.

Given orders by?

The American Army officers.

28:30 What's his name, [General Douglas] MacArthur? By that time he was up in Moresby. He'd been in Brisbane to start with and then he eventually moved up to Moresby. He was not very well liked, I might tell you. He would pass orders down to, for example General Eisenhower, who was a very good general, good soldier.

29:00 And then of course we had our Australian generals there too. But they were all under MacArthur's command. And then we had particular officers, who ran the small ships, but they took all their orders from General MacArthur down through other generals. Down to captains and even lieutenants in some cases, and they would just issue orders

29:30 to the particular skippers of that ship, and they just went wherever they were told. And on the ship of course the skipper was the man in charge, he would have a mate under him, and on the bigger ones a second and third mate as well.

Now I just want to raise a question about just the merchant navy. What was the perception of the actual official army, American troops and

30:00 **officers of the merchant navy? Was there any suspicion or sort of conflict or censorship? Because there would have been very classified information they were giving you, so what was the protocol involved with that?**

Well, that's all it was. They'd just hand it on and they were sworn to secrecy, and that's all it was.

So you weren't subject to checks?

We had to sign a secrecy declaration. And were given

30:30 rank, if we were captured, you know, the captain for example could be a major, it depends on the size of he ship, and that sort of thing, he might be just a captain, you know a military captain. The idea of that is that if you were captured you'd be treated as an officer, or in the case of people like me, just treated as the ordinary riff raff sort of thing. But that didn't

31:00 happen very often.

What was the view of enlisted soldiers, or enlisted army to the merchant navy?

I think they really thought they were superior, that they saw themselves as the fighting men and that we were just the water carriers. But there was no real conflict between them,

31:30 they all got along pretty well. One thing I should have explained earlier, you were very rarely on one ship for a very long time. Most people were transferred, I can't remember how many ships they had, about six I think, and that was the case with a lot of people. Occasionally you'd get a skipper that was on one ship for a time, and when I'd leave and come back to the same ship, but normally most small ship's men were

32:00 transferred pretty regularly. You were on a six month contract or in some cases a twelve month contract. We also had a lot of small ship's blokes who served on American Army ships, they signed on articles, the same as ordinary merchant ships, and that could be for the term of a voyage, you see.

32:30 But in the case of the small ships, you signed a contract for either six months or twelve months, and then you went on leave and then depending you could go back again or you could sign off completely if you wanted to. I don't know whether I should tell you this, but I came back to Australia after the second time I'd been on leave on an old laker, Chippewa. We were in Newcastle for

33:00 a full month while she was being repaired and for the best part of the war. The only trouble is it was difficult getting down Hunter St because all the girls used to fight you all the way. There was one pub in Newcastle, the Newcastle Hotel it was called, there were two sisters working there, and they were very fond of sea men. So you could get free beer there all day unless the boss came in.

33:30 In the end, right on the very last day, the night before we sailed, we had an American boatswain who was real idiot, I mean, there was nobody on the ship that liked him, because he was just plain stupid. He wore glasses for example, and he didn't need glasses, they were just plain glass, but he thought it made him look distinguished. You know, people that wear glasses are distinguished, aren't they? Anyway, this mate of mine

34:00 the one I told you about, when we were on the machine gun on the monkey bridge, shooting at these planes, we on watch together, and we had to go and batten down all the hatches. This is a fair sized ship, about 2500 tonnes, not a Queen Mary, but compared to most of the other small ships it was bloody big. We battened down al the hatches, stowed all the rigging, got everything ready for sea,

34:30 and midnight we knocked off and went to bed. 4 o'clock in the morning the boatswain came in, "Wakey, wakey, hands on deck. All hands on deck." And this mate of mine, Max, he complained, he said, "We've been up all night. We've battened all the hatches down, stowed all the gear away, got everything ready for sea," and he said, "I'm telling you to get on deck, all hands on deck," and he said, "Well, I'm not bloody well going on deck.

35:00 You go on deck." There was a big argument. So he said to me, "That's it Bill, I've had enough. I'm going off, I'm walking off. Are you coming with me?" Well you know, a mate's a mate, whatever else happens, your mate is the most important thing of all. I didn't really want to leave the ship but he put it to me, and you'd be a dingo if you didn't, and you'd be letting your mate down, sort if thing. It all sounds silly, but that's the way you felt. So we packed our

35:30 bags and walked off. And the mate was standing on the gang plank said to me, "Where do you think you're going?" And I said, "I'm going ashore," and he said, "You've got to get past me first". So I said, "Stay there or I'll knock you off." So that was it, he got out of the way and we went to shore, but we ended up with a bad conduct…

36:00 what do you call it?

AWOL, [Absent Without Leave] or?

Not exactly, but instead of getting an honourable discharge, I was given a dishonourable discharge. Now I can understand why, but at the same time my contract had actually finished, I wasn't on contract, so strictly speaking, I wasn't employed by them. So they had no real right to do that. But that was only, in any case, he wasn't the slightest bit interested in

36:30 the part played by the boatswain, that was the real problem. Oh if Max hadn't been so insistent, I would have listened to them and I would have gone back, but it was, "Oh well, if he's going then I'm going," and that was it.

And that was it? That was the end of …

Yeah, that was the end of my term with them.

And what did you do from there?

I went on to Australian ships, on the coast, iron boats for a start.

Was this after the war? Or during the worst…

No, the war was still going on.

37:00 The first iron boat I went on was the old Iron Knob, which was a very old ship and very uncomfortable ship too, going across the Great Australian Bite she was, water was coming over us for I think four days. You couldn't see the foredeck, that's how bad it was, and on the way back, we were coming back from Whyalla to Melbourne, and from Melbourne on up, and the firemen wanted to go on strike.

37:30 I was a trimmer, that's a fireman's helper, I used to shovel the coal up to them and they'd put it in the fires. The blokes wanted to go on strike because they said she was too hard to fire, she was so old and they wanted an extra fireman and trimmer on each watch. They argued about that, and BHP of course wouldn't wear that, because that would mean another six men. So decided they wanted

38:00 to go ashore, and they said, "No, if we go ashore, we'll miss out on being home for Christmas". So they didn't like that idea, so somebody said, "Let's have a go slow strike". So we came up the NSW [New South Wales] coast at about 4 knots, and this Iron Knob could only do about 8 knots at the best of times anyway. And I was in the wheel house when the chief engineer came in and the skipper said to him, "Can't you get a

38:30 few more knots out of those fellas?" And he said, "Oh, I've tried Sir, but they won't budge." And just after that, I don't know how soon, about half an hour I'd say after that, we got a message from Port Kembla that there'd been a ship sunk ahead of us, and this was on Christmas Day, 1944. Just off Gabo Island, and the message said that, "This ship had been sunk, look for survivors, pick up any

39:00 survivors, and make all haste to Port Kembla." Well, we looked for survivors, there was flotsam and jetsam and all things floating around but we saw no survivors. We learnt later that there was only one, I'm sorry, there was only one person killed. All the rest had been picked up by a Liberty ship that was ahead of us, and we didn't know if the submarine was still around or not. I know when I went off watch, left the wheel house and went

39:30 back up, I looked up at the smoke stack and it was glowing red hot, really glowing, and our ship was shaking and shaking. She was doing 10 knots and I don't think she'd ever done that before. I was more afraid of the ship falling to bits and the rivets popping out than I was of this bloody submarine that was still around somewhere. They can move when they want to!

Tape 6

00:50 **So you were going to tell me about MacArthur and the impressions…**

Yes, when MacArthur first came there were all sorts of stories, some said

01:00 that he was chicken [cowardly] for getting out of the Philippines, but he was actually ordered out of the Philippines and I personally think he did the right thing, but he never liked the Australians, mainly I think because we were not as regimented as the Americans. But he thought we were cowards to be honest.

01:30 I mean I don't think he ever used those words, but I just can't remember, there were some situations up there where he just thought that they should just go in, he did the same thing with his own troops too. In the early stages, in the Buna campaign he got very cranky with one of the generals, I've just forgotten his name for the moment, but he just said, "Push on, go." He had no idea of

02:00 the conditions, getting through the jungle and swamps and crossing rivers and this sort of thing. He just thought, "You're soldiers, just go ahead, push, push," you know. But it wasn't as simple as that, and so a lot of his own troops weren't very fond of him either. But certainly the Australian troops didn't like him. For a start, he never ever went up into the front line or anywhere near the front line. As I said earlier he worked from Brisbane with his main

02:30 office, originally Melbourne, then Brisbane, and the closest he ever got to the front line was Port Moresby. So he didn't see the action, he didn't see the jungles, he didn't see what the problems were. He finally sent Eisenhower up there, he was a very good general, and said, "Take Buna," I can't remember his first name, Bob. "Take Buna, Bob,

03:00 or don't come back". You know this is like the Spartans and the Athenians, but this sort of war was very different. He had no idea what it was like, even though he had some experience in the Philippines. Generally he wasn't very well liked, certainly not with the Australians.

What are some examples of some soldiers, American troops that you encountered, or Australian soldiers that indicated that they didn't…

03:30 **…conflict? Well you saw a lot of that in Australia. The Brisbane war, or whatever they called it up there, that was one, but that started over… what do you call it, police, military police, provost. Oh, it was a silly sort of thing, it got started and it just escalated. It came to be a big thing, but it wasn't**

04:00 **initially. A lot of that was the enmity between the Americans and the Australians, and I had one experience for example when I was on the Mactan. I recall it was Brisbane, I was right about that. A mate and I we were going ashore and just as we stepped onto the wharf, there was an American, MP, [Military Police] you know, a paddy wagon there, and two**

04:30 **American sailors from a naval ship just ahead of us came down and said to these blokes in his paddy wagon, "Are you guys going uptown?" "Yeah, hop in", so we hopped in too, without saying anything. We got in and sat down in this paddy wagon and these two sailors in the navy said to this military patrolman, or whatever they're called, "What are they like here?" And**

05:00 **this bloke with a truncheon in his hand said, "Oh the girls are all right, but don't go near those God damn Aussie diggers, they got these big heavy boots with nails on the end of them and they get you down, they won't fight you one to one, but they'll a mob of them and get you down and they'll all kick the hell out of ya, and they're bad business, keep away from them, but the gals are nice." And he went on**

05:30 **and he said, "I tell you, if I ever get a hold of one of those Aussie soldiers," and he's there swinging his stick, and I'm sitting there and I'm thinking to myself, "Oh, I don't want to be in this thing!" We got out and we didn't open our mouth. We didn't say a word! Yeah there was in many cases, there was quite a bit of conflict. Particularly over girls, and particularly, like as the old story, I don't know if it's true or not, the Ship Inn down in Sydney, at Circular Quay**

06:00 **the story goes that there's an Australian digger just back from the Middle East, been over there for two years, and he's having a beer and this Yankee marine comes in and slaps him across the shoulder and he said, "Ok digger you can go home, we've come over here to win the war for you," and this digger says, "Oh is that what you're here for? We thought it was that you were refugees from Pearl Harbour." There was that sort of attitude, but it was mainly here in the cities and I think**

06:30 **that sort of rivalry over girls was the main thing. And also the Yanks had a lot more money than the Australians, their pay was a lot higher. They could buy more things. So there was a fair bit of enmity there, but not in New Guinea, I didn't ever see it much there. Just occasionally, but not ever any stand up fights or anything like that you know.**

So the Yanks were successful with the girls in Australia?

Oh yeah, they had nice uniforms,

07:00 they had, used to have scent on and girls thought they had better manners and they had a lot more money. As I said earlier, down at the Beberfaulds corner, opposite Town Hall in Sydney was hundreds and hundreds every night, and they'd just put their arms around and off they'd go.

You mentioned earlier that you experienced being in Newcastle and going down the streets and you had to fight the girls off. Can you …

07:30 Yeah well the Newcastle girls, I'm sorry for you Sydneyites, but the Newcastle girls are the most beautiful girls in Australia. And Australian girls are the most beautiful girls in the world, you know that. Well there were a lot girls because the all men had gone away, I don't know the actual figures but it seemed like there were 2 or 3 girls to every man. So it was a very pleasant war for us.

How was it viewed by

08:00 **people here, what kind of questions did people ask about your uniform?**

Mostly people would ask, "What kind of uniform is that?" Because our uniform basically, well all I ever wore, was a shirt, khaki shirt and khaki pants. But some of the blokes bought these caps that you could buy in the stores, in the American PX stores that had, you'll see in the book the pictures of them, they've got a double eagle

08:30 with the US Army or something like that on them. Generally speaking the American soldiers were treated pretty well, a lot of people took them into their homes and especially at Christmas time they used to do things like that, and treated them pretty well. I think a lot the Australian soldiers were not exactly bitter, but cranky, that's not

09:00 a very good word, because they'd just done a couple of years fighting in the desert, lost a lot of their mates, and they come back in and find all these Yanks with all the girls, with plenty of money, plenty of grog, plenty of cigarettes, all this sort of thing. They were pretty envious, they were pretty angry, because the Yanks were also blowhards, they were very fond of strutting their chests and

09:30 telling everyone how good they were, and they hadn't even fired a shot. That was what annoyed the Australian soldiers, they just wanted to bring them down a peg or two. But in New Guinea, there was no such thing. In the beginning, when the Yankee soldiers weren't very good at soldiering, the Australians treated them like cadets and thought, "Well it's our job to teach them", and that's what happened. But after a while

10:00 once they learnt, they were treated as equal, they were quite good. Occasionally you'd walk down the street, and I've had this experience too, soldiers come up to me and threatened me, thinking I was a Yank. When they found out I was Australian it was all right. I didn't ever get hit, but I was threatened a number of times.

What did they say?

Oh they'd say, "Who do you think you are, you cocky bastard?" Or something

10:30 like that. "Go home you Yankee bastard," and, "Go back to Pearl Harbour," or something like that. But it was mostly just verbal attacks but occasionally it did start, like that big blow up in Brisbane. That was pretty (sit UNCLEAR). I can't remember but I got an idea that there were a couple of people killed in

11:00 that.

How did the other Aussie troops know you were, or assume that you were American?

Because of the uniform. Not that it was much of a uniform, but it was different from theirs. You could tell, the type if material, and that was all really. It looked different, you'll see when you look at it in the book, but you can tell the difference. Sorry I'm not getting very far with you am I?

11:30 **No that's fine, of course you are, that's fine. Would the, if you were to have worn a cap with the US Army emblem on it, would that be misleading?**

Oh no, you were entitled to do it. The American forces, in fact you'll see at the end of the contracts not finished, that 'not entitled to wear the American uniform after this date'. So obviously they sanctioned it. But they didn't actually provide

12:00 those caps or boots, all they provided was 2 pair of khaki trousers and two pair of khaki shirts and that was it. However I think they preferred you to wear that uniform, for their own sake.

So how did Aussie servicemen respond to the fact that you were working in the merchant navy for the Americans?

No, they didn't mind at all.

12:30 We got along very well. Once they knew you were Australian, but to begin with. Well they didn't like it if they thought you were posing as an American, very cranky about that, but so long as they realised you were just doing a job on ships, and of course a lot of them knew we had been taking them up, and taking supplies and bringing their wounded back and that sort of thing. But not all of them, because not

a lot of them had been to New Guinea, you see.

13:00 **How important were things like patriotism to people back then? In terms of those sorts of things?**

Yes, I think so. Although it's fair to say though I think that a lot of people didn't join up out of patriotism, they joined up out of a sense of adventure, like that fella I said was the father of my friend, who'd been on the dole all his life as far as I could make out, he was glad to get some money. He joined the Australian Army. But I think most people

13:30 were patriotic. Certainly in the war, that was very important. You wouldn't hear any difference. Anybody there was fighting for their country, there was no two ways about that. And they were glad that the Americans were there, mainly because we didn't have the resources. In the beginning they depended on us, as I said earlier, for all these little

14:00 ships that they got from around the coast, and then a bit later on when they started building them, they started churning them out like mad. Here in Newcastle, a lot in Sydney, lots of ship builders in Sydney Harbour. People like, Oh dear, this is awful… you know the people that build the tennis shoes, the tennis racquets, what's their name?

14:30 Oh, I can't think, sorry. But there were lots of little ship builders and other people like here in Newcastle, BHP show makers, people like that who didn't normally build ships, did build a lot of ships during the war. And places like Eden, Eden, Forster, Tuncurry, Lismore, you know, all up and down the coast

15:00 you'd find all these little ship builders . Ulladulla, and in Sydney like Berry's Bay and Oh, it's terrible, I can't remember the names of these places.

And what was that significance of that in terms of the war effort?

Well, I think it was very important. I think it's a bit hard to say just how important, but without those little ship building places, and also as I say, the Americans after a time began to build lots and lots of them,

15:30 but, lots in New Zealand too. In fact some of the New Zealand ships came across here in September '42 and joined with us, we've listed them in the book, and they were very important. Although the, if you think of the European war or something like that, or now the Iraq war, it seems a very small force, but it was everything we could

16:00 squeeze out of Australia. Without those, the Japs had nothing to beat. They'd just come in. Actually they hadn't planned to invade Australia. A lot of people think they did, that wed stopped them in New Guinea, and we did of course, and I've said that too, but that wasn't their immediate plan. Their immediate plan was to take New Guinea, Fiji, the

16:30 Solomons, places like that, and link up with the Dutch East Indies, and then later they probably would have gone on and taken Australia, but not initially. It didn't really make a lot of difference to us because sooner or later, they would have taken Australia and I personally think that the Dutch ships were very, very important in this, and then our little ships, because if you think for example of the

17:00 Kokoda track. Everybody says that we defeated the Japanese, well in a way we did, but what most people don't mention is that when the Japanese retreated, it wasn't because of the Australian Army, it was because Horia, their general, knew that the war wasn't

17:30 going too well for them in New Britain, and Cape Gloucester, those places. He was afraid that they would lose over there and therefore they wouldn't get any reinforcement, and he knew as a good general, that he needed reinforcements. It was suicide to go and fight in there without reinforcements. So he turned them back for that reason. But when

18:00 he'd finished, he planned to come back again. And I'm not saying the Australian troops weren't brave Christ, so were the Japanese, they were both very good sets of troops. But you know, I didn't like the Japanese, I hated them at that stage, and I would hate to have Japanese soldiers here again, but they were very good soldiers never the less.

Slight diversion, what did you understand of the Japanese at that

18:30 **stage, that contributed to why you hated them?**

Propaganda. We were told they were vermin, was the word that was often used. That they were vermin, they were animals, that they'd never been properly civilized. We were told all these stories about chopping heads off and all this sort of thing. They sneaky, creepy little things, you know, but

19:00 we were also told that they weren't very good fighters, but they were. We found that out the hard way. They were really good fighters. In Buna for example, when they moved into Buna, they found down the Japanese trenches, that the Japanese soldiers had been sleeping on top of the bodies of their mates, that was putrid, you know rotting. And, I don't know if it was true or not, but it was rumoured that

19:30 they were actually eating some of their own, I think that's true actually, I can't prove it, but I think it's true. They were great survivors, they would fight to the. They didn't always fight to the death, that's a bit of a myth. Some cases they would, but in other cases they gave in in big numbers, when they saw that it was hopeless, but then so did our blokes too.

Another slight diversion, we talked about Macarthur, is there anything you can tell

20:00 **me about [General Thomas] Blamey?**

Again, I didn't like Blamey personally, and I know lots of people who didn't. I think a lot of the case was stories about Blamey of when he was in the police force in Victoria, there were all sorts of stories about him collecting money from brothels and all sorts of things like that, but I don't think that had much to do with the army, but the main criticism that I heard of Blamey was that he was too

20:30 willing of taking notice of the Americans. If they said jump, he would jump, and one thing I personally felt, that toward the end of the war, when they sent our troops over to Morotai and the places over to the west of New Guinea, my cousin for example was killed there, and I thought it was stupid, I couldn't see why. The Japanese couldn't win at that stage. All they had to do was

21:00 leave them there and they'd have rotted. They would have either died or surrendered. They had no other option for them, but Blamey he was told by MacArthur to take our troops over, and I think a lot of our troops were killed in those places and it was completely unnecessary. A lot of those places they could have just bypassed, which is what MacArthur planned to do anyway. I think his strategy there was very good, and in fact I've got no qualms

21:30 with his strategy. I think all along he was pretty good. It was just that he was a boaster and he only wanted his own troops to get the credit. He didn't want anybody else to get credit. They never for example gave any credit to the Dutch ships. There were a few British ships, not very many, but Australians he just thought they were a superior race, you know. At one stage, I think I mentioned earlier today, that when they went up to New Guinea he said, "No",

22:00 categorically, "No Australians," and it was only when his own generals told him that, "We need the Australians, we need the small ships," that in spite of all the Liberties and the Victory ships and all these other ships that they'd brought in and the American ships and all that, they had enough sense to realise that we'd had a lot of experience and they really did need them. And that was the only thing that changed them around. And in fact, towards the end of the war, the Australian

22:30 government issued en edict that Australians were to be sent back. I've got a friend, that lives not far from here, who was already in the Philippines on a ship there, a dredge actually, and he was sent back, well he only got sent back as far as New Guinea, and the orders had been changed. He ended back up on the same dredge, which was all a bit stupid, but I'm sure

23:00 that this was done by MacArthur, simply because he wanted the world to see that the Americans, his troops did all this, you see. And all this you see in the movies about him walking in through the water, to the beach, "I shall return," he was taken out, put off, in the shallows up to his knees, he just walked in and they photographed it. He hadn't been there at all. Another thing I saw at the end of the war in the Philippines,

23:30 the Americans, the sort of things they're doing in Iraq right now, and what they'd already done in Afghanistan. They blew up buildings everywhere, made a real mess. And when we first, we thought it was the Japanese, they said, "No it was the Americans, they did all this". One night, the three of us went from a place on the main island. We went down to

24:00 this place, in the bus, well we didn't have enough brains to find out if there was bus back. And there wasn't, and so about 10 o'clock at night we'd decided that we'd go back but there was no bus, so we had to walk back 25 kilometres in the pitch dark on this road that was screened by coconut trees and so on. And at one stage I ran straight into a buffalo, the poor thing was sitting in the middle of the road sleeping,

24:30 and I couldn't see anything it was so dark. I ran right into him, and he went, "Amaaww!" And I think I did the same! He didn't hurt me or anything but he got a fright and I got a fright. Then we're walking along and at one stage, for miles we'd been singing and telling jokes and that, but gradually we just got tired and ran out, and we were walking along quietly, and at one stage I just stopped. I had one mate alongside of me, and two other blokes were on the other side of me

25:00 and I realised they weren't there. And I stopped and said, "Where's so and so, and so and so?" And he said, "They're next to you," and I said, "No, there's nobody next to me". And I yelled out, and I heard this voice from way down thousands of feet down in the middle of the earth, and I said, "What the hell are you doing down there?" And he said, "What are you doing up there?" Well we were puzzled, and it was so dark, you just couldn't see in front of you, and we didn't know where we were, or why,

25:30 how could they be down on a road there and we're here. Because we'd been together. We got on our hands and knees and walked, and just as well we did because by the time we got to that bookshelf over there, we came to the end of this, it was the embankment, you know the bridge. Where the concrete, you know like the Harbour Bridge? And you went up this and main part of the bridge that goes across the river

26:00 had all been blown away and they just left this, what do you call it, an embankment? Anyway, you know what I mean, the lead up to the bridge. And it was just as well we did that, because we would have gone over, we couldn't have seen it and it was about, possibly a hundred feet down. It was a very sheer drop. The Yanks had blown it all up and done nothing about it. They didn't even bother to put up a rope, a barrier or anything across. And

26:30 what had happened to the other two fellas, they walked along, and that road went down into the water, and you could walk across it, which is what we had to do anyway, finally. It wasn't very deep but it was pretty wide. We had to walk all the way back and then around. But everywhere we went the Yanks had blown up everything, had made a mess of it. It was really terrible. They just loved shooting things, you know.

This is another slight diversion, but I have

27:00 **to ask you this question, I've been meaning to ask you from the second you walked in, what was your nick name?**

Mostly just Bill but sometimes they'd call me "Popeye".

Why is that?

I don't know why. It's just a name I picked up. Not any special reason for it.

And can you describe the experience of getting your first tattoo?

Oh yes. That was after the war actually, in Melbourne. I was working on an iron boat at that time.

27:30 And it's just like the teenage kids today, copy other people, people, get earrings and say, "Oh, you've got an earring", but once they get them through their lips and their navels and all that sort if thing. No, it's just that lots of other blokes did it, it's common amongst seamen, and I just copied the others down in Melbourne one day. Just went up with a few of the boys and got these tattoos, which I think is stupid now, but I didn't in those

28:00 days. Sort of peer group sort of thing, you know what I mean? It's with an electric needle, and there was no anaesthetic or anything, so it does hurt, and then you've got a big scab on there for a couple of weeks, but I pity the -- this is digressing, I worked on a cattle station in Queensland just after the war, and we had a bloke there one day just joined in while we were putting the cattle in, and gave us a bit of a hand. He was riding a bike around Australia,

28:30 and after we got the cattle in and we got to talking, and he showed us these tattoos, he had one on his back, across the small of his back, "I See You," and on each buttock he had an eye tattooed. On his penis, you wouldn't believe this, he had the letter, not the letter, the figure "4" and "Ladies only". Oh, how on earth he stood that, I don't know!

29:00 But he was a pleasant bloke, but a bit of a weirdo, you know. I often think of that "4 Ladies only", God almighty, it must have been cruel.

Was it common for people, that you were on the many ships that you were in, to get things like tattoos, or hand-made tattoos or wasn't that the common thing?

No it wasn't all that common really. You found a lot of sailors with tattoos, that wasn't

29:30 uncommon, but I wouldn't say that every second sailor had a tattoo, but a many of them did though. I wouldn't like to say what percentage but it was quite common to see sailors with tattoos.

And just on another digression, just coming back to something we were talking about before, what was the experience of coming back for leave and not being in uniform? Did you have any run-ins or experiences…

Yes, I told you

30:00 about this silly old lady, my first day, or second day I suppose it was, from New Guinea and I was just wearing civvies, and walking around down near the rocks, and she came up to me and I sort of wondered what she was after, and she said, "Here, I've got a present for you," and before I knew it I had a white feather in my hand. I laughed and walked away. As I'm going away she yelled out, "There's boys up in New Guinea

30:30 fighting for you, you know!" And I thought, "Yeah I know, I've just left them all." Just some silly old things like that.

How old was she?

Oh, I'd say she'd be in her late 60s, 70s, perhaps. There were quite a few of them about. I had another mate who was in the small ships, he was sunk of a ship just here off, a bit north of Newcastle,

31:00 and they were brought back to Newcastle….

Sorry, that's just a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] plane…

On his way to Iraq… the Japs used to make them 'cos they had a funny sound, their motors had a …. somebody explained to me the way they were made, but they had a

31:30 Brr Brr Brr Brr, anyway, I've forgotten what we were talking about…

You were talking about the American…

Oh yeah he was sunk on a Norwegian ship actually, he hadn't been in our small ships, or was after too, and an American destroyer picked them up and brought them into Newcastle, and the big Norwegian on his ship

32:00 took him up to the hospital, he was in a very bad way. Just put him in the vestibule, just outside the main door to the hospital, and that was 8 o'clock in the morning and nobody took any notice, and it was 8 o'clock at night, the night watchman or somebody came around and shook him and said, "What are you doing here mate?" And he says

32:30 "I've just come off a ship, I've been ship wrecked." And he said, "Oh, sorry, I didn't know that, I'll go get somebody." So they brought some nurses out and they took him in. But they'd been walking past him all day, and nobody took any notice. They thought he was drunk actually. He was quite bad. He recovered all right, he went back on the small ships,

33:00 went up to Japan. Was on, whatever they call it there, the guarding duty up there, and he went to Canada and joined the police force over there.

Why was it so common for people, women to be giving out white flags, ah white feathers [as a sign of cowardice to men not serving in the war]?

I don't know why. They just thought they were doing something for the war effort. You know, getting these shirkers to do something. But

33:30 the truth is most of the people they gave the white feathers to had already been in the war, I think. All the ones I knew of anyway.

So was it quite common for people to be, or did you come across people that were pacifists, or anti-war?

No, not at all. I mean, I'm sure there were, but I didn't ever come across any personally. No. I do know that there quite a lot though

34:00 but they mostly, the ones I know of, I didn't actually know them personally. Joined in the ambulance, you know the army ambulance? And they did non-combatant duties. But I didn't see many of them anyway.

So just in terms of the contact that you had with the different troops, the Australians and the Americans, what were some of the things that they said about why they were fighting

34:30 **and what they were fighting for? Did you ever have conversations about that?**

No not really. The funniest it was hardly ever spoken of, everybody just assumed that you were fighting for your country, both Americans and Australians. The Americans did a bit, they're more prone to talking about things like that, you know what I mean? I don't think there's any difference really, I think that everybody just assumed that you were fighting for you country, and

35:00 that's why I felt bad about leaving the Chippewa, because it wasn't desertion but it sort of felt like it. And if I hadn't have had that mate, I wouldn't have done it. Apart from that the ship went up to the Philippines from there. There are lovely girls in the Philippines, I would have liked to gone back. It probably went back up to Japan too.

35:30 I don't know, I mean, people join for a lot of different reasons I think A lot of them for money, a lot of them just to get away from things, a lot of them for adventure and that sort of thing, but I think in 99% of them, bottom of it all, no matter what they said, they did want to protect their country. Particularly once the Japanese subs came into Sydney Harbour and some of our places in here were actually bombed and

36:00 then we got all our soldiers back from the Middle East and that sort of thing. In the early part of the war, nobody treated you very seriously, you were way on the other side of the world and once the Japs came in it was different.

Can you tell me about the tanks to Buna?

Well as I

36:30 said before they were Stuart tanks, the Americans, but they were owned by the Australian army at this stage and as I say we had a lot of trouble getting them up there because the big ships couldn't get in, the water wasn't deep enough for them and there were too many reefs and things like that, so the only thing they could do was to get them onto these big rafts. The first ones I told you tipped over and sank

37:00 and had to drag it out later. I can't remember the name of the general but he said, "There's no way you can ever take Buna without Tanks," and several of the top officers agreed with him and lots of people I talked to, that was a fairly common thing actually. They knew that you'd never ship the Japanese out without tanks, and that's how it proved too. Once the tanks got there, they cleaned them up pretty quickly.

37:30 Because the Japs just couldn't do anything about it. They moved in and our soldiers went up behind the tanks and threw grenades into their slit trenches and blew them out, and some of them put flame throwers in there too. That didn't do them a lot of good. Once they conquered Buna and

38:00 the places just slightly north of there, that was it. The Japanese couldn't resist much anymore. They kept fighting for a while, they fought them all the way up to Biak and around the Dutch New Guinea, there, well it is the Dutch New Guinea, and they fought pretty hard too, they didn't give in. They just didn't have the forces, they didn't have the supplies. When these places were

38:30 captured they found that they were living on handfuls of rice and appalling conditions. So they were really beaten. In fact there were two, for my money, there were two major defeats. One in Milne Bay, when the Japanese navy came in, and they had a really overwhelming force there, and our diggers, I

39:00 believe they were, every man of them deserved a Victoria Cross, because they were fighting in the night mainly, in the jungle, it was wet, it was horrible, and they were really superb. The Japanese fought very hard too but out of the 1900 that landed there 1600 came out, so there were 300 soldiers in a very short time. We didn't lose nearly as many as they did, but it was a

39:30 terrible fight. What the Japanese wanted to do was to take the airstrips there, and then with naval control, which they had at the time, they could then bomb Port Moresby, they would have complete control virtually of the whole of New Guinea, because they were in Buna but that fight in Milne Bay stopped them, turned them around and then

40:00 Buna was their last real stronghold. They had others up in the Markham Valley, in Lae and a bit north of there, but they never really had any hope after that. The Americans were bringing more planes, more ships, more arms of all sorts, and the Japanese were gradually getting weaker and weaker because the

40:30 American Air Force controlled the air, there were a lot of our planes there too of course, but gradually the Americans just had an overwhelming air force and the Japs couldn't do much about it.

41:00 End of tape

Tape 7

00:38 **First, let me ask, just travelling back to your initial training. What did you do and how long was it?**

From memory it was about 3 months, and we learnt to splice rope and tie knots, different kinds of knots. Learnt how to

01:00 pull them apart and grease them and all that sort of thing that you need to know, rigging. We learnt names of different parts of the ships and as I said earlier, I think we were taught signalling with rags and with Morse, both with sound and light.

01:30 Which was very important too, because when we got into New Guinea, you found that very few people there knew Morse or semaphore or anything. Because it was full of fishermen who knew their way about a ship and they knew all about the sea, but fishing boats didn't have to learn that. So it was often handy when there was someone on the ship – that fella that I was talking about before

02:00 that got a bullet in WW1, Syd Porteus we were on one ship one time and the ship, oh it must have been a torpedo ship because it came up very, very fast, and he was flashing, and the skipper – I was in the wheel house, and the skipper didn't know how to signal, he couldn't read it at all. I told him that he was after our code.

02:30 He panicked, he grabbed the wheel off me, pulled me off, grabbed the wheel and the thing flew back and broke his wrist. He just panicked. Anyway, I wanted to signal, but in his panic he knocked the bloody lamp over, he couldn't find it. But Syd who was the first mate at the time, stuck his head out the port hole with his torch and flashed the signal and

03:00 everything was all right. Oh, I don't know, splice, rope…

So why was signalling important, and the codes if the fishermen didn't understand it?

Because, well it was just bad luck if they didn't. You'd hope, I mean in some ships there weren't, in some ships it was disastrous too, because sometimes they didn't believe them, they sunk them. But that didn't happen many times, it happened very

03:30 occasionally. But usually there was someone on the ship that could signal, but what I really meant was that the skippers themselves often couldn't, because they were good skippers and they knew the sea, but they had never learnt to signal. What else did we do there, as I said we used to go out to sea on an old little Tasmanian boat and practise

04:00 shooting machine guns, and then we used to have to take guns apart, with machine guns and 303 rifles, and put them back together again not literally blindfolded, but virtually, which was important too because you really did know how to take them apart quickly and put them back together quickly. What else? I don't know, I can't remember really. Oh, the rules

04:30 of the road, what lights you had to have, and also the identity flags, when you're coming into port, which flags you had to have, and when you're leaving port and that sort of thing – all of which I've forgotten now but it was important to know what ships were doing, and where, you know, to know what side to pass a ship on, who has right of way – a sailing ship or a big

05:00 ship, that sort of thing. I don't know, they were little things but they were very important really.

And since in a sense you were part of the American army, who was actually paying you and whose authority were you under?

The American Army.

And you were therefore under American discipline and American…

Yes, yes. This is what Ruth was getting at. When we were in Townsville we went by

05:30 train, when – after leave by train to Townsville and we were put on a Dutch ship to go back to New Guinea, and I had to peel spuds all the way back, I'll never forget it, and they didn't give us any for tea. So we got as many as we could and put them in our duffle bags and took them back to Milne Bay and then we made a big fire and roasted them, Ooh, yummy! But while we were in Townsville, I'd taken a couple of bottles of

06:00 whisky, I was going to take them back to New Guinea, I didn't like whisky, I still don't really, but I was going to flog it because the Liberty ships would pay a high price for a bottle of whisky. Anyway when we got back to Townsville I was up with some mates there and they conned me into drinking one of these bottles, and I must explain, I had two bottles of whisky in the duffle bag and a camera, a nice camera I had. You could feel … oh

06:30 and a revolver, a Luger, that one of these boys, Fitzy, he was a mad bastard. He used to fight, he used to deliberately go into town looking for a fight, he'd pick a fight. He didn't always win them, he got belted more times than he won I think. He just loved fighting. Anyway he put his Luger, he'd brought back this, he'd been in the army in the Middle East and he brought this Luger back and I put it in the duffle bag, and of course when things were taken out, like I had a

07:00 jacket in there that hid it a bit, and the girls could feel it and they called the provosts. And when we came back after we drank the whisky, which I was going to take and flog and make a profit out of. We came back and the provosts were waiting for us. They took us out and showed us the Black Mariah. Now one of the boys with us, Max, he got drunk. The funny thing is that he didn't drink when he joined the small ships, it was only after, when

07:30 we were in Townsville, we used to go to the Australian Army canteen, and they had a square table, with 1,2,3,4 pumps you know, you could line up… you'd walk around and the first time you'd buy a glass for a shilling

08:00 and, well you didn't actually buy it you'd hire it, and when you'd go back to it you'd get a beer. And you kept going around like that until the beer ran out. Max didn't drink, and he'd get in and get a beer and we used to take it in turns to have his beer. One night he said, "I'm sick of this, I'm going to drink one myself." And he did, he got drunk very quickly. We got out to the street, he shot out across the street, and we lost him for a while. We were looking for him and we finally found him

08:30 down in the corner in the main street, and he's with a group of Salvation Army blokes, girls, there playing and singing. He got in with them and he's singing all the dirty songs to the Sallies [Salvation Army] tunes. They were all trying to laugh and sing at the same time. It was weird, after that he started to get on the grog and he couldn't handle it, he would get drunk and he was hopeless. Anyway, I don't know where that leads.

09:00 **So whose jurisdiction were you under in respect to the Americans or the Australians?**

Well, one of the fellas that we were with, the fella with the luger, Fitzy, they put us in the Black Mariah, after we had a big fight. I laid one guy out in the gutter, and Jock laid another one out. They put us in the Black Mariah, there was about a dozen of them, and took us down and out us in the hoosegow [jail], and then the Australian

09:30 police came and Fitzy got put in jail. He got 3 months for having an unlicensed gun, but the rest of us, we were going to go into jail, but the I don't know who he was exactly, but the commandeer at the camp we were staying, it was an American camp just out of town a bit. They rang him and he came in, and he told them that we were sailing the next for New Guinea and he wanted is in camp. So they let us go,

10:00 and I always remember they gave him a paper to sign. They had to sign for us and I thought it was funny going out and having to be signed for like cattle or something. That's the only time we ever ran foul with the law. Nothing much happened, you know.

Were you sailing out the next day?

Yes we did. Oh and to answer your question,

10:30 the American government I suppose was the head of the thing, the defence department and then it was the US Army transport service was the overall boss of everything. Then under that we were just a very small section called the United States Army services and supply small ships section.

11:00 That was run independently but under the umbrella of the army transport service. So we received our orders directly from a relatively small group of officers. A couple of whom were killed up there, a famous reporter from the New York Times, I think he was. He was killed too, but in both cases, they were killed by the Americans,

11:30 who mistook their ship for a Japanese ship and shot them up, and a bit of that happened actually. It's really sad. They tend to shoot first and think afterwards, the Americans.

Did you ever come under fire?

Oh, Yes.

From the Americans?

Not from the Americans, no, not me, but I saw plenty that did. When I say plenty

12:00 I don't mean dozens and dozens, but a number, you know. Some of them were friends too, but I suppose in the overall count of things it wasn't really a big percentage, but it was enough though, to make you a little bit sick of the trigger happy.

During the war, the wharves and the wharfies [wharf workers] went on strike

12:30 **did that happen during your service?**

Yes, it didn't ever affect me personally, not any one of the ships I was on, but there were a lot of other ships at the time that were affected. I was always in two minds about it, I still am for that matter. Because the first Australian ship that I joined, the old Iron Knob, the

13:00 BHP ship. It was a terrible old ship. We had to have our meals in the focsal where everybody slept, and the meals had to be carter right up from the mid-ships in to the focsal, so it was usually pretty cold by the time it got there, and if there was a big sea … in the Southern Ocean it would come right over and it was a terrible job to get food there. I think there were 57 people sleeping in that

13:30 focsal which was miserable. If you wanted to go to the toilet you had to go up on deck, and the toilets there they weren't private, they were just open and everybody could see everybody else. In a big sea, we had to run a safety line from, for example from the mid-ships to the focsal.

14:00 Everything was pretty old and nasty, and she was hard to fire, you probably heard me tell Claire [interviewer], sorry. They wanted to go on strike in Melbourne and they ended up having this go slow strike. because it really was a horrible old ship, and other people didn't realise the conditions that some of these old ship

14:30 were like and the seamen had to fight for donkey's years to get better conditions. But on the other hand during the war I thought this was a bad thing. For example, right at the end of when my first contract was up, I was in hospital in Oro Bay, I think I told you about those diseases I got, and I came out and I'd had malaria there, so I was, well

15:00 I'll tell you I was down to 7 stone. Now I'm a little bit over that now, but even at that time, I fought at bantamweight, which is 8 stone 6. So even from 8 stone 6 which is really fine, down, there was not an ounce of fat on me, to 7 stone that's a big drop. I was all skin and bone. Yet, my old skipper who was a Finn, a wonderful old seaman, he came and asked me if I would join his ship to go back up to the

15:30 front line. Well I was due, I could have just got on a plane and gone back to Sydney. But he was a great man and I realised that the soldiers up there at that time, because I'd just been up there, they needed ammunition and I thought it was doing the dirty on him not to take it when you can. So I joined his ship and went up there and just did a last trip. We were bombed and we were starved, but no-one was hurt on the ship, we

16:00 were all pretty lucky really. So, there was a lot of ill feeling towards the wharfies, at times. Very bad times, they had the navy take over the merchant ships. But it was blown up I think, it wasn't really as bad as a lot of people make out. There were incidences, there were times when they did jack up. You can see both sides. Most people don't but there were two sides to it.

16:30 They fought for years these fellas to try and get some decent conditions, they were treated like animals

really.

So, just so I understand, the wharfies – my understanding is that they unload the ships? Is that right?

And load them.

And load them. How were they affected by the conditions on the ship?

Oh, not much at all. Only some of the ships had pretty outdated derricks and winches and that

17:00 sort of thing, so it made it a bit more difficult for them. In general it didn't make much difference. It was slower in loading and unloading, but it didn't really make it much harder for them actually.

And in your heart you're sort if thinking that they're striking at the time was warranted?

Oh, no I don't think it was, truthfully, but I can understand how they

17:30 felt about it. I don't think a lot of people don't understand how they felt, you know what I mean?

Can you share with us your understanding of the both the American Army and the Australian government acquisitioning boats?

I think that was pretty fair, that was good.

What was the process?

Well the Farnstock brothers when they came out here they went straight to the government, to Curtin [Prime Minister of Australia],

18:00 and they sorted out an agreement with him, and so these boats had the sanction of the Australian government, and there was never any real problem. There were a few boats I know of where the skippers tried to sneak out of them because they knew they were going to be confiscated. They all got caught, but nothing happened. No I think everybody realised that it had to be done really.

18:30 We were just so desperate. If we hadn't, I'm not saying that if we hadn't, 'cos obviously I was on the small ships, but I sincerely believe that without the Dutch ships and the small ships, they never could have taken New Guinea.

So what happens if someone who owned the boat didn't want to give the boat over?

They just walked, there was a couple of cases where that happened, they just walked up, pulled the Australian flag down and put the stars and bars up and that's it. It was American.

19:00 **So what happened to these cases that you know that it happened to? Who were the men?**

There was a father and son up in Ballina, they were Danish, well the father was Danish, and the son was born here. I just can't think of the damn name, I know it very well actually. They had two ships…

19:30 I'm sorry, I know them very well, but the damn names won't come to me. But they're the only two that I actually know personally, but I know there were a few others but not many. It was very rare. Most of them anyway, once they were offered the money, it was very good money. The Yanks never tried to beat them down, they offered them more than the ships were worth, and one fellow I know, he was a Yorkshireman, dead now, poor fella, he

20:00 told me that they offered him money, and they'd say no but as soon as they learnt how much they got a surprise and they went, "Oh yes, I'll take that," and when they asked them what was wrong with the ship, and what needed doing to the ship, "Oh, no, nothing, she's as good as new." As soon as they got their money, it's amazing how many faults were found with it. But they did them up mostly in Sydney, in places

20:30 like Cockatoo dockyard and Berry's Bay and places like that.

Now you said earlier that you'd transport whisky up there because you'd get good money for it…

Oh yeah, that didn't happen very often, just on individuals, you know.

Was there a black-market of transport? What sort of things?

Oh yes. Well whisky was the main one, can't think of any others. That went on a fair bit although

21:00 like what happened to us, you got drunk on the way up. They used to smuggle cigarettes back, a lot of that went on. I was involved in that once. A mate of mine bought a big duffle bag full, we used to get a carton of cigarettes every week and I didn't smoke, so I saved them all up but by the time I got on leave back to Sydney,

21:30 half of them had gone mouldy, and anyway, this mate of mine, Curly he said, "Here, give them to me, I'll get rid of them," so we went into this pub in Sydney on George street, I can't remember the name of it, we went in there and met a bloke in the bar and Curly said, "You want some smokes mate, they're

American," of course American cigarettes they used to think were great, so he said, "Yes," and he took him out into the dunny, and I opened the top, showed him and pulled the carton out and, "Oh yeah, Lucky Strikes," you know

22:00 and he said, "How many?" And he got the money and he said, "Quick let's get out of here," 'cos he hadn't found out that half of them were mouldy. There was a lot of that, and of course a lot of the Yanks, especially towards the end of the war, they could get cigarettes in Sydney though their own PX, whereas you couldn't buy it in the stores. It was very difficult, strictly rationed, and it didn't matter to me because I didn't smoke. I wish I never had smoked because I ended up getting my

22:30 bloody insides cut out, you know. But we didn't know in those days anything about cancer. I feel sad now when I see especially young girls smoking, you know young blokes.

So you started on your first ship as potato peeling, can you tell us about the kitchen and the cook?

Yes, the chef, the head chef, was the head chef from the

23:00 hotel Carlton in Sydney, I don't remember his name actually, but he was a man in his 50s, late 50s I'd say. Bit quiet, but very efficient, and a terrific cook. Oh my God, we had wonderful meals there. Nothing like it. The other cooks were top class cooks too, one of the cooks there, tall, good looking, well built sort of a bloke, he was a great singer, and he used to sing in the galley. All opera, all ones I loved, too.

23:30 He sung in some quite big metropolitan thing, not a big role but an important role, you know. He was a really top singer. There were two barbers on the Mactan, that's the ship I'm talking about, they used to play cards, what do you call it, bridge, no not bridge, you know where you have the little things where…

24:00 I can't think of it, bloody brain. Anyway they would play day after day, but they were very good barbers. They were taken up there because, the Mactan, when she came from the Philippines, she really belonged to the American Red Cross at that stage, the American Army bought her from them, and then

24:30 they did her up and turned her into a rest ship for the American officers in New Guinea. Instead of sending them back to Australia they'd put them on the Mactan for a week or two, and they had good barbers and good meals. They had a refrigerator, and ice cream machine, which was the only one in New Guinea at that time. So it was really like a first class hotel there. They had stewards to look after them and clean

25:00 the cabins out and everything. Stewards to wait on the table. So it was really good. Later on they moved from Milne Bay up to, eventually up to near Wewak or somewhere near there. She just stayed in dock and the officers came down and had a holiday there for a while.

So your role was the potato peeler…

And washing the dishes.

25:30 **Where did you go as far as positions…**

The bottom rung.

Were you always the bottom rung?

No, no. When I got up there I was officially what the Yanks called an apprentice seaman, because of the course, we were learning it but if you were on an Australian ship you would just be called a deck boy which means you were learning, you were in a way an apprentice, too. But when I went up

26:00 I was still an apprentice seaman for the whole of that first 6 months, but mainly I was on deck all the time. Not mainly, I was on deck all the time. I used to take my turn at the wheel and holystoning the decks, not that we bothered too much about that up there. All the little jobs that had to be done around the place. But because there weren't big crews on those ships

26:30 you found mostly they were the strictly necessary ones. A lot of the ships at the end of the war had had it and they burnt them, you know at Samarai Island at the bottom of Milne Bay because it didn't pay them to bring them back and do them up. Some did of course. I don't know whether you heard, just last week or the week the before, a fellow in – Rick Weiss in

27:00 Darwin -- found one of our ships, that used to be called the Agassi Le Mal, but had been renamed the Buna. You hear about that did you? Well, it was in Darwin Harbour, it was wrecked in the big cyclone, [Cyclone] Tracy, that's the one. Now we don't know for sure but we were told that she was sailing

27:30 out of the harbour going to Timor, but she turned around to try and get a bit of shelter from the cyclone and came back into the harbour and sank, with 5 men aboard. This fellow rang me, I don't know how he knew me, or got in touch with me but he said, "She was only 30 metres or something like that." He was quite excited because the navy had tried for 2 years to find her

28:00 and they couldn't, they had given up. I just sent him a fax today to try to find out how he did actually find her. That was one of our ships. A lot of them after the war were sold. A lot to China, a lot went to the United Nations to Shanghai to Chiang Kai Chek at that time.

28:30 A lot went up to Japan with our blokes in the, I forget what you call it, after the war…

BCOF? British Commonwealth…[British Commonwealth Occupation Force]

Yeah, something like that.

So did you finish the war as a deck boy? Is that your final…

Ordinary Seaman. Didn't ever get very far. You had to have brains, you know.

29:00 **So where were you and when did you hear of the end of the war?**

I was in Sydney when the European war ended. In Martin Place, and I guarantee I kissed about 3000 girls that night. Or they kissed me, it was amazing, I've never seen anything like it. Everyone was hugging and kissing everyone else. It was wild, it was exciting. When the Japanese war ended I think I was working on the sheep station, the cattle station

29:30 up in North Queensland. That was a rather dull affair, for me where I was. It was just an event, it was on the radio. I went back to see Arthur and I went on a British tramp steamer, went to China and the Philippines and to England, and I worked in England. I worked in a riding school for a while. I used to have to take these young

30:00 girls out, in the middle of winter mind you, through the snow and the ice on horses, and I thought to myself, "You silly little man, what are you doing out here?" That was my job. I had to clean out all the stalls and feed all the horses and the dogs and clean out the kennels. But I liked that really, it wasn't bad. Then I went to work in a factory making rubber soles for shoes. Oh, that was an experience, there was

30:30 one toilet and 2 hundred blokes. You had to keep lunch in your hand, and line up to get to the toilet. You had to get there half an hour before you were supposed to officially start work, or you'd find that pretty soon they would find something wrong with you and you'd be sacked. The first half hour which you weren't supposed to be working, you got all your machine set up and all that sort of thing

31:00 and you could all talk. I used to work with a girl called Alice, and she had the broad Lancashire accent. I'll never forget one of the blokes across the other side of the floor yelling out, "Hey Alice, why do the girls like the boys with the big ones?" And she stopped and she thought, brow furrowed like this was something that only a professor of what, physics I suppose could work out.

31:30 And it finally dawned on her, she smiled and she said, "Ohh, hee, I suppose it's 'cos they get more thrill!" She was funny, she used to tell she'd go out with this bookie and tell us all about it the next day. It was a terrible factory, it really belonged to [Charles] Dickens, you know. It was horrible. 4 pound 19 a week for 54 ½ hours, it was terrible. And then I got this job in the riding school and that was a bit better because

32:00 we were out in the open air and, it was cold of course, it was freezing but it was a lot better when I got back to Australia.

Now it's important for the archive to understand contexts and also the social side of war, I need to ask you if you'd share, and just about sailors and also when they'd find every port a girl, a girl in every port. What was your understanding of the men when they arrived with brothels and

32:30 **girls and stuff like that?**

What do you mean, when they arrived?

In port whatever it was, in Sydney or Brisbane or…

When they went into brothels? Oh I didn't do that. I used to stay aboard and read Shakespeare! Like all the other sailors. Well, in China it was a really a cult activity there. You go into a brothel and there might be 20 or 30 girls and line up and take your pick, you know. We had one bloke, an Englishman

33:00 he was a cadet, that means he was really an officer learning the trade, and at one stage he was the only one of us that had any money. So he'd come and he had to pay for us all you see. And he says, "When Andrew pays, Andrew chooses," and he would choose his girl first before anyone else. It was good fun actually.

33:30 We used to get up to all sorts of tricks and joke with one another and so on. We went to a Russian, in Shanghai, a Russian brothel one night, there were three of them in the street close to one another, and the first one we went into this Englishman called 'Soss', I don't know what that meant but, anyway, Soss went all around to all these girls, there must have been about 25 of them, all sitting down knitting, and Russian girls, big, big girls.

34:00 They were all knitting, and he went round and felt their breasts, every single one of them, and they giggled. In the end Andrew wouldn't pay and so we had to walk out, and we walked out into the street, and the old Mother Judd she followed us out and she said, "All right, how much you give?" And he said, "Oh we'll see, we'll just see this next one, what they're like." And he went and did the same thing again,

he felt them all up. And they were still arguing about the price. Then we went to a third one would you believe, and in the end

34:30 Mother Jug she kept the price, I forget it was about $5 it started and then down to $2, this is American dollars. Of course Chinese dollars was inflated, was … I know that I went to the pictures one time and I had to pay $2000 for a seat at the pictures. I bought a bottle of beer one time

35:00 that cost $2500. Your tram fair you paid with a thousand dollar bill, you were lucky if you got a couple hundred dollars change. Inflation was really ridiculous, you know. This Russian brothel, they started off I think it was 5 American dollars and then it dropped to 3 and then 2, and then finally she came out in the street again afterwards and she said, “How much you give?” And one of the blokes

35:30 I’ll never forget, he said, “I think if we had stayed a bit longer we could have got it for 50 cents!” There was another night we were walking back to the ship and there two nice little Chinese girls walking in front of us, and we noticed they kept looking around and smiling, and we followed them as all good sailors do, and they led us down to another brothel. It was really just like a house, this one. There was only about a dozen girls there.

36:00 There was one that was half Japanese, I couldn’t talk to her, I didn’t know, but by her features ‘cos the Japanese were there for quite a while, they did their duty there too. She was lovely and I kept trying to catch her eye, but she didn’t seem interested. There was one little one there, she kept bouncing up and down, “Me, me, me, me,” and I thought, “Oh jeez this’ll be good,” and oh God, just one

36:30 session and that was it, she, “No, no, no, no”. It was all funny. The Philippines was the best though, they were really lovely there. My mate was with a girl there and she said, “Bill, would you like a girl?” And I sort of ummed and ahed, I don’t know why, she said, “I put it to you frankly, Bill. Do you want a girl or do you not?” And I said

37:00 “Yes, I’d like a girl.” And she introduced me to this girl and she was very, very nice, she was good looking, she was lovely. So we went of together, and the first night we were in a place with just a thin little partition between, and he and his girl, as I said, were lying here and we’re in here, and they kept telling us things in Filipino, to take along to say. They were telling us all sorts of filthy things and we didn’t know what we were saying, but the other girl would laugh like mad and then tell us something else.

37:30 We did all sorts of things. We went to one place where there was a channel came through, and there was hot water coming from an underground spring. You couldn’t put you foot in it, it would cook it. Then there was cool water in this one, and you could just turn a big bloody tap and put them together and you have beautiful water. And that same place they had baths about the size of these first two rooms here, and the same thing. They had the hot water coming

38:00 through one channel and the cold in another and a big tap to turn and you could just get the perfect, so we did a little skinny dipping there. That was very nice. She was very nice. And one night I was going to take her back to the ship but there was a watchman, a Filipino, what they call a customs guard there. He stopped us and said, “No, no you’re not allowed on this, I’m very sorry.” But he said, “If you want to get something,

38:30 I will wait for you.” So she told me to get some sheets and towels, because at the end of the war, everything was all rationed, it was very difficult to get, you know. So I came out with this bundle of sheets and towels and things, and gave them to her. In the mean time, these two big Filipinos, I know that’s strange because they’re normally little. I was reasonably big compared to them. But these were very tall Filipinos and he said, “Here, these boys will look after these for you.”

39:00 and I said, “No it’s all right, I’ll carry them.” And, “No, you must not, you mustn’t carry them.” And of course he said, “You come to my house, I have big house. You are my friend, you come there,” and we went through the jungle and oh God it was creepy under there. I didn’t know what was going on. When we got there, the house was up on stilts, and I’m looking for these two fellas with the sheets and things. They disappeared into the jungle, they did a split.

39:30 You could sell them there and make a lot of money. He went up the stairs and just on bamboo sort of floors, and his wife and two kiddies were sleeping on a straw mat. He just grabbed them, without saying a word, just grabbed them into the other room and he said, “Here you are, you be my guest.” And I said, “I need a leak” “Pardon?” I said, “I need to go to the toilet.”

40:00 “Sorry, what is it?” I said, “A piss!” And he said, “Oh, you wish to urinate? Oh you are my friend, you are my guest, this is my house. If you wish to urinate, do so on the floor.” I lifted the lid up, like a window but not with glass, you know.”

Tape 8

00:36 **So those stories of China and the Philippines, they were during the war?**

No they were at the end of the war actually. And as I said earlier, the damage that was done by the Americans there was horrifying. Whole cities were just about blasted level. I was in London at the end of the war and saw the damage down there, but it was nothing compared to the Philippines.

01:00 The people were very accepting, they were very poor, they didn't have much to eat and that sort of thing but they were very cheerful, very happy people.

Just remaining on the issue of sailor comforts, were the sailors given any advice in respect to contraception, through to obviously diseases?

Yes, one ship I was on they had a big sort of

01:30 bag, like a water bag, you know a plastic bag, and they had just Condy's Crystals I think in it. The sailors when they come aboard they were supposed to flush out the works. There was a fair bit of mostly gonorrhoea and by that stage penicillin had been introduced so it wasn't

02:00 so bad. They were cured in fairly quick time by that stage. We had a fella named Tassie on one ship, and I told you about going up the hill and watching the dog fights. He was telling us that, this was only about a year before, in Tasmania, they had sulphur drugs by that, but they didn't have penicillin at that stage. He went to a prostitute and

02:30 got a dose of gonorrhoea and he had to go to hospital. He was telling us all about these hockey sticks and umbrella, you know those things with spikes up there and you poke it down and you bring them up the break all the ulcers. And hockey sticks that they'd put in and twiddle them around and break the ulcers. Then they'd put sulphur I think down it and Condy's Crystals and all these, ohh, sounds excruciating, you know. It took about 6 months to cure and when he was cured

03:00 to celebrate, guess what he did? Went back to another prostitute and got another dose. Another 6 months. There was a fair bit of it I suppose but it wasn't as bad as a lot of people made out. Fortunately they had penicillin by that time but it must have been awful in the old sailing boat days. I think

03:30 there were a lot of deaths on the sailing boats that we never heard about, that I think was pretty cruel.

Again, just a context question, in respect to the environment, the issue of homosexuality. Did that ever arise?

Very, very rarely. There's lots of jokes about it, you know "It's your turn in the barrel," and all that sort of thing. I saw a bit of it, in fact when I stowed away to Canada

04:00 and I stowed away back and when I was coming back I used to have to share a bunk with a bloke, well not share a bunk with him. When he was on watch I would sleep in his bunk and when he would come off, I'd get out and, we were washing dishes all the way back there. This bloke he was telling me about being a prisoner of war in Germany, and telling me abut no women and no sex and

04:30 he said, "Well you know we had to have something, and we used to have one another, you know." He was telling me all about this, and he would come into this cabin and he'd pat me on the bum. I shied away, it was a little bit too much and, and I took a swing at him one day. He hit the roof, and he went up and told the firemen, I was in the fireman's crews, the sailors wouldn't give me a passage but the fireman did, and they came down and they were big firemen and they were

05:00 going to have my head off my shoulders. Till I told them what happened and so then they bailed him up and the tables were turned. When they got back to port he tossed out of the Union. Wouldn't let him on a ship anymore. It was pretty rare though. Very rare. We had a cook on the Mactan, who obviously was a queen. He had a little thin voice and, "Oh did you put that back there? Oh come on, I told you to put that there"

05:30 again that was pretty rare you know. I didn't ever see anybody bunking up with somebody else or anything like that. Those stories are grossly exaggerated. It does happen, but very, very rarely. I never saw it happen. I didn't even see the barrel even.

Again, just coming back to the

06:00 **China Philippines what were you running, why were you shipping stuff there?**

It was an American merchant ship and she'd come, an old Liberty ship. They were bringing, they took goods like radios and fancy things, I can't remember the other things, but a lot of things like that to Shanghai. They sold them and of course when our blokes got in

06:30 and flogged them, and made a lot of money. Then they bought with the money they made bought a lot of lovely rugs and kimonos and things like that. They took them back to England and sold them, made a lot of money. They dodged the customs you see. When they came back from Shanghai to Sydney they loaded wheat, and that was the cargo when I went there. There was just this bloody bags of wheat.

07:00 You couldn't sell them or do much with them. Although, what was happening quite often, fairly frequently, they'd load bags of wheat onto trucks that were supposed to go out to somebody that had actually bought them, and they'd get out of town on the road and they'd pull up the truck and the other

bloke would get in and they'd have a cigarette together. One bloke would whack the other bloke over the head with a, you know, he knew what was happening, he was expecting it

07:30 but just enough to leave a lump to show that he was attacked, you see. Then another bloke would turn up and pick him up and they'd look for the truck, but it would be gone by that time, and the cargo gone with it. That was pretty rife, they made quite a bit of money out of that too. But that was mainly the cargo from Australia was wheat. They were still pretty hungry there in those days.

08:00 When we'd clean the plates, you'd put it into a tin and you'd throw it over the side, there would be families there in sampans that would paddle up and with nets on bamboo, like mosquito nets, they'd fish it out of the water. Put it in their tins and cook it. We used to see it on a little metho stove. And cook it there and eat it. Oh it was sad to see. You'd walk uptown in the main street, in

08:30 Yankipur Road was road that ran along the river, Nanking Road was the main street, just like George Street in Sydney. At night time as soon as the shops closed there were thousands of people just lying on the footpath with a straw mat, they used to roll it out and lie down on it. Nothing else on, it was horrible to see, and there were thousands of people like that. I saw a woman one day

09:00 getting a tram, and the trams had a step about that high and this woman was about 8 months pregnant and she was trying to get up on the tram and she was obviously having trouble. There were all these men on the tram and no-one would giver her a hand, and she's got a hell of a job trying to get up there, and bloody conductor, he's got a big bag because the money was inflated, you know, $4000 bills, and he picked it up – he was quite an acrobat – he

09:30 had one foot on the ground and one foot on her chest and whacked her on the head with this bag, with paper money but never the less it would be fairly heavy, and knocked her flat on the road. Oh dear, there were some cruel people there. Another day we walked along and there was this bloke sitting on the paving against a fence and I said, "That bloke looks like he's in a deep sleep."

10:00 And Johnny went up and felt him, and he said, "He's in the big sleep mate," and he was dead. Several people walked past him, took no notice, didn't bother at all. And up a bit further there was an old lady, she must have been 80, lying in the middle of the road. Little kids are coming out and breaking little bits of bitumen off the side of the road, you little lumps of bitumen, and pelting her with these and racing up and kicking her and laughing, it was a great game, it was

10:30 great fun. This poor old lady, I think she was probably drugged actually, probably been on the opium or something. I said to Johnny, "Oh, we can't let this go on." So we went up and chased the kids, but then the owner of the shop came out, I imagine he was her son, and he grabbed her by the hair and dragged her over the gutter and into the shop. Oh, jeez, over there, no feeling, you know.

11:00 We went in the shop to buy a bottle of beer, and we couldn't speak Chinese of course and they couldn't speak English, so we had a hell of a job trying to get them to understand what we wanted. So we went into the shop window and pulled out a bottle of beer, they make very good beer there, and put it on the counter. Then we had to bargain but of course we couldn't speak Chinese, we put down, $10, $100, $200 and I forget now, I think it was

11:30 $2000 it cost, which wasn't really much when you worked it out in our money. And it was hot too. It was good beer but it was ruined because it was hot. There was a funny scene one day up in the main street of Shanghai, there was this girl, again there's all these 18 months pregnant girls, I don't know who'd been there 18 months before, 8 months before, I mean. She's running flat out chasing a young bloke,

12:00 she would have only been about 20 I suppose, and he'd be 20, 21 or something like that. She's screaming and all the people are laughing, we couldn't understand of course what they were saying. He got to the corner and the policeman grabbed him and held her and she came up, and as soon as she got close enough she started thumping him. Oh God she was wailing at him. The policeman finally got between them and separated them. I don't know what was going on because we couldn't understand, it's infuriating, but

12:30 you could guess but you didn't really know. All the people are standing around and they're laughing. As soon as he said something, and she said something back to him. And then finally he gave the bloke two blocks start and let the girl go, and she was after him like a greyhound after a rabbit. Yes, you see some funny things.

So what year was that in China?

That was '46. That was after the war, of course.

13:00 **So at that time you're about 19 years of age?**

Yeah, I turned 16 in '43… so 7 in '44, I'm terrible at math. Fancy a bloody school teacher.

So what did you do? Did you want to be a sailor when the war finished?

No, no. Never. I just wanted to do it for a while, just to see a bit of the world, for adventure, but no

13:30 I was interested in farming. When I got back I did a lot of jobs. I went down to Adelong, down in NSW

for a while and trapped rabbits for a while. Freezing cold and you're covered in blood, it was a yuck of job really. Fair money though. We used to sell them for meat in those days. Then I worked in factories,

14:00 and then went out west with a Pommy mate. We bought a 1928 De Soto, one of those old coffin cars and got out in a big flood out there, ran out of petrol. Couldn't buy any petrol because it was all rationed. We went to a hotel, and went around the back and syphoned petrol out of every tank. The poor buggers hardly had any to start with.

14:30 But we got enough to get us up to Cobar. Then we got jobs there on stations, worked on sheep stations for a while. Then we went down to a copper mine… white stuff like lime, but not lime. Gypsum lime, and worked there for some time. Then one afternoon coming home I was driving the truck and we saw a 44 gallon drum of petrol

15:00 sitting there in the bush, all by itself, so I said, "It needs someone to look after it." So we picked it up and put it on the truck, got back to the camp and a couple of hours later in comes a copper, the sergeant from the nearby town. He came in and he said, "Now Bill, I'm not going to beat around the bush, Vic's already told me that you stole that drum of petrol. I know that you picked it up off the ground and that you didn't steal it from anybody, but obviously it belonged to somebody,

15:30 in fact it belonged to the mine." And Charlie, he was the boss there, he said, "He's not going to lay charges if you confess and we get the drum back." And he said, "It's no use telling me that you didn't do it, 'cos Vic's already told me you did." And I said, "All right," and he said, "You know, I don't get paid on this job, coming out here and doing this. This is out of my own time." And I said, "Would 5 pounds cover it?" "Oh, yes."

16:00 5 pounds was a week's wages. No doubt it would do well. And Vic told me I didn't tell him anything of the sort. Crime doesn't pay, you see. Then I worked in cattle stations up in Queensland and cut cane up there, and worked on sheep stations in NSW, and a lot of things. Eventually I went back to night – I worked in a factory in Sydney and went to night school. That was the end of my

16:30 life. Got a scholarship, went to university – that's where I met Ruth. The very first day I saw her, I said to myself, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." It was strange, I never met her, never talked to her, but it's true, I just said, "That's the girl I want to marry," and I did. So, we went to uni together and we went to Sydney, Oh no we went out to the bush. My first school was

17:00 a little one teacher school up near Inverell, being an old copper mining town. It was good in some ways because I had 36 kids every class from kinda to third class high school. I got some of the old miners there to take us around and show us how the mines worked, what they did, what was ore. They picked up ore and what was different types of rock, and they were terrific old blokes, they knew everything about it. Told all the kids and the kids remembered

17:30 much better than a teacher telling them, and the trees, they knew every tree and everything there and when the inspector came -- one of them was a carpenter and made a lovely cabinet for us, you know with glass. We had all these rocks and that labelled, and the inspector said, "Yes, and I'll I bet if I got one of these kids to go and find me one of these rocks, he wouldn't have a clue," and I said, "Well pick one out and try it," and he said, "Can I pick the child?" And I said, "Yeah pick anyone you like." And they picked

18:00 them every time. They went straight out and found them, no trouble. Because these old blokes, they really listened to them. It was hard teaching that many classes, it was very difficult, but they were good kids.

Given that you got a scholarship, do you regret not sticking with school?

Yeah I think I do really. I mean although I had a lot of adventures and went all around the world… the

18:30 first time I was in 6th class, did I tell you this before? I failed, and I was really upset, I was badly upset because I knew I was one of the best scholars at the school. My mother went down to see the headmaster and he told her that I got one of the highest passes in the state but that I was young. I didn't do as well in maths, I was terrible at maths. I knew I'd done well enough to pass. But I didn't do as well as I did

19:00 in other subjects, so they kept me back. Then there was a lot of trouble at home with my father and I just lost it. I was sick of school and sick of everything really. Just wanted to get away, wanted to go to sea or do something like that. But, yeah, I suppose so. I would have liked to have when I did eventually go to uni, I loved it. Did you like it? You're not allowed to tell me! I loved it, it was

19:30 wonderful. I liked night school too, learning is always good.

Just coming back, a couple more questions on the war, what was the bravest thing you ever saw during your time?

That's very hard to say. I think some of the

20:00 skippers, the Finnish skipper I told you about. He was very brave, though it's not the kind of bravery

that you associate -- big bangs and things. But getting through some of those reefs, you know you ask yourself, why was that brave? Because it was very, very dangerous, a lot of ships went up on them, and he just knew his way through there, it was phenomenal.

20:30 Anywhere he took you, he always got you exactly where you wanted to go. Now you might say, well that's not bravery. I don't know, really. Some of those blokes at Morotai, when they had that sniper there, popping them off, day after day. I don't remember how long, but he must have been there for more than a week. Every day he was getting somebody. But I suppose

21:00 all they really did was stay there. It's very hard to say, actually. I know there was lots of brave things done there, but I didn't actually personally see anything really out of the ordinary striking.

In respect to the reefs, how did you work with the ship's captain to manoeuvre your way through? How did you do that?

Just by standing in the bow, and you see the colour of the water change.

21:30 When it got darker you knew to come in, and when you hit the other side, you'd come back again. It was like a snake, and you'd follow it just by the colour of the water. It wasn't difficult but you had to be very, very careful. Be on your toes, watch. Watch all the time.

Were tides important?

Not really. Not really when we were there. They were not big tides anyway, there.

22:00 I'd like to be dramatic and tell you that was. Most of our war was a fairly static sort of affair. We got bombed a lot, that was it, like I told you in Hervey Bay, bombed every single night for a fortnight, and Oro Bay, we were bombed I suppose on average 3 times a week, something like that. By the time I got there, the Yanks were gradually getting control of the air.

22:30 But there were a lot Australian planes there too, of course. In the end they were getting on top of the Japs and the navy too, because by that time they were starting to send more ships out. In the early part, when our ships first went up there, the Japs had almost complete control over the seas. For example when they went into Milne Bay, they had no opposition, and our ships used to in the early days, had to

23:00 sail in the night time, tie up in the day time under the branches, under the edge of the water, because it was just too dangerous to go out in the day time. One time we were coming back from Lae and a submarine popped up, not exactly beside us, but within 100 yards. It turned out to be American but we didn't know to start. I don't know.

23:30 I'd love to say it was all dramatic, and all Errol Flynn [famous actor] and all that stuff, but it wasn't. Most of it was fairly dull routine. There were times when you pretty close to it.

And the most foolish thing you ever saw?

What I did was the most foolish thing I ever saw. I forget which ship I was on now, but there were some soldiers on it, and one of them

24:00 was a very good swimmer. He'd climb up the rigging and he'd dive. He'd dive way out and down, and he'd swim right underneath the ship. And I thought, "That's a good trick, I'll try that." So I climbed up and dived, that was no trouble. I was underneath the ship, but it was further than I thought. As I'm going under, I'm rising, my breath is, whatever you call it, buoyant, and my back - I could feel the,

24:30 you know, like oysters. Not oysters really, I forget what you call them, but shellfish, anyway, very sharp shells. I could feel them cutting my back, and I made a desperate effort to climb out of the water and get out, and I realised how bloody stupid that was. Because if it had've caught me I couldn't get out, you know. That was very stupid. I think I told Claire about that first mate with the grenade.

25:00 He nearly blew us up. I don't know. There were probably a lot more stupid things than that. There was a digger that went and picked up a Japanese rifle that was booby trapped, and he got shrapnel all through him. Then there was my little tête-à-tête with a crocodile too, that was a bit stupid. Swimming back, I knew there were sharks there, I didn't think about crocodiles.

25:30 When you're young, you're silly. Of course you get sillier when you get older too. That was a bit stupid.

So will you tell me the other experience travelling up north? On the Mactan?

On the Mactan? We left Brisbane, we came out on, I can't remember the name of the damn river anyway, we got to certain spot and first of all, one of the

26:00 props stopped. Then a few minutes later the other one stopped, and one of the engineers came up and told us the bearings had overheated and so they had to stop. They had a steward there, I was on deck at the time, talking to one of the blokes from down below, so I said, "They'll fix her, get her going soon." And this

26:30 bloke said, "You know where we are? We're right here where the Centaur went down. This is the exact spot!" I don't know how he knew. "This is the exact spot! And look, moonlit night, bloody submarines

everywhere. Oh God!" he said. He went on and on, I thought he was going to have a fit. But nothing happened. It was very close to where the Centaur went down. And it was a moonlit night, there could have easily been a submarine there, but we didn't know.

27:00 Some of them were funny. Very rarely did you see anybody get scared actually. That was one time though. God, he was funny!

Were you ever attacked by a sub or in a convoy or…?

Not attacked, no. We had a couple of times where, one I told you about, it wasn't specifically after us, we were in a convoy. It was after

27:30 anything it could get, and the destroyers chased it off. But there was another time, further north and we thought, this time it was the other way around, this time we thought it was American, and it turned out to be Japanese. I don't know whether they mistook us for a Japanese ship or what, but they could have blown us out of the water. They hived off and we realised that they were Japanese so we scooted out of there too. But nothing happened, we weren't attacked but we were very lucky that we weren't.

28:00 **So what did you fear most? The aircraft or submarines?**

Yeah the aircraft. We had a lot of attacks by aircraft, and often we were very lucky, there were a lot of near misses. Also, what do you call it, the machine gunning, I can't think of the damn word. Strafing, yeah, like I told you,

28:30 particularly that time at Dreger Harbour, where Max and I were, I don't know how many planes came in, one after the other, and we were shooting off a hell of a long time. I don't know why they didn't hit us, why we didn't hit them. It was straight out, they were coming right over the trees, and you'd reckon you'd close your eyes, press the trips down and you would have shot one down, but no.

29:00 Not as far as I know, not a bullet hit us. But as I said, they blew up quite a few things up ashore, and the wharf of course, was right next to us. We worried about the planes, all right. A lot of our ships were shot down, were sunk by planes, a lot of our blokes were killed too. Submarines usually looked for bigger targets.

Now, we hear of many sort of

29:30 **great stories of the war, sometimes with friends do you hear stories and you think to yourself that's not true, or that can't be true?**

Yes.

What sort of stuff?

Well, particularly when we're doing this book, there was one particular ship in Oro Bay, it was sunk by Japanese planes. She had settled down but they pushed her into shore, one of the skippers who had a little ship, the Zoe,

30:00 only a tiny little thing. With two other ships they pushed her into the shore so she sat up in the mud, and they eventually cleaned her out, pumped her out and took her back to Sydney. But on that ship, I've got the notes from 3 different fellows, who all claim they shot down the plane that sunk that ship. In the official reports, it was a navy

30:30 destroyer that shot it all. Also there was another ship, she was sunk 30 miles outside Oro Bay anyway, and she had a lot of passengers. A lot of our blokes went up on her as passengers. She was shot up, she was finally sunk, and finally some of our blokes were killed there as well as some Americans. Again, the destroyer that

31:00 was escorting her shot down at least one plane that I can remember, but there were others when they were writing to us to give information said that we shot down 3 planes and 4 planes, and you knew that it couldn't all be true. There was another time when one of our skippers took a little boat into Buna, before Buna had been taken, the Japs still had it, and he was

31:30 telling us that he saw an American plane shot down over the airport at Buna, and he had an American general on board and he said, "I think we've gone too far captain, I think we should go back." Well that never happened. That's just absolute bull. He told me that he went back and delivered some 25 pounder ammunition to some soldiers back to a particular, I don't think it's even on the map it's only a little spot,

32:00 and I said … but we had been there, or rather I'll put it this way. We did actually take ammunition there but that was later. The 3 ships that were

32:30 on the cover of the book, they were taking among other things, 25 pounder ammunition to the soldiers, to the Australian soldiers at this place. They were towing a Japanese barge with a portable hospital, they called it, and they were all sunk. I know for a fact that those soldiers ashore a lot of them were killed. The guns were on one of our ships, and it sank

33:00 so they had no guns there at all. Sometimes I've found that they don't tell lies, but things get embedded

in their conscious. I'll tell you a story, I don't really like telling this on tape, but however, it's the truth, and if I'm condemned, I'm condemned. I was talking with a fellow in this house one day, and he'd been at Buna, and we just got talking. I didn't even know he'd been up there. And I said, "Where were you?" And he said

33:30 "Buna." He was with the army. I said, "Oh? What?" he said, "I was with headquarters." And I said, "I know, you were in a tent and a bomb landed near it, flattened and nobody was killed. But a bloke in a truck was incinerated." And he said, "How do you know?" I said, "Because I was there. I could hear that bloke screaming." He said, "That's impossible." And I said, "Why?" And he said

34:00 "Because you didn't get up until months later. I worked it out and he was right. I felt so silly. I felt like I told a lie and yet I hadn't told a lie. What had happened, I think, that Lofty that I was talking about before. When we got to Buna the first time, he told us about this ship that was sunk there, bombs had been dropped down the hold, and a lot of Australian soldiers were killed. This other ship I was talking about that was sunk down in the mud, and he told us about this headquarters tent where the

34:30 bombs were dropped down and it flattened it and that nobody was hurt. And that this poor bugger in the truck was hit, and he was screaming. Now, he used to tell his stories so vividly that you wished he hadn't. He used to tell you some stories! That had gotten into my subconscious, and I hadn't realised it. I had been talking about that for years and always sincerely believed that it was true, that I was there and I saw that soldier burn in the truck. I heard him scream, but I realise

35:00 that it's impossible. It must have just got into my subconscious enough. I think that's happened with a lot of other people. They thought they'd shot down this plane, or done this. And it's not that it didn't really happen or that they're telling lies, it just happens.

Thanks for sharing that, Bill. You've written a book, "The Forgotten Fleet". Why have you written that book?

Because

35:30 a mate was sitting here one day, Frank Finch, who'd been in the small ships. He said, "It's 60 years and nobody has ever written a word about the small ships. Nobody has ever heard of them, nobody knows anything about them." And I said, "That's right." Ruth was in here doing some ironing, and she said, "Why don't you fellas write it?" And I said, "Yeah, why not?" So we did, and that was it. I might add, that Ruth did about 2/3 of the work.

36:00 She got her name in the ads as the editor, but she did a lot more than just editing it. Frank lived up in Kyogle and he came down here for a week, and said he'd like to help with the book. I gave him some library cards and I said, "Now, look, you go through those lists, and put down the names and the date of birth and the ships they were on, that's going to help me a lot when I go through and do the final." He was there a week

36:30 and I got the card, and it was hopeless. There wasn't a single one that was correct that I could use. He was a nice bloke and he means well but he's not an author, you know! So Ruth's doing it this time. She'll probably put down about 16th century drama.

Do you think it was the forgotten transport line to New Guinea?

Well, as I've said several times tonight, there were the

37:00 Dutch ships and that's about all until the first Liberties came in, I think about June or July '43. Up till that time, there were one or two, there was an English ship, it was bombed up in Milne Bay. It wasn't sunk, it was bombed, and was towed back to Australia, I just can't think of the name. There were a couple of American ships that were bombed and a

37:30 couple of Dutch ships that were bombed. That was it. There were no ships at all to take the cargoes, you know the guns, the ammunition, the troops and everything, from say Oro Bay up further. So without the small ships, without the Dutch ships, they couldn't have done it. The American ships in the early part were a non-entity. Until the second half of '43 they wrote and they wanted…

38:00 the admiral of the Pacific… said he couldn't spare any ships, he didn't have enough for himself. That they didn't have enough planes. It was just that, they simply just didn't have enough. So Macarthur's strategy from that point of view was good. Otherwise they just couldn't have got the supplies up there. Major General Herring, we're going to give you a book anyway, who you'll see in it, he praised

38:30 these small ships highly for that.

Tape 9

00:35 **Ok, Bill, what's the story?**

This story isn't in the old book, it's going in the new book. When the old book was finished, we sold out

and I got this letter from this fellow in Western Australia telling me that he'd been on a little ship at Lae, and they went 150 miles north, anyway I'll go on from there.

01:00 I rang him later when we decided to write this book. Frank rang me from Finschhafen and said, "You know we have this fella who was a prisoner of war," and I said, "Oh, I didn't know that." He told me and I remembered that we got this letter months and months ago. Well not months, several years ago. So I rang him up in Western Australia and he repeated the story almost word for word as he had it in the letter he sent to me. He said he went a 150 miles north of Lae and I said, "But that was all Japanese

01:30 territory." And he said, "That's right. This plane had been shot down there and we went to pick the crew up. When I got there all my crew were shot, I was taken prisoner, taken back to," Indonesia – I forget where he told me. Anyway, he told me Indonesia. He said, "I was put in an interrogation camp and I found out that nobody lasted there for more than 3 weeks. At the end of the

02:00 third week, they gave me a shovel to dig a trench and while I was digging this trench I heard the two guards talking about how they were going to kill me. One wanted to shoot me, and the other wanted to chop my head off." I'm thinking to myself, "My God, your Japanese must be very good." And then he told me that they had an air raid that night, on the last night, and that he escaped in the confusion. He said, "I had to kill a guard first, I had to strangle him with my bare hands".

02:30 And then he said he took a Japanese fishing boat. And I'm thinking what the hell would a Japanese fishing boat be doing in Indonesia, they've got millions of them there?" He said it had already been packed with goods and they got out to sea, headed for Darwin, got off at Bathurst Island, or Melbourne Island, one of the two, and an American submarine popped up. It was the [USS] Swordfish. Well we checked on the Swordfish and it was a real submarine

03:00 but it had never been in that particular part before, ever. Anyway, he said that this Swordfish took them into Darwin, and he got his first bout of malaria the day he arrived in Darwin, was in hospital that night, and would you believe two lines down in his letter – two lines down – he said they took him straight back to Oro Bay and he had his first bout of malaria in Oro Bay.

03:30 I'm thinking to myself, aside from having malaria, why would they send him straight back to Oro Bay? Surely the intelligence blokes would want to talk to him, find out about the prison camps and what was going on there. No, sent him straight back. The next thing he tells me is he's gone to Canada, and he joins a ship there. We looked up the records and that ship had finished up the war. It had never been attacked, never been sunk, nothing. It was such a ship

04:00 but it finished the war intact. Then he said that after this ship sank another picked them up, and lo and behold the next day it was sunk. And another ship picked them up and it was sunk. It just got to be, anyway, at first I thought, then I thought, "Why shouldn't I publish that?" Because this bugger had a memorial put up in Western Australia. Got the government, in fact I've got his letter here, saying how wonderful it was, and what a wonderful man Jim was

04:30 being a prisoner of war, and he told me he got $20,000 from the government for bring a prisoner of war. I rang, I got the name of the bloke who was in charge of it, and I rang Canberra, and he said, "Well hang on I'll look up the book." And he looked it up and he said, "No, no such name in the book." It was all bullshit. So I rang him again, and I said, "Look, this is very important. I can't publish this

05:00 unless I've got some verification. Can you send me the letter you got from the department telling you're getting this $20,000, or some other details about the prisoner of war camp?" And he said, "I don't know that I've got it, I'll have a look." sort of thing. The next thing we get a letter from his wife, saying that Jim is a very sick man and there is to be no more correspondence, but she did send us an

05:30 official document saying that he had been on the Marjory Jean, which was one of our little ships, and I'd say that's about all. I've decided now that I will publish the letter, but not put his name there obviously. I feel a little bit sorry for him, he must be very, very sick. The secretary of the Red Ensign, which is a journal that circulates to the merchant sailors in Australia,

06:00 I asked him if he knew him at one stage, and he said, "Yes, I knew him. I went over there when the governor was to unveil that memorial and he got cranky with me because I didn't put his letter in the Red Ensign," the journal. He said, "Oh, it was too far fetched for me. I couldn't accept that." And I said, "That's what I thought too."

So Anzac Day for you. What does that mean?

Nothing. I don't go to Anzac Day. Oh, I won't say nothing.

06:30 I feel in a way that it is important, particularly for the blokes that were the First World [war] diggers, even though Anzac was a dead loss for us. It does represent a lot in terms of Australia spirit and bravery and all that sort of thing. Suffering. That's what I was telling you about what we've got in the book, who took a bullet through the jaw and then he lost his

07:00 eye, and so on. I don't know what it is. I just, don't go on marches or hit clubs, or I never joined the RSL [Returned and Services League], but I don't think it's wrong for other people to do it. I think people should remember these things. I think if you don't, history's important, if you drop history you

07:30 lose the future. That's what I think. But that doesn't mean that you've got to go and march everywhere. I'm not knocking the people who do – lots of my friends do every year, but my first school, the Anglican minister came up to me one day. We were quite good friends and he said, "Bill, they've asked me will you organise the Anzac Day march? It's always been a tradition for the school teachers to

08:00 organise this." And I said, "Oh, I don't really like to do it." And he said, "Look, if you all just front up, I'll do the actual organising." I said, "That's OK, I'll go down there." So I went down there at dawn and we marched, in this little old ghost town. It was funny you know. The secretary of the

08:30 citizens' association, what do you call them? The parents and citizens association, that's right. He was the one behind it, he really wanted it. He got out there and he threw his chest out, "bomp, bomp, bomp, bomp," down the street, and stopping for the religious ceremony and all this sort of thing. I found out afterwards, his war service,

09:00 he was a farmer. He'd been called up, went to Sydney with his father. Went in, had his medical, got his uniform, and his father said he'd been up to the manpower and the manpower had decided to he's in protected industry – they need him to stay on the farm. So he gave the uniform back and went back to the farm. I met a lot of people like that. Like they've never seen anything or done anything, but they want to throw their chest out, and I don't know.

09:30 I mean, I don't really know. I just don't do it myself, and I just don't, as I said I never joined the RSL or anything like that. Lots of good blokes, like this commando out here, he does, and lots of other blokes I know. Did their duty, did everything they were supposed to do.

Given that you studied psychology at university, how did you actually change? How did the war actually change you from a 16, or

10:00 **15 year old entering it, to the end? How were you changed when it was over?**

I think I grew up quite a lot, whatever that means. But after the war, I went around to the banks. I would have been the most hopeless person in a bank. I hate all that clerical work and anything like that. They wouldn't put me on because I hadn't finished high school, I'd only done one year of high school and failed.

10:30 I worked in factories and that, and I hated that kind of work. So I decided finally, I thought of psychology for a while actually. I didn't major in psychology. English and history was the thing I really loved. So I went back to night school. First of all I

11:00 started the Intermediate Certificate, because I'd never done that. But I found it was too easy and I gave that away and I went straight on to do the HSC [Higher School Certificate]. Not the HSC, it was called the Leaving Certificate in those days. I did 4 years French in one year, I worked in a factory in the day time, went to the gym at night – I wasn't boxing professionally at that time, but I used to try and keep fit. I went to school at night, went home after school and studied.

11:30 It was pretty busy but I enjoyed it. I loved learning. Didn't matter what it was, even bloody trying economics! So that was it. Then I won a scholarship to university and met my fate.

What would you like to say to future generations about war?

I think war is horrible. I think it's caused by greed.

12:00 I think what we should be doing is watching, of course in a lot of countries they don't have democracy, so they can't vote people in and out and do a great deal about it. But we can. War has got be an absolute last resort and only in defence. You shouldn't, as they done here, pre-empt. I think that's dead wrong. I think that if you look back at all the wars,

12:30 you know go back to at least the Greeks, you find that war's always started one way or another by greed and power. They go together – greed and power are much the same. I think they're terrible things, nobody should have to go to war. When you can't avoid it, if you're attacked, and you have to defend your home, well you do your best. You get out there and you do everything you possibly can and you don't worry about yourself. You worry about your people, your country

13:00 and you fight as hard as you can.

Do you have any final comments you'd like to make?

Yeah, I'd like to see the government put more time into research of all sorts. More time and money into education so the kids learn more. Not just in schools but as far as possible by visiting other countries or

13:30 doing other jobs. A lot of people go to different countries but they never really learn anything. I found when I went to Canada and I worked in logging camps and mines and things like that, and here in Australia on sheep stations and trapping rabbits. Even in factories, you'd talk to people, like England in that old factory, like Alice working alongside me. They're all people and you learn a lot from them, things that you can't learn in school. I think

14:00 today for example, our kids they went on more excursions and things that we never went to. I think

that’s a great thing. They get to know other people. I think it’s a dreadful shame in this country, that, I forget the numbers now, but something like only 2000 people, I might be wrong about the numbers, are still in these bloody Gestapo camps here.

14:30 There’s a point, you don’t want to open the gates and let anybody in that wants to come in, but there’s better ways, there’s more civilized ways of treating them. I would think probably 99.9% of the people in these camps shouldn’t be there. They should be out working and earning, doing something for Australia. Those people, those 14 people they sent back to Indonesia, to my mind is ridiculous. I’ve got mates that say, “Oh, we don’t want those bastards

15:00 in here.” But it’s ignorance. That’s what I believe. Education will change all that, proper education, though. I mean in a broad sense. Lots of people can be educated without ever going to school, but school helps. (TAPE ENDS)