

Australians at War Film Archive

William Price (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1327>

Tape 1

00:38 **I just wanted to ask you about your life in brief, first up?**

Well, my father came out in 1911, and he and his brother and another friend. And they were farmers in England in Wales,

01:00 and they took up a small farm. And then my mother came out, she was a nurse, a Red Cross nurse in the First World War, came out and found my Dad. I think they were in the same choir in the church when they were in Wales together many years before that. So she knew of him.

01:30 So, I was born in 1922 and by the time I was three and a half I had lost my mother. She had got cancer and died. And I often think, you know, in those days when the nurses were wheeling the x-rays around the hospitals, that they weren't protected by aprons or anything, you know.

02:00 And the other girl that came out from the same area and married my uncle, she died of cancer too, a bit later in life. So I often connect that with the nursing profession. I don't know how it rates over Australia, but the First World War nurses, I think, got it pretty rough. They weren't paid much either, practically nothing.

02:30 So from there I lived with relatives for a while. Another lady that was a midwife around Manangatang, she looked after me until I was about 7 or 8, plus the relatives had me occasionally.

03:00 From there, my father had left Manangatang and had started farming at Tongala. Actually, he'd left Manangatang with my mother, too, at the time, and she was so pleased to get out of the dry, dusty, smelly country. So that's where the cancer set in, and we lost her.

03:30 From there, when I came back and lived with my Dad, I was 8 year old and I was just baching with him. And I was going to school, I think I was probably in second grade by the time I came back. This was a five teacher school. It was a lot better than the Manangatang one, where they only had two teachers.

04:00 It was much better. I got on a better at school there. Later on in life, when I got the merit certificate, the next school really was Echuca. That was going to cost old Dad a shilling each day just for the fares to go up there. So a lot of us just went to school and got first jobs. I worked in a

04:30 butter factory, just as a bit of a bookkeeper and helping answering phones and one thing and another for 15 shillings a week. I spotted a better job a little bit later, as a baker, driving the baker's cart around the town, for a pound a week. And then later on,

05:00 one of the chaps that I was very friendly with, he joined the navy and he had a job at 2 pound 5, working in the orchards. So I put in for his job, as just a neighbour actually. So that was the best pay I had till I got in the navy, and I don't think it improved for a long time. It was pretty low pay. My education, I did, I went back to the local school teacher. I used to go there once

05:30 a week to get up to the Intermediate standard. And from there, I went down to Taylor's College and got a one-on-one teacher to try and get up to this standard at least, because I was very interested in signalling, and particularly wireless. Anyway, we had an exam at Port Melbourne,

06:00 and that was in 38, 1939, October 39. I was still only 17 then. So anyway, they let me know later they'd got their quota, and was I still desirous of joining the navy. And I said, "Oh, yes," and they called me up as in the seaman's branch

06:30 in April, just a week after my birthday. I was 18 then. And this was a permanent naval course. It was much longer than a lot of them. It was the best part of eight months. Doing seamanship, signals, torpedo courses.

07:00 I think I mentioned signals as one of my best subjects, because I could send Morse code and read it. We

had another farmer that wasn't living far from us. I learnt the Morse code and tapping it out with this chap. He was in the First World War,

- 07:30 a naval man. So I came on armed with that, and that helped me a lot in exams and in the navy. Signals was my best subject, and seamanship, I think mainly. I got fairly good passes right through. Then we were waiting for the first draft
- 08:00 and it was to the [HMAS] Sydney. Now the Sydney was over in the Mediterranean, and I was sort of looking forward to this, but then there were hold ups when she was coming back to Australia. Which she didn't come straight back, it was the following February, this was about, getting on the end of December. And we had to wait till she came back
- 08:30 So we were part of a crew, because a lot of those got drafted off to other ships. So, there was about 30 of us, I think, in this group that joined the Sydney. And my part of the ship was the quarterdeck. My action stations on that ship
- 09:00 were the handing rooms. This was next to the magazine. When action stations are sounded, all watertight doors behind you as you run through are closed. When you go down to the magazine, the hatch up top is closed and screwed down and can only be opened from the top. You're down there. There's
- 09:30 no way you'll get out. So, and from there, you're taking cordites through the wall from the cordite room. Next to us, in another partition, was the shell room, coming through from the magazine too. So we were handling cordite and there was a chute that you sent the cordite up in.
- 10:00 This you could open from the bottom of the chutes if it was opened at the top. This came about because of the battle in the First World War when some of the flashes had gone straight down through to the magazines and blew the ships up. So this was a precaution that come in, that you couldn't open the chute if it was open at the top.
- 10:30 Well then, once you could open it, you just pushed the cordite in, closed it and it went straight up to the gun. So they had the cordite coming up from us, the shells from the room next door coming up. They were 100 pound shells. They'd just land those on a tray and straight in, cordite. So that was my action station on the Sydney.
- 11:00 My cruising station was the four inch gun deck, and this was behind the second funnel. There were four single guns there, high angle guns. And so we had a good training on those. We had gunners' mates and those types running around training you all the time, because this was a real
- 11:30 training ship, and you know, nothing was slack, you were on the go. And once you'd been in 12 months, you were able to stand then for an examination for an able seaman. You had to be able to pass that, otherwise you held off, I think a month or whatever it was. Anyhow I got through that.
- 12:00 From there, you were, there's still no slackness. On the, when we were at sea, the first thing at dawn stand to was
- 12:30 that we would be closed up to our guns, my action station being down in the handing room, and from there you waited there till the all clear. The plane usually has flown off the... We had a plane that was catapulted off, that searched the horizons, and gave the all clear. You know,
- 13:00 made sure there were no enemies about. So this was the way the Sydney was run, and I think it was the same with all cruisers, those that had planes. And so, just give us a break for a second, I'm getting a bit dry.

Oh do you need some water?

Oh no, continuing the story of my

- 13:30 naval career. I'll leave the Sydney for a while. After I left the Sydney, I was drafted to a destroyer, HMAS Vampire, that was operating around Singapore, and from there I went to the [HMAS] Colac, which was a corvette. And
- 14:00 that operated up and down the coast, and particularly from Townsville through [Port] Moresby and around the north with troops and one thing and another, convoy. And last but not least, I went to a very safe ship. I'd left the Colac and put in for a
- 14:30 leading seaman's course. You didn't get many chances to go for these things, you know, because we were all fairly busy most of the time. And a lot of permanent navy fellows finished at the end of the war and were still ABs [Able Seamen], see, they hadn't had time to sit for these exams. So anyway, I thought I'd put in for a course, passed the, to a leading seaman.
- 15:00 You're acting leading seaman there for 12 months then, they don't make you, you're on trial for quite a while. I put in for the divers' course, because on the Sydney I had been in a divers' party once on the Swan River, and I sort of thought, "That'd be nice walking around there, with the heavy boots and the big helmet," you know, because that's what the divers wore in those days.

- 15:30 And I'd find that interesting, I'd like that. So I put in for a divers' course, but they must have had enough divers or something, because I didn't get to do that course, they shot me straight back up to New Guinea. So I was there waiting for a draft, and somebody put in for a very experienced seaman, to go to the
- 16:00 Gerard. And so this was a very small ship, and it was quite a shock actually. From Milne Bay I went up to Padang to catch this ship. And I said, "What's she like?" you know. Once I got there, I'd landed, I was talking to one of the blokes on the shore, and he said, "You'll hear it, it's due in, you'll see it coming round the
- 16:30 corner." And it had the auxiliary engine, and every now and again, bang, and there'd be a smoke circle go up, you know, and then bang again, you know. So I thought, "Good God, is this it? So have I come to this." Anyway, we had a lot of fun aboard that ship. We were... It was a store ship, really.
- 17:00 Unfortunately they had taken the sails off it - it used to have sails. It had been the ship for inspecting... What do they call them, Tom? Excuse me for a second. For putting, when you put chaps on...? The pilots, yes.
- 17:30 Going back a bit, in Sydney she was used as a pilot ship. They had taken all the sails off it and just made it out on its auxiliary motor. And this is all we had to get along with. So, the Yanks had found it too slow to keep up with the forces from going to island to island, so we were mainly stuck up around New Guinea and those areas there,
- 18:00 just carting stores backwards and forwards from Moresby to Milne Bay and that sort of thing. And that was a ship I felt safe on because it was a very small ship. There was only 24 of us aboard this thing. And I thought, "Now, the Japs won't waste a torpedo on this. They might surface and put a gun on us, perhaps, but we won't
- 18:30 get torpedoed, that'll be for sure, cause the torpedo is worth just as much as the ship," in my opinion at that time, which was downgrading it terrible. But we did do a lot of good work, just shifting stores along the coast, back again. And I think our biggest cargo was some torpedoes from Moresby, shifting them around to Milne Bay,

19:00 that type of thing. And.

And then did the war finish up on this ship?

Yes, the war did finish on that ship. It was strange. They'd broken down in Milne Bay, and the injectors were American

- 19:30 and we were held up for parts. So, we got in with the army chaps who were on boats that used to go up the rivers and that sort of thing, and they were pretty good. They had a supply of hand grenades, charged to jelly, and we were pretty keen
- 20:00 on fishing, so they were supplying those. But prior to this, we noticed one day there in Moresby, there was this float that was floating past and the top of it had already been cut out. So we dived over and rescued this thing and then we took it to our army blokes, got a rudder welded onto it,
- 20:30 a bit of a keel underneath, not very much, so as we could sail it. I was always interested in sailing. And we went out to the 17 mile dump out there, and we got a lot of rigging, and we had a bit of duct on board that we made into sails, so we used it for sailing. But it was very handy without the sails, because
- 21:00 when a ship... We were a bit hard up for stores, and when there was an American ship there, we worked in with the army blokes and they'd... There's a net down below, as you can imagine, these tides, fairly big drop in the tide there. And we'd probably be down under the wharf a bit, you know, on the other side. So we were working
- 21:30 in with the army. And we wanted a case of oranges once. They'd come out from California, beautiful oranges. They'd just kick them into the net and we'd take them into the boat and lay them aboard the Gerard. But the real prize one day was a big side of bacon, and so anyway, they kicked that over into the net and we got that out.
- 22:00 We took it aboard and down in the storeroom. And we had a chap there by the name of Jefferies, he was the other leading seaman. And Jefferies was in charge of the store. And we had a bloke, two-and-a-half ringer, we didn't have much respect for him really, we called him Snookums. And Snookums
- 22:30 was a chap who had been recruited for the navy somehow or other, being a stevedore or something, but he wasn't quite up with all the naval talk. So anyway, this particular day, Snookums was down in the store, and he said to Jefferies, "What's that?" And Jefferies said, "Well that's a rabbit, sir."
- 23:00 "Any fool can see it's not a rabbit, it's too fat." Now, how it comes about, when you're talking about things you've won, they're always rabbits. When you're going ashore, somebody might yell out to you, you know, to tuck the ears in on these rabbits, you know, cause you've taken something from the boat - it might be a pound of butter or something, taken home. So anyway, he said, "No, no," he said "don't be

silly. It's not a rabbit. It's too fat."

- 23:30 So we had a great laugh about that for ages. And so here it was. So, when war finished, we'd been saving up our grog [alcohol] - we got two bottles of beer a week. You know, if you could get it to the Yanks, it was worth a carton of cigarettes. So
- 24:00 this is what we were planning on, you know, because we thought, "Next trip we'll probably be back to Cairns or somewhere, or around the top, and we'll meet some Yanks and swap it for cartons of cigarettes." But anyway, war finished and we decided to drink all this grog. We'd had some whisky, too, that we'd bought.
- 24:30 That was worth big money if we could get that to them. So we decided to drink it all. Of course, we were pretty inebriated by the time we finished all this. And two of my mates got in this boat, which was already rigged, and they decided they were going to sail over to the army boat and continue with the celebrations over there, if they had any. And anyway,
- 25:00 about halfway over they got in a bit of a wind shift and the thing tipped over. And of course, everything was quiet on the harbour because the war had finished, there wasn't many boats getting about, and so they were there with this thing upside down. And so they thought, "I bet if we're quick enough, we might be able to right this thing, get the water out of it,
- 25:30 and get back in it." So they righted it, but they couldn't get the water out of it. It just sunk below them. So, then it was looking out for the nearest place to swim to, which was quite a distance. So one of my mates, he'd been a lifesaver on the Gold Coast and he was a pretty good swimmer, the other chap wasn't too good, so a married man too,
- 26:00 and very worried about getting back. So, anyway Albert swam with him for a long time and helped him, and finally Albert was at the stage where he wanted to rest himself. So he wasn't terribly far from a bit of coral, so he swam over to that, got his breath and by the time he got back, this Freddie Siggs was nearly gone, but anyway,
- 26:30 managed to save him. Well all the messages he had to give to his wife. So yes, that was the end of that little sailing boat that we had. And it was the end of the war.

And tell us Bill, just briefly, what your postwar life has been like?

Yes.

- 27:00 Well, after the war, well since the war finished, I was the only permanent naval man on board, all these others were getting out. So I put in a request to get out. And so anyway the captain come to me one day, this was about three
- 27:30 months later, we were still getting down the coast. And he said, "It looks as though something's come of your request to get out. You've been drafted down to Port Melbourne." I said, "Oh well, sir," I said, "that's where I joined, and that's probably where they'll discharge me." I was hopeful. So anyway, when I got down there, I fell in with the demob [demobilisation] crowd
- 28:00 and they said, "Well there's nothing here for you. We'll have to get in touch with the navy board and check up on it." So I got called up the next day, and they said, "You're not getting out. You're corporal of the guard, Flinders Naval Depot." I thought, "Oh God, this of all things," because dressed up in the Guard... And
- 28:30 this was a job where you were putting sentries on gates, and one thing and another, and around the depot. And it was the leading division. You had to be spick and span for divisions on Sunday. You were the leading division and all this sort of thing. So, become very good at squad drill and drilling guards. So, anyway, I put in another request,
- 29:00 and I was told, you know, I was only just becoming useful, virtually not by the commodore, by the officer of the day, so I don't like your chances of getting out. So I put in this request to get out, and I was using the old Dad. I said, "He's on the farm and he's 60, and he's having a bit of trouble handling it,"
- 29:30 you know. And I really wanted to get out and help on the farm. And, "No, Price. About turn." Out I went, still in the navy. So that was, I forget his name, Fearless Frank Farncombe, he was navy from boots to the top, and
- 30:00 so I couldn't get out. I put in another request a bit later on, the same bloke there. I thought I'd got a letter from my Dad, and one thing and another, and put it to the officer of the day, and from there I thought, "Now I might get out this time." So it was another about turn, and, "No." So
- 30:30 it was getting to pretty desperate. I was getting into almost 47. But what I did enjoy while I was down there, when I landed down there in 46, I was always good at football. And I was picked for the, oh no it wasn't 46, when I first joined the navy.
- 31:00 I was a pretty rough sort of a kid, apparently, I bowled a few over and there was a four-ringer on the... looking at the talent, you know, on the boundary and he called me over. And I thought, "By crikey. I'm in

trouble for being too rough." And, "What's your name?" And I said, "Oh, Price, sir." "We've been watching you, we'd like you to play with the Mornington, with the depot team

- 31:30 in the Mornington Peninsula League." And, "Would you be willing to join us?" And I said, "Oh yes." He said, "It will mean training with the depot team Tuesday and Thursday nights, and you'll probably lose half your Saturday when you're ashore." And I said, "I don't think that'll worry me much." "And when you join, you're not allowed up the line until
- 32:00 you've finished your squad drill and everything, and look like a sailor." So this was around about three weeks, and I had my first game on the Melbourne Cricket Ground. So I thought this was good, almost like a celebrity. So I enjoyed me sport there, very much. It got me out of a lot of other things. I didn't
- 32:30 have to play rugby, soccer or any of the other team... I didn't mind playing cricket, but I was kept out of that too because I kept into the Aussie Rules [football]. So yes, again, at the end of the war I lined up again and I was accepted again as a footballer. But we hadn't had any training, you know, but we were a bit stale. But yes, once again, I was in the Mornington
- 33:00 Peninsula League and enjoying my football. So when I got knocked back the next time, I thought you know, "At least I'm enjoying my sport here and one thing or another." There was a two-and-a-half ringer - Tom would remember this. The parade ground was attached to the gunnery school, and there's this two-and-a-half ringer there, he's watching me and
- 33:30 he noticed I'm a leading seaman, so he called me over. I'd been drawing them pretty well, and he called me over. He said, "I've been watching you. I'd like to get you into the gunnery school and put you through a gunnery course, probably up as high as a first rate gunnery course and you'll be right for a petty officer." So I said, "I'll think about it, sir."
- 34:00 I couldn't say, "No." I'll think about it, because I was getting determined to get out. As luck had it, this commodore was shifted. He was elevated, I think, and along comes Showers, Commodore Showers. So this was good.
- 34:30 During the war I used to go out to his mother's place - we were slightly related to him and knew his sister, knew his mother, knew his father. And his father and my father were cousins. So, and Showers arrived down there. I said - I'd got in touch with my Dad and I said, "You write him a letter and tell him how hard things
- 35:00 are on the farm," and I said, "I'll put a request in to get out." And by this time there was a lot of navy fellows who were out. They'd been out for about two years and they were coming back in as an interim force, a lot of them, and joining up again. And so they weren't needing us so much then. That helped me to get out too, I suppose.
- 35:30 Anyway I put in this request, and the next thing I was out, in 1947. And but I was still charged for breaking my contract. You join for 12 years, so there's got to be a cost to this sort of thing, and its 25 pounds, well basic wage at that time, was around about four pounds I think. So this was, you know,
- 36:00 five or six times the basic wage, which these days can be quite a big sum. So it probably looked a big sum then. Anyway, we had to pay that, which we didn't mind. So the next thing, I was out. I had met Doreen while I was still in the navy in 1946, struck her at a dance, and
- 36:30 so I told her my intentions. And she hadn't been on the farm. So I took her up to the farm, and things were a little bit primitive. The shed wasn't very big, and we had to increase the herds - he'd only been milking 30 - but he had a mixture of cows,
- 37:00 and so, I suppose I was a bit critical of him in a way. But anyway, we decided that... There was a herringbone dairy being built not far from us, about 20 mile away, and this was an experimental thing. The first one had been built in New Zealand. And this, the dairy farmer, the dairy
- 37:30 inspectors, and one or two from the agricultural college, were very keen to get another one built. So we went over and had a look at this, and he had 59 cows or something like that. And crikey, in about 20 minutes, or 40 minutes I think it was, they were all finished, out. That was ten a side, this one. They were up on
- 38:00 platforms about three or four feet, and they were stacked in like a herringbone, with their backsides pointing towards you, and the heads out the front. And so that was a very fast way of milking cows. You didn't have to bend down, put the udder on, the cups on the level. And so I came home.
- 38:30 Prior to this, I had rang up four or five farmers because I wanted to be pretty sure that we all agreed on this thing, you know. So we came back. The whole lot of us would have built these herringbone dairies. But anyway, mine was the first in Tongala and the second... No, it was another bloke at Kyabram beat me. He was a bit wealthier, I think, at the
- 39:00 time and a bit quicker at getting it up. So they had a big field day there, and then we had a big field day at ours. And being a good Anglican, we had the priest up there running a mission and he hit on the idea: "We'll bless the dairy." So we had the

- 39:30 band from the Salvation Army, they were out there, and playing the drums and everything, the music. And we had this blessing of the dairy. So that was the initiation of the thing. We had a huge crowd there too, not only parishioners, but other farmers from around the area.
- 40:00 So, a lot of them stuck around for that night to see us milk the cows, so this was the general thing. Nearly every night for quite a while, there'd be, or afternoon, even if they didn't come to see you milking, these farmers, the dairy inspectors, had been along to have a look at these new dairies. This was the way to go, so.
- 40:30 **We'll just have to pause there, because we're coming to the end of the tape.**
- 40:38 **- TAPE ENDS**

Tape 2

- 00:36 **What sort of news were you hearing about a possible war coming, sort of in around 1938/39?**
- Yes well, a few of my elder
- 01:00 school mates, you know, a bit older than me, they were joining around, 38, you know. We'd come through the Depression, and one thing and other, and work was starting to get a bit more plentiful. And instead of these 15 bob a week jobs, or whatever it was, that we had as kids, I decided to join the navy. And I remember
- 01:30 one chap, ex-World War 1, and he had been in the Victorian navy, the states had navies in those days, or at least Victoria did, anyway. And he deserted that, for some reason, so they didn't cut the corner off them like they do now, they just put R-A-N on them, RAN [Royal Australian Navy], you know.
- 02:00 So anyway, when the First World War started, he joined and he was a cook. So, he said, "At least I could boil up me clothes and get the lice out of it." But he said, "If you're going to join..." And he got two of his sons joined the navy, one went down on the Sydney, a great mate of mine, but he said,
- 02:30 "You're always clean, and if you're on watch or anything, you know, they bring what they call kai," a very heavy cocoa, very rich, you know, "on watch. You get a glass of that." You had to be on watch for quarter of an hour, before you start to get your eyes focussed for the dark and that sort of thing. This
- 03:00 cup of kai was good, you know. At action stations, of course, you got nothing because we were all on duty, including the cooks.
- And so what was the attraction about the navy for you?**
- The attraction, we knew about Showers, he was a commander. I'd been over in
- 03:30 Adelaide at a scout camp, and I was a rover scout, I think then. And he was on the [HMAS] Adelaide as a commander, you know, and I thought, "That would be lovely," you know, "being on a ship like that." And it started getting into my system a bit. So apart from what this old Wally McGowan told us, you know, "Join the navy," I was leading up to it.
- 04:00 I'd been fairly friendly with another farmer who was teaching me signals and that. He'd been a signalman in the First World War. And I was pretty good at tapping out Morse code and reading signals and one thing and another.
- Do you want to have a drink of water?**
- I'd better have another drink, getting a bit... You're not taping this at the moment, are you?
- Yes.**
- I'm sorry. I didn't realise you were doing it.
- Oh no, don't worry about it.**
- 04:30 Oh, I'm going back over something that I didn't think was relevant.
- Oh no, no, no. This is exactly what we want.**
- Oh, is it? So, where was I up to?
- We were talking about your interest in the navy, and that growing interest before you joined and where that had come from.**
- And so, a few of these young blokes, they'd become sort of
- 05:00 mentors to you, you know. They'd joined the navy and you'd meet them when they come on leave, and all this. And so, anyway, when my turn came, they called me up when I turned 18, and down I went, so I

was very pleased to get there. And the first thing that you hear there is, when

- 05:30 you land in, you're usually driven down by a bus or something, a crowd of you. And the so-called old-timers, they've only been in a few weeks probably, say, "You'll be sorry." That's the first thing you hear, you know. So anyway, it was a bit light then, almost the evening when we got down there, it might have been 7 o'clock, so we hadn't had
- 06:00 anything to eat. So the first meal was tripe and onions, and I'd been baching as I mentioned before, and I don't think I'd ever eaten it. So here's all these other lads that'd just left their mothers, complaining like hell about this tripe and onions - they didn't like it. So I hoed into it,
- 06:30 and I thought, "This is lovely," you know. It was the first meal, I thought, so, "and I didn't have to cook it," you know. I did a lot of my own cooking before I joined the navy, and I didn't go much on my Dad's soups either. Anyway, I enjoyed that and the meals were particularly good. And from there to the Sydney, the meals were excellent.
- 07:00 And from there to the Vampire, was a little bit unfortunate there. She was a First World War, built at the end of the First World War. She didn't have the storage, the coolstores for food. The breads in that tropical area was starting to go green in a day and a half, so the cooks used to make dampers,
- 07:30 and we used that, which was quite nice. I love dampers.

Can you tell me your memories of when you heard that war had been declared?

Yes. Well I'd sort of made up my mind I was going to join up the navy before it started, and

- 08:00 but once it started, yes, I decided to go down and sit for an exam. I was hoping to become a signalman, or anything to do with wireless, or anything. I was more interested in that actually, than signalling, you know, semaphore and Morse code. I'd rather be tapping it.
- 08:30 So, but anyway, at that time, it was still pretty early times and they got a quota and I got a letter, this was about October, might have been November, said they'd got their quota and was I still desirous to join the navy? And I wrote back and said, "Yes." So they called me when, just when I turned 18, in April 1940.
- 09:00 So.

And can you remember hearing anything about [Robert] Menzies' [Prime Minister of Australia] speech on the radio on anything, declaring that, saying that war had been declared?

Yes I do certainly remember that.

Where were you when you heard that?

- 09:30 I'm not sure whether I'd just joined the navy, or still thinking about it. But Bob was overseas, I think, at the time, and I just forget the, what his speech was like now. But you know, that didn't trouble us much, the Japs weren't in the war, and convoys that we started on,
- 10:00 which was convoy on the Prince of Wales fleet. The Queen Mary, not the Prince of Wales. The two big queens - the Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth - and Aquitania, Zealandia and other ships. And conveying those across the [Great Australian] Bight. Because those big ships, they travel at a fair speed.
- 10:30 And cruisers are very sharp-ended, and when you're going, you know, we must have been doing pretty close to the 30 knots whatever that they wanted to do, and they could go much faster than that. So we were slicing through these waves, and if you got in a really rough sea, they were breaking up as high as B turret. You couldn't go out on the deck, not even on a cruiser, there was a line there that you, that you had a fair chance of being
- 11:00 washed over, you know in a really rough sea, but we always had this, one manila line, right down both sides, that you could hang on to.

And when you went to Flinders, we were talking about the food on the first night. What other, what were your impressions of being at Flinders in the first couple of days there?

Well actually I liked it. The

- 11:30 drill and all that didn't worry me. I, you know, had lived a pretty hard life, I thought, and this wasn't worrying me. The food was excellent, and plum pudding on a Sunday, see, I didn't often have that with all the trimmings. And so this continued on the Sydney because we had good cooks on there and terrific storage. And I remember the storage
- 12:00 room, cause it carted sides of beef and lambs and everything down there, helping. You had to have a duffel coat on when you were working down there, which was a very heavy coat - it was freezing. And we had 12 gallon cans of milk, you know, fresh milk. This was unbelievable, you know, this was good.

12:30 Life was very good. So, yes, so.

And you mentioned you liked the drill. Can you tell me about the drill, what sort of things you'd be doing?

Well, the drill, I sort of enjoyed any thing like that, to a degree. The only time I got caught a bit short, you had to double everywhere

13:00 in those early days. So we'd been down the drill hall, I think. No, we'd been doing them in the gymnasium. And so anyway, while I was up in B block, we had 2 x 3 big blocks, they were then. After that there was army huts everywhere, cause there's a

13:30 general call-up of people, you know. So, anyway I decided I'd better go to the toilet before I go down there. So of course, everything happened that quick, and they were all gone. So anyway I run back down and had the drill instructor there, Saltmarsh, I think he became lieutenant after the war, but at that time, he was just a chief.

14:00 And I hadn't been taught how to climb ropes, and there was about ten of these ropes, that you, for the classes to be taught how to climb on ropes - how you gripped it with your feet, and held it, you could virtually hold it there, you know, while you got another grip with the arm. Anyhow I hadn't been taught that at this stage. So, he said, "Start on that rope there,

14:30 and keep going." And I got to the top of that one, just hand over hand. I didn't use my feet much. I didn't know how to use them. So, I was a pretty strong kid. So I don't know how many ropes I did, until finally I just had to let go. Anyway, I was never late again, I can tell you that. So this was how they treated you.

15:00 You know, you doubled everywhere, particularly the permanent navy fellows, they really wanted to make something of us.

Did you notice much of a difference between the permanent navy fellows and the ones who'd, who weren't...?

Yes, when they came in they did their six weeks squad drills, and they went through their seamanship and whatever they had to do, extremely quick. And

15:30 they, oh I don't know it might have been 90 days, I suppose. And the navy thought, "Well they'll learn on the ships." When they went to the ships, they weren't as well trained as we were, you know. We knew quite a lot of things, we were new enough to pass out for a leading seaman after we left the naval depot

16:00 because we were teed up on seamanship and the whole lot. We hadn't had the experience of seamanship at sea, you know, but we could answer a lot of questions.

Was there any sort of rivalry between the two different groups?

Ah, not really. We just accepted the fact. As a matter of fact, they stopped

16:30 taking permanent navy about July 1940. Because of the general call-up to get these people, ships were coming off the slips and one thing and another and they had to have the men to man them. So, and there was naval officers coming in that were perhaps school teachers or

17:00 whatever they were, you know, getting a very quick training. And some of those you respected very much, some of them were very good, and some were pretty average and you'd make fun of them, you know. Such as this chap we called Snookums, I think I've told you a little bit about, he was a bit of a slow learner.

17:30 **Can you tell me about some of the things that you were learning during your training at Flinders?**

Well mainly you went through different schools. You'd be going through the gunnery school, and learning everything about that. And then you'd be perhaps on torpedoes; you had to do

18:00 a course on that. From there, detonations with explosives, handling explosives, we had to do that and understand them, because often you're called on to explode things, you know, or you could be, we're pretty good at exploding things, to catch fish, that's how we learnt so quick.

18:30 So yes, it was a pretty good course really.

What was your favourite sort of classes?

Mainly the signals, though I still was a little bit disappointed that I hadn't been accepted, but I was good at it really.

19:00 Yes.

Was there anything that you didn't like about being in the navy, any particular...?

No, it's... We accepted it, so we were proud to be there, it was our duties, and our country needed us sort of thing, we knew the dangers.

19:30 One thing this chap that said, you know, "Join the navy, Bill." He said, "It's better than dying in a trench, mud and slush and everything." He said, "In the navy, if your ship goes down and you can't get out," he said, "all you've just got to take a few gulps of water, and it's all over, no pain." So that was how I looked at things, although if I'm locked up down below, that's what will happen.

20:00 You know, so you're not looking forward to it, but was prepared.

Did you think that there was much chance that, seeing as there was a war on, that things could go wrong, and you might...?

Yes, I can take you back to Singapore, when we first arrived there.

20:30 We hadn't been there very long and we heard this awful rumour that the Sydney was missing. And the other crowd, there was another ship load of them coming, the Sydney had actually escorted them to the Sunda Straits, and they were on the Zealandia and they were the last to see the Sydney.

21:00 Cause they said she left in a hurry, she circled the ship, and the [HMS] Durban was coming out to meet her - that was an old English cruiser, probably built at the end of the First World war, like we were. And so they were signalling her in the distance and away she went, at high speed.

21:30 Now, on the Kormoran, I... This is strange. I was commodore of a yacht club down there at one stage, and mainly because my sailing interests and one thing and another. Anyway, we had fisherman, power boats and yachts - the yachting made up the biggest section. But this power boat bloke, he seemed to always

22:00 avoid me. We had another German fellow there, who I took over as commodore after him. But he was in Palestine, and when the Jewish crowd came in there he found himself on Cyprus. So he always thought his people had been there from the 1880s, and his wife's people,

22:30 and they thought they were part of the 12 tribes. This goes into a long story, I won't enter into it any further. But anyway, Rudy was a particularly nice bloke, a particularly good Australian, you know. So he was commodore, and a good commodore too, and he stood down and it was my turn for a while. And they had this fellow from the Kormoran,

23:00 he always seemed to be dodging me, for some reason. You know, I never got to know him really. It wasn't until after the war, that he only lived about a mile and a half, he was living with a lass that had lost her husband in the Second World War, through shock and one thing and another, they had to put him away

23:30 they couldn't do anything with him. And so, anyway this was a nice looking blonde girl, he called her Blondie, and he'd shacked up with her. So, only a mile and a half away. And so I got to know about him after a while,

24:00 and met him, and then he had two mates who came out from Germany and they were very keen to meet me, too. So I listened to their story and one thing and another, and it came up about how, book that was written by a chap that lost his father on the Sydney, and who sank the Sydney. And

24:30 I said, "Yes, I have read it." I said, "It concerns me quite a bit, actually, what I've read in there." So they started speaking in German then, and I thought, "Gee." So, I won't enter into it now, but that's still a mystery, it hasn't been solved. We think there was a Jap sub there, we're pretty sure there was a Jap sub there that sunk it, the Sydney.

25:00 Because 645 just don't disappear off a ship, there's always floats and things that you can get on. So, none were picked up. We believe the Kormoran didn't torpedo it, we believe, because she was back.

25:30 This captain was well trained, we'd been at sea with him, we had Collins before that, the chap who's been in the Mediterranean. I think this other fellow measured up to him. And anyway I remember this Piney Homan, telling me his story. He said, "We saw this ship barely on the horizon,

26:00 and," he said, "within half an hour, it was on us." And I said, "What do you mean, on us?" So he said, "About five thousand yards." He said, "They were signalling us pretty freely at 14 thousand yards." And that was about the range of Kormoran's guns. And so anyway, the Sydney must have had a message that she was

26:30 in the area, she landed on them so quick. And he said, "We were amazed at the speed of her. She knew where she was going." And so, the German story is that they came up level with her. Now not even an able seaman would do this sort of thing,

27:00 and steaming along at about 15 knots. And at twelve hundred yards, you know, you could hit her with a pea rifle, or that. So, I interrupted him there, I said, "I can't understand that." I said, "I would imagine she would be further back on your stern." So, we believe this was the case.

- 27:30 There was a bit of a rumour that there was another submarine alongside her. It might have been the same one that was tied up alongside her, as she was getting short of diesel. This raider was using diesel, and was pumping that. And she had to, when the Sydney showed up so quick, she had to break the lines and ties and everything,
- 28:00 to get away, quick. So according to the bloke, his story of who sank the Sydney, the Sydney would have been firing at that. So that would have been the Jap sub, we think, or at least a German submarine. But the Jap subs carried 24 inch
- 28:30 torpedoes, ours were 21. The 24 inchers had the equivalent of twice the explosive power as the 21 inch has got. And not only that, when... In Pearl Harbour, when they sank the big battle ship [USS] Missouri, the torpedo that hit that melted the metal.
- 29:00 So there were a little bit of atomic charge with it. And that ship had to be filled with concrete. She had nine inch plated steel. The ordinary torpedoes wouldn't have busted it, certainly wouldn't have sunk it with one torpedo like they did.

What was your feeling when you heard that the

29:30 Sydney was missing?

Well the feeling was shocking, you know, we expected there would be survivors. When we heard there were no survivors, I was shocked. I thought the people that took our place, you know, it would have been virtually their first trip. The convoyed the Zealandia around to West Australia, I had a cousin,

- 30:00 and I said to his lass, I said, "I'll be seeing Tom," who was on a small ship over there, "when we get into Perth." Well, Fremantle it could have been. And anyway we were called up, and of course, we were drafted off. And the Sydney left a few days afterwards. This ship was having trouble, the Zealandia, with a bit of crew

- 30:30 trouble, I think. So anyway, these people had joined my...took my place. And several of us, there was about... Oh cripes. Several of us taken off, took our place. You had to be... It got to you.

- 31:00 So, anyway.

Well lets talk about the Sydney a little bit more, tell me what your first impressions were when you first saw her?

Oh, first impression was so proud. I was so very proud that I was on this ship. And you know, we worked and we were trained hard, but

- 31:30 I enjoyed it. Mind you I was a country lad and I was used to hard work and all that sort of thing, nothing worried me much. The food was excellent. I had been baching.

Can you describe the Sydney to me, what she looked like when you first saw her?

Well, she was tied up at Garden Island

- 32:00 when we joined her, and the first job was cleaning and painting and, you know, she'd just come back from, from the Mediterranean, so we were very busy painting. So, general cleaning and that sort of thing. But, there was a big crew of us,

- 32:30 you know, as soon as they got back from their leave, they were back into it too.

How did they introduce you to the ship, who showed you around and that sort of thing?

Ah, that's a good question. At that stage, I don't think any of the permanent officers were there. I think they were all on leave at that stage. And

- 33:00 there was a few there that had had a lot of naval experience. And they were, you know, just showing us what to do and cleaning and one thing and another, until the others came back. And, of course, their naval officers were quite good. Never had a problem with them. So, all my time in the navy, I

- 33:30 only did one day sixteen, punishment, which a day sixteen, is halfway through the dinner hour, you've got to muster your kit and have it for inspection. If anything's missing or anything's dirty or anything like that, you're in trouble, you might get another day sixteen, or two or three days until everything's right, until it's all made up. But that was the only punishment I did

- 34:00 in all my navy times. I did some silly things too. I'll get into those later. We had a lot of fun at times, so, anyway.

Tell me about where you were sleeping on the Sydney, and what that area was like?

Well, I was on the quarterdeck area and we had

- 34:30 lockers, which were about so wide and about so high, and, you know, plenty of room for all your kit, quite easy to keep clean because washing was no problem. We slept in hammocks, and hammocks I

always found all right. You had one blanket which you used in the winter, and you could... And in tropics you hardly needed that. You just

35:00 pushed that back, yes, that was quite comfortable. And just lead me on a bit.

What was it like being on the ship for the first time?

Well that, that was you know, what I'd joined for, and I really enjoyed it. Being on this ship. This was a glamour ship, for God's sake.

35:30 It had sunk a cruiser in the Mediterranean, put it completely out of action, blown the front off it and everything before a destroyer went in and torpedoed the rest of it. And knocked another one, another six inch cruiser, they were Italian ships, and a bit faster than the Sydney, one of them got away. So, but gunnery must have been

36:00 very accurate. Although the Sydney got hit once. They had a few near misses. They had one hit on the funnel, which killed nobody. So they got out of that action pretty good. And they'd sunk another destroyer, yes destroyer, and they're in a lot of action over there. And you know, to be on this glamour ships, which it was, you know,

36:30 it was thought of so well, you know. It was something, you know, we were so proud. Yes.

What were the main differences that you noticed, between your training at Flinders and your first couple of days on the ship? Was there anything you weren't prepared for?

No, nothing. We still had PT [physical training] and that. You still had that,

37:00 PT training. And doubling round the decks, at times, that sort of thing, you know. Generally keeping you fit, and that was the main interest, you know. Fighting men had to be fit. And you don't have any big fat blokes in the navy, they're no use. They do get

37:30 fat later on when they leave, but they like the slim blokes. And I don't know whether that's the same today, I think it would be. I can imagine there's one problem with them now, they're that tall, that the deck-heads weren't very far up, and you know, coming through the doors, they'd be having trouble. The watertight

38:00 doors, you had to step over those. They were about that high off the deck, to stop any flooding, and you had to step over them every time. No. Yes, the Sydney was good. We had a lot of convoys. We convoyed the 'Queens' a fair bit out into the Indian Ocean, and they just

38:30 got up speed and left us, and the British Cruisers met them at the other side. This was before the Japs came in. We were taking airmen across to Canada, but we never got right across - we'd go pass the dateline somewhere, and just signal goodbye and away would go the ship, and probably the Canadians met them.

39:00 We were in Fiji, we had a good time there for a couple of days. Around Noumea, we took a six inch gun there.

We might just have that drink of water. We'll just stop there because we're getting to the end of this tape.

39:27 - tape ends.

Tape 3

00:35 **You were just telling us about Noumea, that story then?**

Yes, well this was one of the trips we were looking forward to, cause, see, New Caledonia was under the French and we were to take a six inch gun up there, which we did. And we unloaded it onto a barge as soon as we got there, and a few of the officers went ashore.

01:00 But anyway, we could see these lasses on the jetty, and we were sort of visualising perhaps a few days there or something, you know, getting to know these girls, take them to dances. Real loving Australians, you know, they could trust us. So, maybe. And so, it came to a

01:30 fairly quick end. The captain was very anxious to leave, and off we went. So we didn't get a... I did get a close view of them. I was up on the X-turret having a look through the glasses there, the range-finding glasses that they use, if the gunnery's knocked out, and you can bring them right up close, so we had a good view,

02:00 but that was all.

What were you seeing?

Hey?

What were you seeing?

These girls. Visualising them, I don't know what.

How did they look?

Disappointed, I suppose, we were that we hadn't been staying longer. It would have been lovely to get to know them. We would have treated them nicely, being young Australians.

What were they doing there?

Hmm?

What were they doing there?

02:30 Well, they were hoping to meet us, I think. They probably got wind [found out] that we were coming, I don't know. It's an Australian ship, it would have been something.

Did the boys discuss the fact that you had to leave?

Yes, we were a lot of disappointed navy men, I can tell you that. So near and yet so far, it was bitter disappointment.

03:00 So anyway the skipper was very keen to get back. I don't know whether the next thing, was probably back to Sydney, probably more convoys somewhere or other, which we went out into the Pacific a few times with convoys of airmen for Canada and soldiers.

How many ships would be in a convoy,

03:30 **about?**

Oh just, just, at that stage, the war hadn't developed. We didn't have the Japs weren't in, but there were still German raiders about. So, for that reason, you know, before we let them go, the Walrus was flowing off. And had a pretty good look at the

04:00 horizon for several miles. So, Canadian ships would have picked them up in a very short period. We had one casualty when we were taking a troopship we had from Australia. It's not only just picking them up at New Zealand. We had them airmen coming from Australia and one thing and another.

04:30 And there was a chap missing during the night, and we never found him. We went back over the track, but only for a certain distance, and they declared him lost. And that was the first chap I'd seen lost at sea. Yes, so.

05:00 **What did you think had happened to him?**

I don't know. Whether he... I don't think he'd commit suicide, or whether, or what happened to him, you know. These things happen. In those times, you never heard of suicides much, or fights. There probably was an odd fight on the deck, so I don't know. You know, why he went overboard, we don't

05:30 know. But they knew he was overboard, so somebody must have witnessed it. Yes, we went back over, and we couldn't see him anyway, so we just assumed he had drowned.

What kind of talk would there be about this kind of situation, would people talk about why he went over?

No, you know,

06:00 it's always in your mind there. You feel for the poor devil, you know, we lost him. But you know, we didn't know him personally. It's different when you lose crewmen off your own ship, or people you've trained with. That's bloody tough. And that happened later on, we lost a lot of men.

06:30 As we were saying, the Sydney when it was lost, 645, and we knew such a lot of them. When you're a young man, and you say 645, it's amazing how many you know on board the ship, in a short period, and know them by their first name. But as you get older, particularly now, get in

07:00 with a room full of fellows, you know, you could be introduced to them, and five minutes later you wouldn't know who they were, even though you've seen them and shaken hands with them. But as a young fellow, names stuck to you, you'd be introduced and you'd know him for some reason or another. Another thing we had on the Sydney was boxing, that's a sport I loved,

07:30 got a few hidings. Got one hiding from a lieutenant that lived at Echuca, which wasn't far from us. A chap by the name of Eddie, and he was pretty good with the gloves, so I found out. Another one, Tug Wilson, I took him on, and he was a bit of a champ, and I was flat on my back with him. But I had a few victories too, so.

08:00 And this was a sport, it carried on, on most ships, boxing.

Where would they hold the matches?

It was usually on the quarterdeck, or the ways to the ship, or something. And yes. It was sport for the rest of the crew to look at too.

And when would they hold these?

Oh generally in the

08:30 afternoons or something like that. Usually at shore, not so much at sea. I don't think we ever held them at sea actually, other than general PT work, you know, physical training. But of course, when we got to...

Just on the boxing too, how many, how many of the blokes would be watching a match?

09:00 Oh quite a lot. This was, this was something that a lot of people were interested in, you know. There was other sports, there was deck quoits, there was other things that went on, you know.

Any gambling on the...?

Oh yes, yes. But you weren't supposed to gamble. Yes, Crown and Anchor.

I mean gambling on the boxing matches?

09:30 Oh not that we know of. No, I don't think so.

And how many rounds was a game, match?

Oh about three, yes, so it was pretty short and sharp.

Was there a ship champion, or...?

Yes, this Tug Wilson, the bloke who laid me on my back. He wasn't named Tug for nothing, he was a big bloke.

10:00 **And what was the...?**

So it wasn't a fair match.

Yes, I was going to ask?

He was a heavyweight, lighter.

So there wasn't a real weight division, kind of, it was just...?

Oh, they tried to match you a bit, yes. We had some particularly good boxers. And in the depot there was always boxing going on there, in the gym.

10:30 We used to have them down there too. You were also taught how to box, too. At those early stages, anyhow.

And what's it like being on a ship with 650 odd men?

It didn't worry me. It was fairly clean living.

11:00 You had times when you were a mess deck orderly. You had to clean up around the mess deck. That brings me to something to. A chap that joined from my town, he was a very big bloke. And anyway he was mess orderly this day.

11:30 And as soon as you tie up at the jetty, this was pulling into Fremantle. You know, once they got a spring ashore, or a manila rope or something, and they could, the officer can step off. And you've usually got a two-ringer marching up, you know, giving orders and one thing and another, with a telescope under his arm. So anyway,

12:00 this Digger Bowl, he had a rotten cucumber there that had been in the mess, so he thought he'd throw this out through the port [porthole], and it hit this bloke. Well yes, I don't think Digger had ever done any punishment. He was a pretty good living bloke. And

12:30 I never saw him box either, but nobody would take him on, I don't think. He was that sort of bloke, very strong fellow, reared on the farm. So anyway, Digger had to do a bit of punishment for that, because he couldn't convince this bloke that it wasn't intentional. It hit him, I think it was supposed to have hit him in the face, or the chest, or something.

13:00 Anyway, yes, that was one of those things. I think the crew had a good laugh about it, and Digger did his little bit of punishment for that. It wasn't very much. Another time we'd been ashore with another chap from Tongala, this Tom McGowan. And we knew some people,

13:30 the Comporeres. They were great musical people. They were a northern Italian family. And they called them 'The Two Ls', and they were in Sydney. Tom knew where they lived - it wasn't far out - so we went out to see them. And they plied us with a lot of grog when we got out there. So,

14:00 we had a very enjoyable night there. Then coming back, we were walking down George Street, and you know, I wasn't booked in anywhere. Tom was - he'd booked himself into a hotel. So he said, "I'll be leaving here Bill." And I said, "I'll continue on down to the jetty. I think I'll sleep down there." So, we could sleep on benches or anything in those

14:30 days, not a problem, just put a cap under your head, go to sleep, sleep on the deck or anything. So anyway, I got as far as the hotel, and there was a pretty good entrance to it, and I thought, "I'll prop in here." I had my burberry on. So anyway, I propped in there and sort of dozed off. The publican opened the

15:00 door in the morning, looked at me, and said "You've had a pretty heavy night, have you?" And I said, "Yes, you could say that." And, "Where am I? I'm heading for the jetty." And he said, "Oh, you haven't got far to go." So I got down there and I caught the Liberty boat. But what I'm getting around to is Tom missed it. So when we got around to Fremantle,

15:30 and he caught up with us again. Well he must have come across by train or something. He was put in sols [solitary confinement] for missing the ship. That was a very serious offence. So, I forget how many days sols you got for that, but it was looked upon pretty... He'd have been there 14 days probably, ten days anyway. There was only one more serious charge than that, was thieving. If you

16:00 thieved in the navy, you were out. It was a punishable offence, and meant they cut the corner off your discharge papers, and you were out of the navy. And we had an instance of thieving, soon after we joined the ship, the Sydney. There was something missing - I don't know whether it was a watch, or what it was - and the

16:30 commander had the lower deck cleared. We were all out on folk sail, on the quarterdeck mainly. And he addressed us all and told us how serious this charge was if we catch him. He said, "When you catch him, bring him to me. Deal with him first, then bring him to me." So you were allowed to give him a pretty good

17:00 punch-up if you wanted to. Once you brought him to him... We never caught him, but he would have been out of the navy forthwith, no matter what it cost to train him, or anything - he was out. So I think that goes on in to modern day navy, too. It's one of the most serious offences you can be caught with.

17:30 **And on the Sydney, you were telling me earlier about the cordite room. Now, forgive me, what's cordite?**

Cordite is an explosive charge that is set off to, once they close, it's fired and the projectiles in ahead of it. And there might be two charges of it, depending

18:00 on whether you're firing 20,000 yards, or what. These are pretty big charges. And so, usually two charges are cordite.

And so, the cordite room is like a storage room for this?

Well, it's next to the magazine, sealed up, and everything is sealed. Cordite that is coming through the wall to you, is a

18:30 cylinder shaped thing. They put it in and then spin it around. And it's open to you that side, but it's still closed, if you can understand, in case there's any sparks come down. When you get down into those places, the first thing is take off your shoes. You go down in sandshoes so there's no sparks, of course, on the deck or anything. So, from there, as I explained, they go up these chutes, straight up

19:00 top. And the same with the shell room next door, there's a partition through. It's got to be partitioned off from the guardroom, the cordite room, too, where the shells are. So there's a massive amount of cordite and shells, you know. In a big battle, you could fire a lot of them, three or four hundred probably.

19:30 So, yes, it's a...

So, this was one of your roles aboard the Sydney. And you manned the guns, the...?

We were taught, in our training, we had to. We were taken up into these six inch guns. We were taught how to handle them. We were given the position of trainer and gun-

20:00 layer, and you were, you couldn't see the enemy, you were just following instruments. And you know, you'd be going this way and that way, you know, a rough sea and keeping it on target, level, and that sort of thing. And handling our, how shells are handled and everything, so.

20:30 **How are they handled?**

If they land there, they're a fair weight, those six inch shells, a hundred pound weight. You have to handle those fairly carefully.

Is there a special way you carry them?

Yes, both arms, until you get them on the tray. From there, they're rammed in. They're rammed in with

a rod too, not with a fist like we did on the Vampire, where the pad...

21:00 You just shot them in with the hand they were pushed in with a rod, a padded rod. And yes.

And would you have to work at a rapid pace?

Yes, always, always. Everything was supposed to be done fair dinkum. And another thing on the Sydney, this captain that relieved

21:30 Collins, they always reckoned he wasn't cautious enough. We did have a float that was being towed, by a tug or something, I just forget now, or another destroyer or something. And we, they fired at that. What we fired were mainly, somehow, a sort of

22:00 a two inch barrel, I think in these six inch guns. I just forget how they work that, sort of firing those. And anyway, approaching that, everything was done properly, nose on. And you know you don't approach enemy, you know, broadside on, or anything

22:30 like that, nose on. And everything was done right. So we were rather surprised when the Germans said that they came up level at twelve hundred yards. This is absolute bunkum, and I still believe its bunkum because no skipper is going to do that, put his ship in danger. You know, they could fire torpedoes,

23:00 they've got, they had five point nine guns, no way are they going to do that. I would imagine he was, most of his problem on that ship, was probably answered around about fourteen thousand yards, maybe, he may have come into five thousand yards. The Germans reckon that

23:30 they assumed abandon ship. And the Sydney was lowering the cutter, I think it was, to take men across to inspect it. Now, that would have still been done from the stern, you know. He still wouldn't have come up alongside,

24:00 as the Germans reckon. Because they probably set off a smoke flame and one thing and another, and reckoned they'd been attacked, and a lot of their crew was in the water and that sort of thing. Yes, so they did lose about 80 men from one boat. They'd have only lost 20 probably,

24:30 if it hadn't have been for a bloomin' boat tipping over. So that must have been a bit of a hurried thing. That would have been when Sydney probably fired at this submarine, or whatever was in the vicinity, or be a little bit prior to that. So, that's the way we took it, so whether that... We

25:00 never would have come abreast, not even an able seaman would have done that, with an ounce of sense, travelling along at 15 knots, that was, you know, not on.

I was...

So, I think, they're going to have an inquiry into it soon, they seem to know where the two ships are. There is a bit of a story, that they think she was

25:30 hit by one of these torpedoes, an exceptionally strong one, they hit the German battleship, not the German the American one. And if that happened, it would have melted her, they'd have still would have been an awful lot got off, but she'd have gone to the bottom very quickly.

26:00 Now there was one German by the name of Gosling, had let this out, he was working on the Snowy River Hydro Electrics. He let that out, he got shifted back out of the country, so it was all kept secret. Everything is still secret until we can find this ship, and really get down to, you know, what really did

26:30 happen. Coming out from Carnarvon, the air force blokes, had, I think it was four Avro Anson's or something up, and they noticed another float plane, and this went out to sea. So, that was probably from the submarines. It would be a Jap submarine, because they could carry planes. They

27:00 they just pulled alongside, they winched in board and they put them in under cover. So, you may be familiar with the story when they entered Sydney Harbour with these three midget subs [submarines]. They were carried in, in board. So, they were pretty big cover. They had very big guns.

27:30 They were firing shells into Newcastle from out to sea, very big shells.

So they had quite a capability?

They had quite a capability. And when we were coming back from being sunk, we were marked time down at Jervis Bay, because the Japs were in the [Sydney] Harbour. So we were on the Dominion Monarch, a 27,000 tonner, so just as well we didn't show up outside the Harbour at the right time,

28:00 or they would have sunk us.

I'll ask you about that experience in a while. But I'm interested in, on the Sydney, when you were loading the guns, what kind of calls were made? What would people say to each other?

Oh well, see I'm going back a long time. I can... On the smaller guns,

- 28:30 you know the loader would say, "Ready." You know, the charge is already in the projectile. "Ready." And then it's up to gun layer then. But on the Sydney, the order to fire would come from the director's towers to the gunnery
- 29:00 officer, who was sitting up at the back. He had the range finder too. So, the order would just come, "Fire," then there would be a quick load. And the message would come back, you know, as soon as she's ready, "Ready," you know. They'd be still watching the indicators -
- 29:30 you can't see the enemy, you're enclosed. So.

What indicators are you looking at? What exactly are on the indicators?

Well, they're only a small thing, And that's what you're looking at that light there, that's telling you when you're right on the target. And that's the...

- 30:00 The director is on that target, and that's an indicator that's in the four turrets. So, yes, even the flash doors are shut too, at that stage. But they no doubt open them afterwards, 'cause the smell of cordite, is a shocking
- 30:30 smell, very powerful, you can't stand it for long.

What does it smell like?

Bloody cordite, it's... I can still smell it today actually, but the feeling for it, you know. It's, it's, you can't describe it ... rotten yeah, rotten egg,

- 31:00 yes, that'd be pretty close to it, yes. Not a good smell. And once you've been firing for a while, you know, as something in the destroyer now, which the shield was open and everything. The smell of this, you know, it's with you for a while. My shell cases, nobody's picking them up, they're just
- 31:30 rolling around under your feet. You're dodging, you can trip over those things. So yes.

Were your best mates on board the Sydney, with the gunnery, with the guns?

Oh yes, we were all mates, yes, no doubt about that. We knew so many, its...

- 32:00 Anyhow, we had respect, you know, for anyone a bit above you, petty officers, and one thing and another. There was only one petty officer, I thought he was a bit severe, but. Otto Smith, his name was. Unfortunately he was on our quarterdeck. He was a great gunnery officer, a first rate gunnery bloke, but you could never be standing still,
- 32:30 if he was about, yes, he'd have a work for you, or whatever. And a very tough bloke. Coming back from Fiji once, he fell over somewhere, fell off something, and virtually cracked his blooming leg somewhere, and he walked back to ship, you know, he was a tough bloke. He was on board a bit, before he gave himself up, you know. They strapped
- 33:00 his leg up a bit. Yes, Otto, he was navy from top to bottom, you know. He'd been in it a long time. Unfortunately, he went down on the ship too.

Before that happened, tell us about getting your call to go to Port Melbourne. How did you receive this news?

- 33:30 To join the ship?

No, to leave the Sydney for Port Melbourne?

There's a door open down there probably, there's a breeze coming in, no, I think down here.

Sorry, receiving that call to go to Port Melbourne.

Yes, well, that was a great disappointment as I said. There was still one of my town mates on board, a chap

- 34:00 I went to school with, he was probably 18 months older than me, he was a grade or two above me, he might have been two years older. But, yes, I reported back to Tom, and I said, "I've got a draft. I've just been called up to the office, and the regulating officer," which is on the ways to the ship,
- 34:30 "and I've been told I'm on draft. There's a few of us leaving." And he said, "Well, go back." he said, "You might be able to get out of it, you know, say you want to stay with your mate." He said, "I don't want to see you go." And so I went back, and I put the question to them. They said, "No, Price. It's a navy board draft. It's nothing to do with this ship. We've had no influence on it, at all. Have your bag and
- 35:00 hammock up here at 2 o'clock," or whatever it was, "and there'll be a bus to pick you up and take you to the train." And, "You're on your way to Sydney to pick up a ship to take you to Singapore." So, yes.

And why had they chosen you to leave the Sydney?

Well, we were, most of us, particularly the permanent navy blokes, we were highly trained men,

- 35:30 and this is, they wanted to pass us off, because there was other ships, and they wanted trained men on them, too. So, when I got to the Vampire, nothing was new to me, except that it wasn't as nice a ship. But, you know, I was able to go about my work, and knew about watches, and all that sort of thing.
- 36:00 Watches is when you're on duty and off duty and all this sort of thing, whether you were on three watches, two watches, action stations, all these sort of things.
- Well how hard was it to leave the Sydney?**
- Extremely hard, because she was the glamour ship of the Australian navy at the time, you know, a very successful ship, and I was so proud I was on it.
- 36:30 And we were sort of thinking, "Anything that tackles us," well you know, "it'll be bad news for them." So.
- And kind of in retrospect, I mean, how do you feel about this situation that you got a call up from the Sydney, just before she was to go down?**
- Well, as I've said, you know,
- 37:00 it's... A lot of the chaps I trained with were still there, and particularly a chap from me home town, we were the best of mates. So I didn't relish the idea of leaving it at all, you know. I knew things were getting serious, but I didn't stand me chances too well on a
- 37:30 a destroyer up in Singapore, you know, because we all knew the Japs were coming in. The navy knew, for sure, which we didn't, 'cause we had the code broken. The Americans knew they were going to get attacked in Pearl Harbour, they had the code broken, and that's why the carriers were out, they left their battleships in, thinking that, you know, they'd be able to fight a few planes off, possibly, you know.
- 38:00 They had to make it look as though, you know, to get the Americans into war, that they'd been attacked, and which they were of course. But fortunately they got their carriers out, amazing, you know. So, yes, the code was broken.
- How do you feel, in retrospect, the fact, that you were kind of saved by this**
- 38:30 **call to go to the Vampire?**
- Yes, in retrospect, I was lucky, because it wasn't terribly long after that she went down, she was missing. This, you know, we didn't even know for a few days too, after the action had had happened, it just didn't come over the news. There was rumours coming, before it was
- 39:00 broken in Australia, I think, that, "Sydney is missing." And you know, we didn't take that too bad at the time. We thought, "Oh well, she might have been in action but there'd be a lot of survivors, there usually is." But when it finally come through that it was missing with all hands, that grips you.
- 39:30 Yes, it's... So anyway we arrived in...
- We'll just pause there and have a break.**
- 39:54 **- tape ends**

Tape 4

- 00:37 **So tell me what your first impressions of the Vampire were?**
- Well my first impressions when we got there, see, she was in dock, she'd been, come back from the Middle East, she was one of the five of the 'scrap iron flotilla' as the well-known German bloke called them.
- 01:00 Trying to think, Dr [Joseph] Goebbels [Nazi propaganda minister]. And so anyway, she was in dock, and they'd had six torpedoes on, and they'd taken three off, because we wanted to board aircraft, machine guns and that sort of thing, so that left us with just three. So there seemed to be a great stack of stuff, you know,
- 01:30 on the jetty, the shore, so all the stuff they'd took off. So anyway, finally she was all ready to go. So out of the dock, we were no sooner out two or three hours, and we run into a ship, somehow. I don't know if it was their problem or ours. So, you know, we'd filled it with ammunition the whole lot, ready to go, so.
- 02:00 **Tell me about running into the ship?**
- Well, I don't know whether the thing backed into us or what happened. But anyway, it dented our side a fair bit, and it necessitated a bit of welding.

What did it feel like, having a ship run into your ship?

Oh well, I didn't take it that seriously at that moment. But what I did take seriously is we had to go back into dock,

- 02:30 unload all the ammunition, and all the welding had to be done. And this was the hardest work I'd ever done in my life, and I'd worked hard. Loading the stuff again, you know, and there's hundreds and hundreds of shells and things, and cordite, and all this stuff that had to come off.

How did you go about loading and unloading? Did you use

- 03:00 **machines to help you, or did you...?**

Oh a lot of it was brought manually up to the deck, and because this was a primitive blooming ship, we thought. So from there, it was taken off to the jetty or somewhere. They might have taken it further away, I think, it's pretty explosive stuff. So that was a bad start, it was a bad omen. So, anyway,

- 03:30 got it all back again, then the next trip was to Kuching, and that's northern Sarawak. And we've all got the feelings the Japs are coming into the war very shortly, at this stage. And so, we picked up the British C-in-C [Commander in Chief] General

- 04:00 and took him up there. He wanted to inspect the forces up there.

What was he like?

Oh, just an average British high-up officer, you know. We didn't have much to do with him. He was down in the war room, he wasn't with us sailors so much.

You said that you had a feeling the Japanese might be coming into the war...?

Oh yes.

Where did this come from?

I think generally the higher-ups knew, because the code was broken. We knew they were

- 04:30 amassing their ships and everything. And even when we went over to, trying to think of the town, and we were there, Sarawak, the signalmen, not the signalmen, the sparkers reckoned they could hear them, you know, further out somewhere. Strange goings on.

- 05:00 So they were massing, and they were concentrating their forces to hit Singapore the same time as Pearl Harbour. So anyway.

Well what were your feelings about a possible war with Japan?

Oh, I wasn't looking forward to it. We knew they'd had a lot of experience. They'd been in China for about six years. We didn't know how good their pilots were until they

- 05:30 come into the war. But their pilots were the most accurate you could ever come across, until we shot them all down later in the war. They were running short of these highly trained blokes that had about six years of training. And you know, they got hit, they just kept flying, so they were that type of person. They were quite happy to go into the happy hunting ground. We didn't mind

- 06:00 sending them there, if we could get onto them either.

Just tell me initially, what are the differences between sailing on a ship like the Vampire, compared to the Sydney, just in terms of how they move through the water?

Well, they're both fast ships. The Vampire could do about 42 and a half knots, I think, 32 and a half knots. I'm thinking of Japs, they could do nearly, around the 40,

- 06:30 their modern ones. And the Sydney was about that same speed. But there were faster ships about. So yes, cutting through water, pretty fast.

Is there any difference in the way they move, in the water?

Yes, there is. In a rough sea, you wouldn't dare go outside on the destroyer. You'd go through the ship to get to

- 07:00 wherever you are going. So, also there's lifelines. And they were steel wire, too, on this one.

And how about in terms of your job? What were the differences on the Vampire compared to the Sydney?

Oh, it was a much older ship that rusted

- 07:30 very quick. It was harder to clean. We could run out of water - we could be out with the fleet and be short of water. We might go along and get a bucket there, they were stokers standing over the pump, and that's your quota. So you'd do your washing and whatever you want, with that. That's

08:00 being at sea a few days. That normally just a short trip, you know, there's no water restrictions. But yes, on a big trip, there was. And oil, you'd run out of oil. You'd pull in alongside a fleet oiler, or a battleship, and get your oil across that way, to keep you at sea. So how these

08:30 Jacks stayed across, it's quite an art really, and the skipper's got to be pretty good, or the chap on the wheel that's giving the orders from the skipper. You don't want to be drifting too far and dropping stuff in the water. Particularly if you've got someone there with appendicitis or something, that's got to go ashore, or to a bigger shop to be operated on, yes. See, you've got to be careful you don't drop him in the water. But the

09:00 stores or whatever is coming across, you know, we'd be getting short of food or one thing and another, that'd be coming across to us.

And you talked to Kiernan [interviewer] a lot before about the guns on the Sydney and your job with them. Tell me about the differences on the Vampire.

Well, on the Vampire, they were open. There was just a shell case in front of you, and about that far from the deck,

09:30 if anything landed down there, it'd chop your legs off. Yes, it was very primitive compared with the Sydney. Yes, and we, you know, we still... I was happy to be on a gunner, particularly in action.

10:00 It's a little bit like fighting - if you're landing a blow, it's not so bad. But if you've got a position on the boat where you can... You're only just watching and doing your job or whatever it might be. You know, a lot of those blokes were getting round corners, I'm told. I even heard of one signalman with his head in the flag bin, so.

10:30 And you can imagine it, particularly night action, the flashes of shell fire, and you know they're coming, it's a frightening thing. But for us who were on the guns, we were able to fire back, so.

How did this help take your mind off?

Well, you were busy. And I wouldn't like to be

11:00 an ammunition carrier, because they walk around the decks and supply you with the shells and that all that sort of thing. Because this was a pretty primitive sort of boat. A lot of our projectiles are on the rails, not far away from the magazine, some are being handed up. In those positions, we actually had an engineer, that they had...

11:30 It was nearly a court martial. He wasn't going to stay down the engine room. I can show you a paper I've got one here about him. He went to the [HMAS] Canberra after that, and he failed again, so I don't know how he got through the war. But yes, with bombs, you know, a near miss, the whole side of the ship lights up, so you can imagine how the stokers felt,

12:00 especially one comes through the deck, you're a goner.

And comparing again the Sydney and the Vampire, was it a happy crew on the Vampire?

Yes, the crew was quite happy. We were very close knit. When we boarded this ship, the... Singapore in those days was a very dirty place. The river there, if you've been over it

12:30 probably it's clean now. When we were there at that time, you just about had to hold your nose to get across it. And the river, you wouldn't step in that, you'd die of cholera or something. But nowadays, you jump in there and swim or anything, I don't know how this, Lee Kwan Yew [First Prime Minister of modern Singapore] got it so clean and so safe to go out. You can walk the streets,

13:00 women can walk the streets there of a night-time, not a problem. And if you're caught dropping anything, it was about a \$500 fine, you know, the streets were clean. How I come to notice that, we went back there ten years after the Prince of Wales was repulsed for, 50 years rather, after they were sunk. We were with those, when they were sunk,

13:30 two battleships, or one was a battleship, the other was a battle cruiser, very big capital ships really. So.

Well tell me about your first impressions of Singapore, when you first arrived there?

A very dirty place. I was about to tell you that we had mechanised dandruff - crabs. We had bugs, sorry.

14:00 We got rid of the dandruff - the crabs. Apart from one fellow, and you could see them crawling on him. So we had permission to scrub him. I wasn't one of the blokes, but. There was a chap, he's only just died a couple of weeks ago, there was him and

14:30 a couple of big fellows, and they got him and scrubbed him with soft soap. And this was permissible and the officers knew about it. So that cured him, you know. He looked after himself a bit after that. He was always in dirty clothes. He was a hard worker, but it wasn't easy to keep your washing dry and all that sort of thing.

15:00 **How did the all the rest of you get rid of crabs?**

Oh well, we were just careful. You had to be careful on the toilet seats, because they could jump about two feet. Oh, that's an old saying. But yes, yes, we'd have one toilet where, but they had wood on the things.

15:30 It wasn't so much the crabs, but the bugs, they were in there. And down the stokers' mess desk, which was down below ours, they were fumigated down there, and they still couldn't get rid of the damn things. So, we had those too till the bloomin' ship went down.

What kind of bugs were they?

What do

16:00 you call those, Tom? They're a... It's a bug that they pick up at the docks, in those days. You wouldn't get one in Singapore. There wouldn't be one alive there now, it's that clean. It's a different situation altogether.

Did the bugs bite, or did they...?

Oh yes, yes. I never got trouble with them. We were up on the seamen's deck.

16:30 There was another problem coming into harbour, we had the Capstan engine was in the seamen's mess. And the air conditioning, the dock that drove it, was this motor. They always seemed to want to pull that down when we got into harbour and work on the thing. It didn't seem to be perfect. So that's pumping air through the mess decks, and but anyway. You'd

17:00 come into harbour and drop the anchor, and of course, you've got this steam engine, it's all driven by steam. This heated up the mess deck and everything, and you've got your port holes closed, the whole blooming lot, so that was hot. And in Singapore, the smart ones would get out and sling the hammock under the wings of the bridge, and 'cause,

17:30 it was always raining, it'd be, from 3 o'clock on it seems to be rain in those places. Yes, so, I'll tell you another story too, in Singapore. We had a name, a chap by the name of Graham Horn, by nature, too. He yes well, he could curse a bit this bloke.

18:00 And this was after we'd been at war a little bit with the Japs, and we had to do a boiler clean. We'd been at sea a lot of times, a long time. And so the stokers had these boiler tubes out on the wharf, and tapping them and trying to do a boiler clean in one, 24 hours, it usually takes three

18:30 days. And we were getting raided pretty bad those times. Anyway we'd been close enough to the guns every time the siren went, but it was that overcast, that we never got anything to fire at. And they weren't quite low enough at that time. So anyway, there's a shell landed just out on the wharf, and it was a hell of a bang.

19:00 We were down, or we had Graham Horn finishing off the painting, 'cause we were painting the ship too, trying to clean the ship as well as clean these tubes. He was down there finishing off, down the water line. We had him out on a pole, with a Jacobs ladder on it, type of thing. So this hell of an explosion. And I was one of the chaps standing on this blooming

19:30 pole we had him out on. And we all dropped to the deck and we forgot about him. So, I did think about him at one stage. I thought he'd be safer under the wharf than he would be on the ship. So anyway, finally the all clear goes, and we closed up to our guns again, and anyway, Graham's screaming out down below. He said, "I've been swimming around this,"

20:00 I won't say what sort of ship, shocking language, and he said, "Nobody would help me, didn't give a stuff about me...I'm yelling out. Talk about, 'I'm all right, Jack,' and you're in board," and all the adjectives that went with it. And so we finally get him aboard.

20:30 Yes, that was this Graham, who died about ten years ago, he lived life pretty well to the full, and drank a lot, smoked a lot, married twice. I don't know whether he was married, but he had one girl, he had the tattoo,

21:00 he got it put on in Colombo, Leslie, across here. And when he got back to Sydney, Leslie had gone with the Yanks. That was Leslie. There were others. I could tell you great stories about him, but I won't, proud man.

You mentioned that when the raids would come over, you'd, I think you said you'd close up the guns?

When...?

When a raid would come over,

21:30 Oh yes, yes.

you'd close up the guns?

Close up to the guns.

What does that mean?

Well it means you're at action stations, and you close up to the guns. Anything overhead, we would, from Y gun, we would come and give this three inch, or 12 pounder, a hand might be with fuse setting, to keep the shells up there. Somebody would be reading off, if you

- 22:00 could see the plane, you know, "Eight thousand, ten thousand, seven thousand," you know. And you'd fuse set them, ram it in the gun, and fire. That's a three inch or 12 pounder, we used to call them. We were poorly armed, terribly poorly armed.

When those guns fired, what was the reaction of the ship? Did it move, or jump?

No, no.

- 22:30 Not for that one, it wasn't big enough. I would have loved to have been on the 20 millimetre guns because I was a marksman in the navy. I got a pretty high score out at the range when I joined. And like a lot of farming kids, we were used to shooting hares and that sort of thing. You know how far to aim ahead of them to...
- 23:00 And on a ploughed paddock, you can see the dust, you know, see where your bullets are landing and that sort of thing. And a lot of us farm kids, we had rifles you know, when we were 13 or 14. We'd go down to the rivers and do a bit of shooting, and one thing or another. The worst thing we ever did, was we'd run out of meat for a drum net, so we shot a swan
- 23:30 and put him in. But we couldn't get back for a week, and I don't know whether somebody had beaten us to it, or what, but there was no crayfish in there, not much of the swan left either. So, yes, they were good days. But yes we were pretty accurate with rifles, and that. And that brings me to another story, where, we'd run into a bit of a minefield,
- 24:00 in the Banka Straits, this was getting on, pretty much into the war. And there was a floating mine there. So, I asked for a rifle and was firing at it, and then the 20 millimetre Waller guns opened up on the thing. And it probably wasn't my shot, but all of a sudden, 'cause it hit the,
- 24:30 one of the horns, and bang, out it came. Then we had a wooden door on the wheelhouse, and we were just too close to it, you know. It seemed a reasonable distance away, but by crikey, there was a lot of explosive in those. I don't know what a mine would hold.

Were you in trouble?

No, that was the only bit of damage we had, but we learned something.

- 25:00 From then on, with asdic, we had this, and we don't think the Japs did. We could ping our way through a minefield, and watching that way.

Was it a bit hair raising?

Well, it is and it isn't, but you're expecting these things. Probably a corvette would have been called in, they had the proper minesweeping gear. We had

- 25:30 paravanes that we could put over, too, which, that'd pick up the wire and run it back to a cutters, and up she'd float. Possibly how that one got picked up, so. We had those on the Sydney too, that was quite an exercise, we had them on the corvettes.

Tell me about what you remember hearing about Pearl Harbour?

Well it was shortly after, we'd been... Once the war started, they bombed Singapore at three in the morning, this was on the 8th, it was virtually the same time as we were on a different side of the date line as Pearl Harbour. So this was 3.00 am in the morning.

- 26:30 And there was only ship opened up fire, was the [HMS] Repulse. They had the searchlights on her. She had five point two guns. But we didn't bring any down that I can remember. They may have got one down, I don't know. They were firing all over the island. They were keeping at a fair height. So anyway, next morning, Admiral
- 27:00 Phillips was on the [HMS] Prince of Wales. He had his flag on that ship. And the captain, I'm just trying to think of his name, Leece, Leech. Anyway, it would have been pretty early in the morning, we decided we were going to go looking for Japs was what we thought. So anyway, the Vampire,
- 27:30 we had our captain was a three-ring commander, and he was the most senior, so we led these two ships out. And there was other destroyers on the sides, screaming, and the corvettes had been already dropping depth charges. I believe there was a Jap out there, submarine. So,
- 28:00 anyway I never heard that they got him. And anyway, they were dropping charges there, and Australian subs too, Australian corvettes. Anyway we set off, and we went north and way up west, too, and then came in up north. The aim was to go to Singora.

- 28:30 This is where we expected they were landing troops, and anyway it was getting a bit late in the night, and we were near Cam Ranh Bay, this was a French held position. The Japs had taken over Cam Ranh Bay, I don't know what its called now, its probably the same name, and developed it as a big air base, torpedo bombers,
- 29:00 high level bombers, dive bombers the whole lot - it was a massive thing apparently. I was amazed that they got it set up so quick. So, anyway, according to the Japs and what we could find out after the war, we must have been within 18 or 20 mile of them - we almost met. And 'cause
- 29:30 they had some battleships and cruisers and destroyers, they were more than a match for us really. And they were set up at the southern island end of an island - that's Burma, on the point. That was their watch post. So anyway, we had been discovered, unbeknown to us,
- 30:00 a Jap submarine had reported us, and fired torpedoes and missed, so they were expecting us. And so anyway, we headed off to the coast, but down, not going up where there was immediate danger.
- 30:30 So instead of Singora, we landed, we went quite a long way south. By the time the Japs started to catch up with us again, we were 200 miles south. So, Admiral Congo, Condo or something, Condo I think his name was, he was going to give chase, but he gave up the chase.
- 31:00 And but anyway, the Jap air force had been looking for us, and it had been very overcast and they hadn't pick us up. Then finally it cleared a bit, and about 9.00 am there was a float plane or something out on the horizon. I think it was Vampire spotted it first.
- 31:30 It was watching us. So the next thing, there was nine really heavy bombers, carrying very big bombs. They flew over the Repulse, just nine of them. The Repulse had these five point two huge guns, they were...
- 32:00 Shells seemed to be up there with them. But they didn't break formation. But nine ships, nine planes would cover a fair area, you know, they were big bombers. So they pattern bombed, and the spouts of water, you know, was right round the ship. See, anyway they landed one in board, and
- 32:30 it might have been a thousand pounder, I don't know, but it killed 30, it was on the aircraft hangar side, it was on the port side, and there was 34 men killed there.

What did that look like?

Well it was on fire for a long time. It's smoking, and a massive amount of damage, you know, down below and everything.

Have...

- 33:00 We kept, kept on. And anyway, we were, by this time, we were, might have been 70 mile off the Malayan Coast. And apparently the main force had been down and missed us. They'd been down as far as Singapore or somewhere,
- 33:30 they caught us. So, give us time. Switch it off. Shocking experience. We had high level bombers over us. We were in fairly close to the battleships for a while.
- 34:00 But, firing their pom poms and everything, you'd wonder how planes would get through them. So we had to speed out, about two mile out, so as they could fire, you know, in case anything's lined up between us and them, you know, because they didn't want to be landing shells or anything into us. So, I think it was the Prince of Wales, I think, copped the next bomb,
- 34:30 and it was a shattering experience for them, because it went through the deck and shattered the whole ship. They didn't know where it had gone to, you know. And those that were on the deck, they felt this hell of a shudder. So, and the next thing, of course, was the torpedo bombers, caught up, you know. We had the high level bombers for a start,
- 35:00 they come in, and they were, they concentrated on the Prince of Wales for a start. And finally they hit her with two torpedoes, which damaged her starboard side torpedoes, her starboard side screws, propellers they are. And
- 35:30 also apparently the rudder, because she wasn't steering too well. She was inclined to be going in a bit of a circle. So then, she was listing a bit too. So, the next thing, the Repulse, they were flying in at, you could imagine this,
- 36:00 at seven at a time, round you. Because they had, there was about 80 or 90 of these damn things, counting their high level blokes and everything, bit of a massive force. And these were top pilots. And they were coming in from all angles. And after we'd picked up the survivors from the Repulse, we picked up the captain, and he was sitting on the
- 36:30 deck, charged, just next to my gun. And I said to this Captain Tennent, I said, "It's a bad day for the British Army, sir." He said, "I did my best. I combed 18 torpodeos," you know, and they're not that

manoeuvrable, but he did his best. Finally, they got him and then they were got. They were around the Prince of Wales at the time, dealing with it at the same time. And,

- 37:00 I think, the Repulse probably had about four torpedoes in one side. She was going along, listing to port. And started to get a bit more severe, and then got another hit or two on the other side, and you could gradually see her
- 37:30 rolling over. Now she'd just come back from America, had been refitted, and there's this beautiful red bottom, upside down, and the vision is just like a red cigar, before she went under. So, we had to go like hell,
- 38:00 to get in there to pick up survivors. And the [HMS] Electra, one of our destroyers, had to go back. They didn't have the fuel to stay up with us. They'd gone back a bit earlier. So there was only destroyers to pick up the crews. So, we got in there and
- 38:30 we lowered our boats, there was just black oil, the propellers as we were just moving around, just turning black oil over. Because these ships are carrying hundreds of tons of oil, probably thousands, I don't know, a massive amount. Anyway, we picked up
- 39:00 all we could, and an awful lot went down, because she rolled fairly quick, and a lot of those were inside, and had no chance. The Prince of Wales was the next one to go down, but she was pretty determined. She was wanting to be towed back to Singapore, you know. And up to this stage,
- 39:30 before the Repulse went down, we were radio silence, but for some reason, they hadn't called for planes, not that it would have done any good, because the Japs had bombed all their blooming airfields all the way up the coast. But anyway, Captain Tennent on the Repulse had called for fighter planes, so we had, at that time in Singapore, the Brewster Buffalo, they were
- 40:00 about a 1931 model, very fast in a dive, like most planes. Not a match for the Jap fighters, no match at all. So they didn't last long. They were, there was about five or six came out, after the ships had gone down. They probably couldn't get off the blooming airfields, I don't know. And when they did come, they just flew over us, and it was too bloody late now, you know.
- 40:30 We were a bit annoyed with them, but not too many of those survived the war, I can tell you.
- We'll just pause there, because we're just reaching the end of that tape.**
- 40:45 **- tape ends.**

Tape 5

- 00:37 **About what time, of the day were the planes coming in?**
- Oh, it was from ten o'clock in the morning, that they dropped the first pattern round the Repulse, and it'd be around about 11 o'clock or
- 01:00 quarter past, I think, when they, the main flight caught up with us. The high level bombers first and then the torpedo bombers seemed to be everywhere. We actually got credited with one. It was coming, it was sort of lining us up. We were out two miles, did I tell you that, from the ships, because they were firing. You'd wonder how,
- 01:30 the puffs of smoke, from the shells bursting, mainly pom poms, how a plane could get in and torpedo without being shot down. As far as we know, we only got seven. It's unbelievable. I would say some of them wouldn't have got back, they'd be... Must have been a hell of a lot of them with bullet holes in them somewhere.
- 02:00 But anyway, one sort of lined us up, and the skipper turned the ship. And anyway, we opened up on this thing. So a little while later it started to lose height, and then there's fire starting, and these blighters were still flying, with the, until there was just a frame, before it fell to the water. That's,
- 02:30 that's the type of person you were up against, you know. If it had been me, I would have been jumping out of the plane long before that, although they were pretty low to the water too. Yes, so, we didn't have any respect for the blighters. We had respect as far as their fighting
- 03:00 ability was, but to see one drop in the water, that didn't worry us at all. They must have burnt to death before they hit the water, I think. Yes so, I think I mentioned when we got back, the ships tied up. By the time we
- 03:30 dropped anchor, it'd be three in the morning. I think we were something like 56 hours virtually at first degree readiness most of the way. So we hadn't been back to our hammocks. The survivors had been in

and they were covered in black oil, a lot of them, coughing,

04:00 and that sort of thing. We slowed down on the way back, we were probably doing about 27 or 8 knots, I suppose, on the way back to Singapore, and we slowed down a very low pace in the night-time. And we were burying them at sea, there was quite a few. I remember one chap,

04:30 got him aboard, and I can still see this bloke. He was a subbie I think, a sub lieutenant. And we had the old chaffers' method at that stage. You lay them down, face down, with head on the side, and make sure their mouth's open, their tongue's not back, and all that sort of thing. But we were just, pressed them like that.

05:00 And but we couldn't get any water out of the bloke. And the doctor came along and said, "I think he's gone, mate," you know. So, yes, we were, that was a sad thing. We held this burial service on the back of the ship, all we had was a slide, and

05:30 we didn't have enough flags at that stage, just one tied over the top. One or two in canvas, the rest I think, we were short of weights there, probably had a shell or something tied to them, and that took them to the bottom. Yes, from there and back to

06:00 the harbour, we were cleaning ship. It took a while. It was pretty greasy down below.

Just on the sea burial, what was said, what kind of ceremony was held?

Oh we didn't sing any hymns like you would at a normal burial service. But there, they've got the

06:30 the usual thing in the burial service in the particular part of the Bible, or whatever they're reading it off. And you know, you're committed to the depths of, I just forget how they go, it's a long time since I've seen one buried at sea. It's sort of an impressive

07:00 thing, if it could be impressive. There's a lot prefer, you know, even in this day and age, like I could request a burial at sea, if I wished to, and you might get a warship of some type to take you out and bury you out here in the bay or wherever. Or it might only be air sea rescue take you out,

07:30 and perhaps one of the ministers from the church. So, that's the way that's run.

And why was it decided to bury them at sea instead of taking them back to Singapore?

Well that's a good question. There's so many, you know, every ship would have had.

08:00 It's a quick way, and I think, had it been... If I was on the verge of dying, I would be quite happy to say, "Yes, bury me at sea." But it's a bit like Tom, he's a navy bloke, and he might

08:30 leave it in his will that he wants to be buried at sea, and this happens. They don't have to be navy blokes either, it might be a yachtie [yachtsmen] that's got a love for the sea.

Well tell us about picking up survivors in the sea?

Well, that was, a full-on job that was, because

09:00 there was so many. But, I remember one bloke, he was an Englishman of course, off the... And we were trying to get them. We were helping them up on the nets. We were scrambling nets over the side. You'd get down there and give them a... Some of them were just too weak, you'd virtually have to lift them all the way. But anyway, there's one bloke and he's on a bit of wreckage, and he wasn't far out, you know, he

09:30 might have been 20 yards or so, he was drifting past. We yelled out to him to, to come into the side, paddle in. He said, "How the bloody hell can I? I've got no fenders." So you might appreciate this. That's the humour in such a disaster, you know, there's always somebody who's got a bit of humour.

10:00 Yeah, we got him into the side. But getting them up those ropes, up those scramble nets over the side, was not easy. So yes. Well anyway, leading on from there.

10:30 Just quickly, what did the scene look like after the attack?

After the attack, it was black. You might, somebody might drop a drum of kerosene on the [Great] Barrier Reef, there'd be all hell to pay. But this was black, and it was, we were about 60 mile out by that stage, I think. The two ships were eight mile apart. There was oil right across.

11:00 A massive amount of oil. All that would have to go ashore somewhere. So, there would have been a lot of birds there, suffering ashore, I would think.

And people in amongst this, or...?

No, we picked them up. We combed the area pretty well,

11:30 I must say. And I haven't mentioned it yet. That the [HMS] Express, when the Prince of Wales was starting to go, she had listed over to port a fair bit. And the Express came alongside, they threw a steel

wire rope, it had a loop on it, and put it onto

- 12:00 one of the bollards, and on the destroyer they just turned it around a couple of bollards, you know. When she started to go over, it was... getting that undone, was quite a... It looked as though she was going to go with her at one stage, because she was up against the ship. But she saved more than anyone. I don't know how many they saved now from memory, but they were jumping off the Prince of Wales
- 12:30 straight onto the decks. There must have been quite a few of them injured, down ropes and all that sort of thing, that was a better way to go than actually jumping. The Japs have actually got a photo of them, you see them jumping down. Well that skipper, he got some mention over that, too, he got some decoration,
- 13:00 which he should have. And anyway they got ashore and got off the side of the ship. I don't know whether they got the loop over the bollard on the other thing, or whether they slackened it enough so they could, but he had to go full speed to stern to free himself.

And what did it look like going down, the Prince

13:30 of Wales?

Oh, shocking. You know, to see a ship like that, she was only built in 1939, and this was, '41. She had, a turret with four 14 inch guns in it, and I think the others had three, I forget. There was two sets

- 14:00 of four. And it would have been interesting to have seen her in action because she would have been extremely accurate, I would have thought. You know, she had the latest radar and all that. And radar controlled guns are better than through the control tower, you know.

- 14:30 So, they've got this mesh and its going around, yes.

And what's that moment like when you see that final bit of the boat go under the water?

Oh, it's shocking. You know, we'd just entered the war, this is two days and you've lost two battleships.

- 15:00 And next thing we hear, there was eight battleships in Pearl Harbour sat on the bottom. So at that stage, the Japs were stronger in capital ships than Britain and America put together, so we were up against it, and it wasn't a good feeling.
- 15:30 It, they were able then to keep landing behind our men, you know. And that's how they got, had to get back pretty close to Singapore before they decided they'd form a line, you know. But even then, I've heard, some of our Australian diggers that were there, that you know, we should have stayed fighting
- 16:00 them longer, we should have pushed them back, 'cause... But they had no hope, because we knew how strong their air force was. They'd have knocked them out in no time. They'd have no hope of holding them. And some of these diggers I'd like to tell them this, when you see a massive force like they could put up. But, it was tough. The diggers did hold them for a while.
- 16:30 And when we, in late January you could hear the guns just over in Johor, that was the first state up from Singapore Island, you knew they were getting close. And we brought in, on the Vampire, there was us and the [HMS] Arrow, I think,
- 17:00 and a few other ships, about six ships. And we had boxes of Hurricane planes, and that was round about December, middle of December of getting on in a bit, you know. Things were really serious, they were screaming out for good planes, you know. If we'd have had, say 500 of those there, or Spitfires,
- 17:30 it would have made a lot of difference, especially with the torpedo bombers, if they'd had a Spitty [Spitfire] coming in behind them, blowing the tails off them, we would have saved a lot of ships, saved a lot of lives. So, anyway, later on we were coming back from another battle, and this was getting on
- 18:00 towards the end of January. And these boxes were still there, they hadn't been able to unload them. So the Japs got some Hurricanes there for nothing.

So tell us about coming back from that initial attack. You said you were talking to the skipper of Repulse?

Yes, we happened to pick him up. And

- 18:30 on the backs of these ships, like the destroyers, corvettes, and cruisers to a large extent, you've got a row of depth charges. And anyway, I was still round Y-gun. We could get a few shots with these lower angle guns, because the planes were coming in low, you know. But anyway, he was sitting there, he had a bit of blood down his face, and
- 19:00 a bit knocked about. And I just happened to say to him, "It's a bad day for the British navy, sir." And he said, "Yes, I did my best, I combed 18 torpedoes," before he was hit with one. So, you know, in a big battle cruiser, he did well.

19:30 But of course, once they hit him in the stern and that, you know, you lose your steerage, and you get torpedo after torpedo, until you roll over. Not a pretty sight.

Did you see the torpedoes hitting the ships?

Yes, you see them. Well you don't, we were out two miles, but we could see they were being hit, yes.

20:00 Some of those coming off the Repulse, running down the side of the ship, and back into the blooming holes that were torpedoed had left, you know. Because it got hit with several. It takes a few to knock a big ship out.

20:30 But, these were bigger torpedoes than we had. They were what they called the long lance, they were faster in the water. I forget what they were driven on now. England was working on the same principle at one stage, but she gave up, and probably with the war starting with Germany,

21:00 I suppose, they hadn't followed it through enough. But these things were much faster than our torpedoes, very hard to see in the water. They didn't seem to leave that line that you could see, you know, with a torpedo, an ordinary torpedo. Because many passed through, which we struck later in the war, without seeing the damn thing.

21:30 All of a sudden, there's a ship hit. You know, you don't even know how far out he was. If you got over them, they were very hard to bring up, especially if they happened to be in deep water. The ones that were brought up were mainly in shallower water, you know. They could probably only get down to a hundred or two hundred feet or something, you know, very easy to damage them. Because you'd drop a pattern,

22:00 that's several off the stern, some fired out from the sides, that's a hell of an explosion, I'd hate to be down there.

And tell us, you said there were people coming along the sides and going down the torpedo holes, what do you mean exactly?

Well you can imagine a hole, that's you know, blown in the side, it might be from here to the wall there, you know. And the water's gushing,

22:30 and there is a hell of a lot, and you'd sliding down the side, and you just happen to go in there, you disappear with the water. She's filling up that quick, you know. There mightn't have been many of those, but there was talk about them at the time, you know.

And how did your ship, how was your ship, was it under attack, also?

The only one that lined up with us, that

23:00 eventually flew past our stern which we got, no they were after the big targets. And once the ships were down, we thought, "Well, probably we're next now." But they seemed to fly away. I think they were running out of fuel, because they had been down to Singapore and back before they could pick us out, you know.

23:30 So yes, we were left there.

What was the morale like in the following, I don't know, 24 hours or...?

Well, you were shocked. You had high respect for those Japs, you know. And we had raid after raid.

24:00 From Singapore down to Batavia, back again, we dodged, able to dodge the high level ones. But fortunately we didn't get strafed or anything in all that section there. We unloaded some very big ships, you know, out where Krakatoa is. Do you know where that is? It's between Sumatra

24:30 and Java. A big ship would pull in there, we'd have destroyers dropping depth charges out, and you know, if you got a ping from underneath, no matter what it was, a depth charge went down. So we'd unload these big ships and be on the smaller English ships, and a lot of Dutch ships. The Dutch

25:00 were very good with their shipping, you know. They didn't squib it, you know, I've heard people run it down, but that's warships and everything. They were with us. And these small ships for goodness sake, you know, you get bombed it's usually with...

25:30 Seemed to have the happy knack of getting through. So.

And so tell us about coming back to Singapore from the attack which sunk the Repulse?

Well, coming back, of course, it was soon nightfall, and we were getting back at a fair speed.

26:00 And well after dark, we had a lot of dead down the quarterdeck, and some of them were done up right, you know, in their whites and everything. But you had a slide that would be from about here to that corner there. The body would be laid on there after the ceremony, and just be tipped,

26:30 and they'd slide off, so that's how that would come about.

And coming into Singapore, after the...?

Coming into Singapore, it was pretty late, I think I might have mentioned we, pulled in, it was around midnight I think. We pulled in alongside the Electra, which was the other destroyer that picked up survivors from the

27:00 Repulse, and here we were, with all these sailors, getting them ashore. And they were a pretty sorry sight, some of them, pretty greasy looking, and we didn't have any water for the showers. So by this stage, I think we'd been out nearly...

27:30 So I think I told you about Captain Leeches' son, who was a midshipman, he was going over the destroyers, looking for his Dad. He went down with the ship. So, a lot of skippers seemed to do that.

28:00 Unless, it rolls over and you find yourself floating, I suppose you're entitled to swim then. But, they're usually the last to leave the ship.

What were you being told as you arrived. Did anyone give you orders, or...?

No, no. I think we were just shocked out of our systems, to a degree.

28:30 We were very down-crested, if you could put it that way. Yes. So anyway, there was still more convoys and that to do. And after we got our ship clean, we got back into it.

How long did it take to clean, what did you have to do your ship?

Oh to get this oil and that up, that took quite a while.

29:00 I just forget now, it took quite a while to get that clean, yes. So.

Did anyone debrief you, or talk about what you'd been through?

No, none of that.

How did they deal with it? What did they say?

No, we were never debriefed. There was more to do the next day, so.

29:30 So, I don't know about debriefing, that never happened to us. The next serious attack we were in, was getting onto the 26th of January, and the Japs were almost on the border of Singapore. And they were landing.

30:00 There was a Dutch plane, I think it was, that flew over Endau Bay, a fairly big bay. And they reported that there was two big transports unloading, and there was a cruiser and three destroyers. So our skipper had been ashore, and got his orders, and

30:30 so had the skipper of the [HMS] Thanet, there's parts of the Thanet in there at the RSL [Returned and Services League], been brought back. Anyway, the Japs had reported two light cruisers, well the two light cruisers were our two old destroyers. So they must have been looking at them from great heights or something, 'cause they didn't pick us out exactly what we were. So we headed off, pretty late in the afternoon,

31:00 we had 80 mile to go up the coast. And when we got up there, there was an island. We sheltered in behind that for a while, because moonset was around 2.00 am in the morning. And the skipper had told us, it had come over the PA [public address] system, that they had sent two...sink two transports to get in there,

31:30 and get past the ships that were guarding them and sink these two transports. So, you'd hear a few of the blokes saying, "This is a bloody death and glory run, this one," you know. And I think everyone said their prayers, especially praying for their mothers, so I didn't have a mother at this stage, so I just prayed for myself I think.

32:00 We did pray in those days. Anyway, when we got up there, the Jap, from what we heard after the war, the Jap had a cruiser, one cruiser, a six inch cruiser, Sendai, and six modern destroyers - I think they could do about

32:30 possibly 38 knots or more. And they were modern destroyers. They had, each of them had three twin five inch guns, which is a lot for a destroyer - it's a fair size gun. Anyway the first thing we struck when we moved out

33:00 from behind this island was an auxiliary ship. It was fairly dark and we didn't notice this ship until we were almost on it. And the first thing that came over the phones, we were all connected by phones to the guns, that there's a ship passing from starboard to port ahead of us. And it was pretty damn close.

33:30 So, as it passed our bows, we were probably too close. We turned, and to line up and we only had three torpedoes as you may remember me saying, and we fired two torpedoes and missed. You know, when I heard this whoosh, you know, you know they've gone.

- 34:00 So anyway, we missed with both torpedoes. And what we think happened is that as we turned, we'd heel a bit. These things take about 200 yards to level out, this is the old torpedoes, the English type. Somehow they control with the certain
- 34:30 amount of water system that is running through them or something, and it brings them to a steady angle, you know, if you're firing them at six feet or something, it takes them that while to steady them, otherwise they're up and down for a while. We think these stuck in the mud, because we were on a bit of angle ourselves, fired on an angle.
- 35:00 But the order to fire comes from the bridge, naturally, and you have a rating up there, a torpedo man. And the skipper just yells out to him, "Fire torpedoes," and this goes to all the torpedo crew down below, and...
- 35:30 So yes, we missed. Sad story. So anyway, we swung around from there, as they knew our presence was there, because they would have radioed off straight away. And I think from memory, we went eight or ten miles out deeper,
- 36:00 and came in again. And this was, we were going along fine, but pitch black, she was black. So anyway, the Thanet, we're in line ahead, the Thanet and us, and a Jap destroyer suddenly sailed straight in between us, in a line ahead. And I'm on Y-gun, and
- 36:30 we were told to hold our fire. And at that exact moment, the torpedo blokes were down there, their first thoughts were they'd roll a depth charge under it, or a couple, but they didn't want to sink to 50 feet, because at 50 feet was the minimum depth that you'd explode them at that time. So they wanted this one set as a time to explode,
- 37:00 but with a buoyancy on it, so as it would be a bit slow at getting to, well it wouldn't go down under this destroyer and blow up the Thanet on the other side. So we're told to hold fire, you know, we're on this gun, and I said to the gun-layer, "I said, I hope we get the first shot in." So, we only had four inch
- 37:30 guns. Anyway, we get these blue signals, U-K-N-O, I could read the things, they were in blue lights, and they did it twice. And I thought, "This is bad. This is the challenge signal, next thing it'll be shells." So, that's strange.
- 38:00 She pulled out of one hell of a speed, I could hear her going past our stern, actually hear it. We had one torpedo left, we were told to hold fire, and we were following this thing, guns to fire at the water, as we were told, you couldn't have missed, you know.
- 38:30 And we were told to hold fire. And so they fired their last torpedo and missed again, so we were in somebody's ditch, I was going to say 'shitters' ditch', so, you know, what's going to happen now. And we were still trained on this blooming
- 39:00 ship, even thought she was getting away, she swung away fairly quick, and she didn't open fire. Because if she had hit us, we'd have blown up. I think if we'd have hit her and got around the water lines, it'd have probably blown her up, too. Five inch guns would have made a bigger mess of us if they'd got the first shot in. Some of those near the magazine, yes.
- 39:30 It'd be good night.

We might just pause there because the tape needs changing.

Tape 6

- 00:37 I was saying this Jap destroyer came in between us, and we missed and everything. So from then on, it was a few minutes before the searchlights came on, and we didn't use our searchlights,
- 01:00 these lights were on us, there were a couple of destroyers, and we were just firing shells into these searchlights. It was some time later, it might have been, have been only 20 minutes, seems a long time when you're in action. The six inch cruiser opened up, and one of their shells was coming our way as well. We knew it was her,
- 01:30 'cause the Jap searchlights caught her in their lights, saw this great bow behind, and. So anyway, they hit the Thanet with a salvo, I don't know how many shells they used, it sounded to me... It was leaning over to starboard almost, we were at that time. Already
- 02:00 had a smokescreen going, as black as the ace of spades. That was screening her behind, but anyway, the searchlights behind, they were able to pick her out. So, we also had a flare that we threw over from the bow, that can be used to flare, to screen your own side, but this thing
- 02:30 flared a lot, and it was thrown over the side. And that, we were thinking would have helped shield her a bit. So, we swung around, and for some reason. Well before this, somebody at B-gun had, they were

firing

- 03:00 backwards a bit. And they must have fired cordite without a projectile. And nobody's disputed this, but I've said in my memoirs, you know, this is what's happened, that it created a flare right down the side of the ship, and almost a blinding flare, just burning cordite.
- 03:30 And I think then the Japs thought, "Well, we've got us, too." So all of a sudden the searchlights went off. So we were then able to swing out around, and before we'd gone very far, the searchlights came on again and they started firing. They may have been still firing at the Thanet. And a bit later,
- 04:00 from what we can hear, there was two of their destroyers were firing at each other, so they were confused too. Now, when we went in there, I think I told you, there was a cruiser, six modern destroyers, there was five auxiliary ships who had twin point seven, a turret of six twin point seven guns on the front of them. They could do 20 knots, they were about 650 tons,
- 04:30 not a terribly big ship, but, that was the first one we fired at, that thing could have sunk us with their point seven, four point seven guns, you know. So, plus there was other ships too, smaller boats again, but. Anyway, they had the whole area pretty well covered, it was pretty hard to break through. There was no hope of getting through to these
- 05:00 transports. The idea the Japs had was to build an airport there, just 80 mile north of Singapore, very handy, and for the final battles. So yes, we retraced our steps there a few years afterwards, and there's nothing seemed to have changed there
- 05:30 much. Different to Australians, they had big high rise buildings on the shore, nothing like that at all, still those small places. There was a bit of a sign up about a wreck. We couldn't find anyone that would take us out over this wreck, which was the Thanet. You know, we wanted to put a sheaf of flowers down there, usually put a bit of weight on them, and when you're over it, or reckon you're over it,
- 06:00 you just let it go. But.

What was it like leaving the Thanet?

Oh, it's not a good feeling at all. Not good. However, our navigating officer, we weren't in charge. At the time,

- 06:30 I thought we'd have been there till the end, you know, 'cause you don't move away from a battle usually, whether you're getting beaten or not. So, the fact that the searchlights went off, and we'd swung out and round, and I thought, "Well." I don't know what he was thinking, because the next thing, we were heading for, out,
- 07:00 we got out behind this island again.

Was there any chance of picking up?

No chance at all, no. The only thing that would have happened there'd have been more of us, there'd have been another ship down there too. So.

What was the impact like, having just seen the Prince of Wales and the Repulse sunk? What was the impact of seeing the Thanet?

It was devastating.

- 07:30 It's a scene that never leaves you. It's a shocker. And when you're only two days in the war, and to see this, such precision work by these highly trained pilots, it's quite amazing, you had to have respect for them.
- 08:00 The loss of the two ships was shocking. To get back, just imagine getting back into Singapore, you know, people there and everybody, you know, you come back without two of your big capital ships, but you don't feel very good about it, you know, and you're only two days into the war. By the time we cleaned up and everything,
- 08:30 we were virtually three days, you know, it was getting well into the morning before we could relax a bit, cleaning ship and everything.

Can you describe a little bit for me, what the sensory experience is like during one of these battles? What the planes sound like, what it sort of looks like to have bombs falling that close to you?

Well later on in the war, we were with an aircraft carrier,

- 09:00 and this aircraft carrier, it was a small carrier. The Japs had come into the Indian Ocean, when they first come in with six, one had to go back, but they had five that they could put 300 planes up. And they were mainly dive bombers and fighters. So anyway, we had been out,
- 09:30 Cunningham, we had two fairly modern carriers, and this small carrier, which only carried 16 planes.

So, anyway, the Japs had apparently dispersed. We were going to go, have a go at them one night, we were going to split up into two forces. We had two battleships at that stage, as well.

- 10:00 We had 29 ships counting cruisers and destroyers and all that. The Japs had something like 60. We had the report of how many was there. And we were still going to have a go. But anyway, we didn't make contact, which might have been a good thing, I don't know. It would have been a bit bloody, I think, a bit messy anyway. So,
- 10:30 the Japs came into that Bengal Bay, on up around the northern part near India, with seven fleet air, seven fleet oilers, so they could stay at sea for a long time. And I think we only had one oiler. So, Somerville thought it was a good thing to withdraw, and we withdrew back to
- 11:00 that isle well down in the Indian Ocean. Anyway, when the Japs cleared, us and the aircraft carrier, the small carrier, were sent back to Trincomalee. I would think, so the natives could see that, you know, there was still warships about.
- 11:30 And also, there was Sarah and [HMS] Devonshire and [HMS] Cornwall, they were two eight inch cruisers, they were sent back to Colombo. So the Japs appeared again, and they'd done a lot of damage around Colombo, sunk a destroyer, a troopship, a few other things, a lot of damage, shot a lot of our Hurricanes out of the air.
- 12:00 I think they won the air battle, with their Zeros. But they knocked a few Zeros out, too. Well anyway, after they attacked Colombo and went back, probably to reload or whatever it is. So one of their planes must have noticed these eight inch cruisers, heading
- 12:30 south, probably doing 30 knots, or 32. And so anyway, they come back at them with a big force around about 60 planes I think it was. Quarter of an hour each, they put them under. That's, well-armed
- 13:00 ships. Now, later in the war, up around the islands further up, the [HMAS] Australia was hit with flying planes coming into her, but never devastated, you know, they didn't. The Canberra got hit, over
- 13:30 in the Solomons, with pretty big guns. Very big ship, probably hit it with ten or twelve inch guns, I don't know. And so, the Canberra was knocked out, really. We could have saved her, the Americans weren't too anxious about towing her away. So,
- 14:00 we just torpedoed her. The Canberra didn't last long, that was one of their eight inch cruisers, in the pitch black, the Japs were pretty good of a night-time. So, they got one or two American cruisers too, they did a lot of damage coming in there, to the Solomons.

You were telling me what it was like when you came back to Singapore after the Thanet was sunk,

- 14:30 **what was the atmosphere like around Singapore Harbour at this stage?**

Well, when we came in, there was already a raid on, and we saw, we just got inside the boom, and but anyway they didn't worry us. But there was still a hell of a lot of guns on the island and they had these planes up, they might have been ten or twelve thousand feet, I suppose.

- 15:00 Still a lot of guns there, we didn't even have to open up, they were a little bit further away from us. So yes, we knew we were losing the war fast, especially Singapore. We weren't that down that we were going to lose the war. There's something about Australians, and I think Anglo-Saxons, probably Germans,

- 15:30 they don't give up easy. Still got that faith that you can do it. So, anyway, it's a hard road back.

You mentioned that you were putting up a smokescreen. Can you tell me how this works and what it's like?

Well somehow in the engine room, how do they do this, smoke pots,

- 16:00 yes, and this just goes up through the funnel, and you know, it's not very high above the ship, it hangs low, and it's ideal for blacking out something if you're trying to get away from something.

Doesn't it give away your position, because that's where all the smoke is?

Well, if they can't see you, you've got a chance of getting back a bit,

- 16:30 and this happens in sea battles.

How hard is it to be a gunner, when there's smoke everywhere?

Well at that stage, I think it was slightly a bit of a relief at that stage. You know, we're still closed up, and it's, yeah.

When...

17:00 I'd like to take you back now to the aircraft carrier, where we were sunk

Can I just ask another couple of questions just about the general conflict. You mentioned before you were something like 56 hours at action stations, how do you stay alert, how do you...?

Well, you're at first degree of readiness, that doesn't mean you're firing all the time, that you're there, you're closed up, and that's what you call first

17:30 degree of readiness. Of course when we got back into Singapore, we weren't closed up there, but we were still working, trying to get these people off the ship and ashore. And then out in the stream and dropped anchor, and you know by three o'clock in the morning, before we could think about going down below.

18:00 **Was there any chance of having a bit of a rest, when you were closed up at the guns?**

The only time that you were rested closed up, there is always one on the phone, and yes, I can remember going up to meet the Japs, as were going to,

18:30 the vibration down on the afterdeck, it was pretty bad. And there was a wall of water nearly as high as the ceiling there, and behind the props going flat out, you know. So, yeah, we were getting along.

And when you are in the middle of a battle, what sort of sights and sounds

19:00 **are around you, in terms of what are people saying to each other, what's people attitude, are people yelling at each other, are they running?**

No, not around the guns. Occasionally I fell over a blooming, shell cases were underneath me, and I probably yelled out, "Shit," but I was all right. And

19:30 they said, "Are you hit, Bill?" you know. And I said, "No, I'm right," so yes.

Is there any sort of frantic... Do orders get a bit more frantic, and a bit more tense and is there?

No, no. You might have a gunner's mate telling you where to aim shots or something. But no. It's strange,

20:00 I was telling you about a plane that sort of lined us up, and he was flying past our stern, and we were on Y-gun. And we didn't realise that we had, this bloke on a machine gun. And anyway, the next thing he comes crawling around the back, his eyebrows is burnt, abusing the hell out of us,

20:30 "You silly bastards, you nearly killed us." We'd fired over his head, you know, we were probably firing at a bit of an angle like that, but, you know, it wouldn't be far above him. Well there's a fair bit of heat comes out of the end of the gun, and the barrels get hot too, something I haven't touched on, they get red hot.

Does this affect any way that the

21:00 **guns fire, when they get so hot?**

Yes, it does. If you have a misfire. The chap that loaned, left that barrel there in his will to me, he was on a gun above me, X-turret. And he had a misfire there, and he was so anxious to, you know,

21:30 keep firing, that he opened the breech and threw it over the side. Well they're likely to go off, you know. So anyway, it hit the water without exploding. It's something you... If there's a misfire, you've got to give it a bit of time, your gun's red hot.

And you mentioned you were in Y-turret, can you explain to me,

22:00 **not really knowing the layout of the ship, whereabouts that's located on the ship?**

Well.

And also keep in mind, that the camera can't see that picture, so if you can explain it to me?

Well Y-turrets at that time, we had two openings, one for the trainer and one for the gun-layer. And steel was around to the side of the ship, the gun. But from about that height,

22:30 it wasn't touching the deck, it wasn't, you know, it's not like a turret that's closed up and everything, and you're inside. If there's any shrapnel flying about, you're likely to get taken just, in those sort of gun shields and not much. If one of those five inch shells,

23:00 that we were in, in Endau Bay had hit us, you know, it'd wipe a gun out quick smart. We, we brought up, or the English brought up, we were in the far end of Java and Sumatra and Sunda Straits, and they happened to get over a Jap sub that couldn't

- 23:30 get deep enough to avoid the depth charges. And this was a modern English destroyer, you know, proper turret and things. So anyway, when this sub started to come up, a lot of them rushed to the side, yelling out, "Hooray." But this thing started firing torpedoes and they manned their gun,
- 24:00 which would be at least a five inch gun, if not bigger, yeah, five inch. And they hit the A-turrets and knocked out the crew. So, we pulled up alongside this stupor, and these English blokes, Lordy, bloody grim chum, you know, the way they talk, using the f-word.
- 24:30 So they told us all about it. And I noticed when I was on a corvette later in the war, we got over one, and I said to the officer of the watch, I said, "You want all your machine guns, and your four inch gun closed up, because if you ever bring one to the top, they'll fire at you, and they've got a bigger gun than we've got."
- 25:00 But anyway, we could. We hadn't brought one up. We'd been over a couple there off the east coast of Australia, in deep water. They'd get down. They seemed to get down. I don't know, you just can't disturb them. But nowadays you would, because torpedoes would follow them down, if you fired a torp at them, or whatever. They'd hone in on it, if necessary.
- 25:30 **And talking about your gun turret again, in terms of the whole ship, where was it positioned? Is it starboard, port, front, back?**
- No they'd be in a line. There was A right up the bow. There was B which was another sort of deck up, just below the bridge. Then you'd get back to the stern, you've got X turret which is above us, we're down here, we're down
- 26:00 at deck level. But they're all line ahead.
- And from the gun turret, in a battle situation, such as either where the Thanet was sunk, or the Repulse, or something like that. What, what sort of a perspective do you have, do you get much of a sense of what's going on around you?**
- Oh, when you're being bombed, it's a pretty deadly situation. I must tell you, this carrier -
- 26:30 I've got a painting down below, I'll show you later. She got hit 40 times. She had steel decks. She was the first ship, the first carrier that was built as a carrier, and had fairly strong decks, but after being hit with so many bombs, they had two four inch high angle guns,
- 27:00 probably numerous machine guns and everything up in the structure. Yes, she suffered terribly. Anyway, as she was going down, we had 16 flying around up there. And we couldn't fire up there, because they were low angle guns, so I went on to
- 27:30 this 12 pounder, three inch gun, and as a fuse setting, I was just putting it into, the bloke down the side's setting the fuse to go, you know, somebody would be calling out the height you wanted it to explode. If they're already coming down, you might call, "Five thousand," or something, or, "Seven thousand," or, "Eight thousand," but they were up a fair height. And the amazing thing about it, we could twist and turn,
- 28:00 we dodged a few. The first bomb almost got us on the stern, it wouldn't have been any further from here to that thing, was straight underneath. And that threw a few of us on our backsides, it really lifted the ship, cause these are 250 ks [kilograms], 500 pound. So, it was a pretty noisy thing.
- 28:30 Knocked the steering about a bit. One of the officers came back and had a look at the tiller flat. The tiller flat is the part that controls the rudder, in there, the motors and everything. And its all full of coir rope and wire ropes, and everything like that. So,
- 29:00 anyway I closed the hatch. I was saying that we weren't leaking, so I think they thought there'd be a hole in the bottom. So it might have ex, may have been an armour piercing bomb perhaps, you can get the HEs [high explosive] that'll explode when they virtually hit the water or you can get one that'll probably go a bit of depth before it blows.
- 29:30 So possibly it was down ten or 15 feet, or something like that, you know, before it's let go. But yes, that really rocked the ship, that was the first one. We had another couple of near misses, we were very close.
- What runs through your head at a near miss like that?**
- Well, it's a relief, so, it hasn't hit you. Anyway,
- 30:00 we had another couple of near misses, and then we had a direct hit and that was on the boiler room. And it must have been an armour piercing bomb, I think, because it went right down and blew the boiler out. So, we come to a stop, and so we were in a bad way. So,
- 30:30 they'd, it was another couple of bombs had hit us. Another one virtually in the same place, and so she was getting busted up a bit down below. With a lot of the soakers we got out of there, they didn't live, they were burnt and skin hanging off them, and sorry.

- 31:00 So, by this time, she was listing to port, and we were able to get two Carley rafts across, one from the other side, and across there and get these injured on. There was quite a few injured. So anyway, we had then, we had
- 31:30 asdic gear, it's not allowed to fall into the hands of the Japs. It's just like the signals and one thing and another, that bag is lead weighted and any codes, or anything and that, is thrown over the side. I don't know what the skipper was doing. I'd gone up there. He said to prepare to abandon ship, was the first call we got.
- 32:00 And I went up. My abandon ship station was the motorboat, which was on the starboard side, and there were and bits hanging on the daybed, but there was no boat. So, the, I looked through to the other side to the whaler, and it's gone. So, we had no boats. We only had to get floats out then. So,
- 32:30 it was back, I just went back to the gun. I thought, "What the bloody hell do I do now?" I threw a Detten raft off, that was hanging up there, and I see the skipper coming down, and he went down to his cabin and that was the last we saw of him. What he was doing down there, I don't know. Whether he had something
- 33:00 that shouldn't fall into the enemy's hands, I don't know.

Did he say anything to you, when he?

No, no. No, I just noticed him. Yes. So anyway, we had this petty officer,

- 33:30 he had to go down, and I think it was a depth charge or something. But it had to blow the asdic gear up, you know. You can't go down and unbuckle it or anything. So, when she's going down, you can blow it to pieces. So, somehow it's attached awfully close to it. I think he was on his way out when it blew up, and so...
- 34:00 He didn't die on the spot. He died about two days later on the hospital ship. This is another story. So, yeah, well anyway. The ship had its back broken, the bow sort of come up like that, and the stern seemed to be going up, and the bow sunk and the stern stuck up there, it seemed a long time.
- 34:30 You know, you might call a quarter of an hour a long time, or ten minutes, you know. This thing was still sitting up there, the flag was still up there, and my gun, for once, was pointing right up in the sky. Anyway,

How did you...?

I always thought you had to go over the high side, so. The high side was starboard side,

- 35:00 and the only thing I did was skun my shins a bit, clambering up this flaming deck to get over the side. So, the Detten raft I put over, there was three or four of us around that. And the gunners' mate, the poor old fellow, he's probably married, you know, he'd be a full age of 26 probably, but you know, we'd call that
- 35:30 old then, you'd almost call him 'Dad'. He might have been 27. He wanted to sit up on the top of it, and I thought, "Oh, damn this, I'll swim over to a bit of wreckage." So, there was plenty of wreckage about. So I swam over to a bit of wreckage, and clung to that for a while. And about five, five and a half hours went past, and while we were
- 36:00 in the oil, and two ships had sunk fairly close together, fair amount of oil, you felt warmer, it's not the best stuff to be swimming in. I had a shirt on, I'd kicked me long trousers off, you had to have clean clothing when you went into battle, in case shrapnel goes through and takes the material into your
- 36:30 system somewhere, so its supposed to be clean. But anyway, I thought these weren't the best to be swimming in, so kicked those off and me shoes. And so I was, still had underpants on underneath that, and a shirt. So, that was good.

What did you do for five hours?

Hmm.

What did you do for five hours?

Oh, we just kept together, and this was something the captain drilled into us at one stage. We had an abandon ship thing there one day. And had the boat lowered, the two Carley rafts tied together, towing them.

- 37:30 And he said, "The main thing is to keep together. They have a better chance of finding you, than shooting off somewhere else." And at this stage, we were only about ten mile from the coast, the Bay of Bengal, halfway down Ceylon, it's Sri Lanka now, on the Indian Ocean side.
- 38:00 As you come up on the swell, it wasn't a very terribly rough sea, you could see ashore. And there was a couple, actually, from the aircraft carrier, actually swam ashore, they'd swum that far, that when they were picking them up with boats from the hospital ships, which came along later. Looking back, there

- was an Indian sloop sunk, there was a fleeter wooller, and oh a lot of
- 38:30 devastation further back, and...
- Did you talk to each other during those five hours in the water?**
- Yes, there was even a bit of humour occasionally.
- What sorts of things?**
- Somehow I felt, you know, doing the right thing, keeping in a group, you know. I thought, "We're not far out. Somebody will come out here before long."
- 39:00 It might be tomorrow, but, you know, as long as we can stay afloat, we'll be picked up." Then lo and behold, this hospital ship appears. And so it got amongst us, got amongst the aircraft carrier's survivors first,
- 39:30 and they lowered boats down. So they picked us up, and I knew what it was like to be covered in oil, in my clothes. When we got aboard, or before we got aboard, we had a few dead in the Carley rafts. And I had, one mate, he'd joined
- 40:00 up with me, this Percy Blakeney, and he hadn't long been dead, you know. And I pulled him out of there, and I got him onto the platform, the gangway up to the top, and I was about to carry him up, and I thought you know, "He's entitled to a sea burial," sort of thing, having seen it done earlier in the, in the war. And the bloke there, he was quite abrupt, he said, "No good bringing him aboard, he's
- 40:30 dead," you know, "let him go." Righto. So I let him go, the last I saw of him was going down the side of the ship, with his hands up. So much you don't forget, it's not easy. So anyway, we were
- 41:00 picked up. I got under the shower, I got out of these, the shirt.
- We'll just stop there for a minute Bill, cause we've reached the end of the tape, and it might be a good time to.**
- 41:11 - tape ends.

Tape 7

- 00:38 **Okay, I've just got a couple of questions. Prior to the ship being sunk, what work were you doing with the ships in the Indian Ocean from Singapore?**
- Oh, from Singapore, we were a force but not quite big enough to take on the
- 01:00 Japs. As I related to you before, after Pearl Harbour and our two ships were sunk, the Japanese with capital ships and almost with carriers, were as strong as Britain and America put together. Us, that's included us, you know.
- So what was your ship doing, like, with this force of Japanese coming**
- 01:30 **down towards Singapore, what was the orders for the ship?**
- You just couldn't do anything about it. They had the planes. They could land anywhere they wanted to behind our troops. And you just couldn't stop them. That's how it was, right down to the, you know,
- 02:00 they were just outside Singapore.
- So when you left Singapore, who did you leave with? The crew? Or did you take any people on board?**
- Oh, we had a couple of trips down there and back again, and down to Batavia. I'd have to look up records almost. We took a convoy down,
- 02:30 to Batavia. Then another one, an American one, took them out past the Sunda Straits, came back again. They had another destroyer or something there. And then, what probably saved us at that stage, was
- 03:00 Commodore Collins was in charge of ABDAs [Australian, British, Dutch, American] they called it, which meant Australian, Dutch, American whatever it is, add a couple of the letters together. And we were a part of ABDA force at that stage. But anyway, he came aboard and we had a convoy of two ships
- 03:30 to take to Colombo with civilians and women, kids and civilians mainly. And so that was the 6th of February. We would have cleared the Sunda Straits, I suppose on the 7th of February. It was getting pretty close to the end of Singapore, anyway. And we sailed fairly straight
- 04:00 out into the Indian Ocean. We didn't turn up the coast or anything like that because the Japs' ships were

already out round there. And you might remember they caught the [HMAS] Yarra, three cruisers. Anyway, as luck had it, we just kept going and going, quite a long way, before we turned towards Colombo, North West,

04:30 and eluded these ships without getting knocked off. It was quite a feat, luck I think. So then, we were then part of the British Far Eastern fleet from then on. We were with those for quite a while. We had four battleships there at one stage. Only one, War Spike was the strongest of them.

05:00 She was properly done up. She was even First World War. [HMS] Resolution, and I forget, I can't just bring the other two to mind, they were pretty old ones.

How many women and children were on board the ship?

I couldn't say. There were probably a ship of about, four thousand tons or something like that, they're reasonable size,

05:30 you'd get quite a lot on them. I think they'd put as many as they could, probably we had a few Dutch on there too. Because at that stage, one of our chaps who'd been on the Vampire with us, he got put off in Singapore, I don't know whether he had appendicitis or something. Anyway he got across to Palang Bay, and down from there,

06:00 to Java. And he had a motorbike, you know, it had just been abandoned. So, there was a bit of that about, you know. The Dutch civilians seemed to throw it in very quick, the naval force didn't. The Dutch navy stayed in the battle until they were sunk, the whole lot of them.

06:30 **And what was this scene like, with women and children on board, and having to sail out to the Indian Ocean? What was the kind of the scene like, the feeling like on board?**

Well you were just hoping that you'd be able to get there, you know. It would have been a dreadful scene if we'd been caught up with. Because, you can imagine an eight inch cruiser coming. The first thing you do in British tradition, is

07:00 run to defend the thing. The ships, they're supposed to scatter, but they wouldn't have the speed to scatter, they'd dead set going to be sunk. And some of those big cruisers hit you from 17 or 18 thousand yards, pretty accurate. So, no you wouldn't get far.

And, and....

And the destroyer wouldn't get far either.

07:30 **You were talking about how you were sunk in that scene. What had happened before that to make you go out into the ocean?**

Well, there had been a little bit of a lull. The Japs were trying to get India out of the war, too. This is another thing at the time, they'd even bombed a bit of India, sunk a lot of ships up there,

08:00 on their coast, generally knocking them about a bit. So, the Jap fleet seemed to have gone quiet for a while, with no reports of them down there, we thought they'd gone back. And so,

08:30 your question again?

What had led you to be in this situation of being out at sea and being attacked.

Oh yes. Well we knew on the 8th of April that there was an attack coming, because they were back in the area. So, the orders were to get the ships out at sea. They didn't want them

09:00 sunk in the harbour. And we were told to hug the coast and run down the south. And we had just turned to come back, thinking we'd been missed. But somebody spotted us, and then, of course, the next thing, there was quite a big number of planes over us, dive bombers. So, we didn't get back. It was simple as that.

09:30 **How many planes were there?**

You were asking about, or we were talking about shoring up sides of ship and that. There was always a certain amount of timber, that you could jam things up against it. Even a hammock might fill a bit of a hole, you know. Or you might have a

10:00 a mat that you could drop over the side. And if you got enough rope, you'd take it up around the bow and gradually pull it tight, top and bottom, you know. That type of thing. But we didn't get time for that. We were gone.

10:30 **Take us through what you saw, with the, it was the [HMS] Hermes which was attacked first. Take us through what you were witnessing.**

Well, in a very short period, they were peeling off, one after the other, you know. There was already one down there dropping his bomb, there's another about halfway down, coming with another one, it was just that fast. It didn't

- 11:00 take long to drop 40 bombs. And what happened too, was there, the hatch that they bring the planes up on, we only had one plane on board there. And the planes had been flown off. They could carry torpedoes, these old planes, nothing like the Japs. But they were flown off to an airfield just outside Trincomalee a bit, and
- 11:30 the only one aboard was one that was under repairs. So, but anyway. This hatch that brings the planes up, or takes them down and runs them back, that got jammed, and she was on fire down below decks and everywhere. It was, it was shocking really to watch.
- 12:00 And these bombs, I think most of them must have been armour piercing or something, they seemed to have gone through the deck too. She had fires everywhere. And she was starting to come over, and go by the bows that way. And that's when we started to notice them circling over the top, and we went off at a fair speed. Twisting and turning.
- 12:30 And that was just after a few near misses. And then, a couple of hits dead centre almost, completely crippled us, you know. The rest was. I don't remember being machine gunned. This is strange, you know. Usually you would think, "Oh there'll be strafing as well."
- 13:00 But, I don't remember that at all.

What did the dive bombers look like when they were coming down at you?

Well looking south was where the sun was there, 'cause you're in the northern hemisphere. They were coming out of the sun, so.

- 13:30 Straight at you. They were at a pretty good angle, it shouldn't be extremely fast. How they pulled out of these dives, I don't know. I wouldn't be sure, but they were probably at 200 feet before they flattened out, and the bombs still coming. Another second and it's got you.

What does it feel like, to see this and hear this coming at you?

Oh, it's

- 14:00 pretty scary. Yes, especially if you think one's going to hit you. Lucky I was just on that part of the ship probably, where I missed them all. It could have been much worse, it really could have.

What were you doing? What was your position, at this...?

- 14:30 Well, I had been on Y-gun, and they, two-and-a-half ringer, who was what we called 'number one'. You've got the skipper on the bridge, the next in command is usually aft. If your skipper gets killed or injured badly, the chap down aft has got control of the ship. He'll probably have to go up to the bridge, but he's usually
- 15:00 down aft, and conducting things there. And he was the one that, "Come here and give these blokes a hand with the fuse setting to keep these dive bombers up there a bit," you know. But, they were coming that fast, you know, just peeling off one after the other. What seemed like
- 15:30 ten minutes, could possibly have been less. But, yeah. So, after we'd broken in half, they seemed to level off a bit up there. There was still one or two was carrying their bombs. I suppose, they
- 16:00 they didn't want to take them back. They wanted to use the last little bit of the Vampire, sticking up, the back part of it. I think they were just having a bit of dive bomb practice on that. It was, coming back onto carriers, I think they liked to get rid of their ammunition in case of an accident, you know, on board.

What was the fuse setting machine that you were

- 16:30 **on?**

You have a... It's just a machine, about so long, this one was anyway, for 12 pounders. On the end of the nozzle, you can set them to explode at a certain height. So, we'd get the shells there and hold them in there, and somebody would be calling out what height to set. The fuse setter

- 17:00 would do his best to set at it that, and you'd hope it would explode in the air. Your chance of hitting one, with a shell, was much less than it is if you can explode the thing near him, get a bit of shrapnel around him, and whatever. So that's the idea of those.

And you said the attack took about ten minutes. How long did this feel like, at the

- 17:30 **time?**

Oh, it didn't appear long, it happened that quick, it certainly wasn't long. They weren't like the Stuka's [dive bombing aircraft], the Stuka's we would have been able to dodge them, cause they wouldn't have been down as low. But according to those that had been

- 18:00 attacked by them, they used to have a screaming sound, the bomb, you know, as its let go. No, they'd be probably pulling out or seven or eight hundred feet or further.

And what was the panic like on board? Was their panic, or...?

No, we were disciplined. A certain amount of

18:30 those that had nothing to do, you know, seen crawling in behind parts, or something, where they think they're safe, but you're not safe. There was very little of that.

What about men who were injured already from the bombs?

Well, the only hope they had is that you carry

19:00 them down to the raft. And they, at this particular stage, we were listing to port a fair bit, you know. And it was pretty easy to get them from there to the water's edge, and from there to the raft. By the time I'd been up there, and had a look at the damage control

19:30 things of these two boats, they were all out there, already, and getting them in the water, so. I thought, "Well, I'll go back to my gun." So, the 12 pounder, they'd already left that, so, cause we were getting on a bit of an angle.

20:00 We were going, and breaking in half. So, yes. So yes, well anyway, I was picked up, the beater, the hospital ship, and I just kicked me clothes off, just outside the showers,

20:30 and me shirt and underdacks [underwear], got most of the grease off me. I came out to get me clothes, I was going to give them a bit of a rinse or something, and they'd already been picked up. I think they'd just threw them overboard, all the oily things. I thought, "Bloody hell, what do I do now? There are nurses running about."

21:00 Not that proud or anything, I was just one of those chaps that liked to be covered up. So, I found some pillowslips and I looked at the thing there, and you couldn't get them around this way, and the best way was to pull the bottom out of the thing and well, pull them up. So, that was what I was

21:30 covered up with, and that's what I went ashore with, when they put us off in Colombo.

Were you cold?

We were starting to get cold in the water. Being in there, a while, you do get cold, you know, almost wished I'd had my long trousers, so.

22:00 Yes, you never, never should kick all your clothes off in the sea, it does keep you warm, believe it or not, to a degree. Because if you go in the Atlantic or something, like some of those poor devils there, you wouldn't be in there very long, if you weren't picked up in a boat very quickly, oh you wouldn't last long.

22:30 So tell us, did you see the last of the ship going down?

Yes, it seemed to take a while, it was just the stern, and it still had the flag, and it's the first time the Y-gun was pointing up in the air. If we'd had a charge in, and been able to hang onto the deck, we might have been able to fire one up,

23:00 but you wouldn't have hit anything.

And what was that moment like?

Oh well, it's not good. It's, you know, you were beaten by these bloody Japs. And thank God, we were,

23:30 close enough to shore, if we were out in the ocean. They would have just sailed past you because they don't pick up people, and they won't be picked up themselves. If you sink one of their ships, they will not be picked up.

Were there, were there any further dangers, fire or explosions, while you were in?

24:00 No, not after that. Once we were aboard the hospital ship, we turned and went round to Colombo. And it was pretty devastating there. The Tenedos that was with us, Forces Head, she'd been sunk there, English destroyer. And

24:30 the troopship. One of the few things. A lot of devastation round there. Airfields had been done over and that sort of thing. But anyway, when we landed there, the first thing they did was, were put in St Joseph's Barracks, and they had some quite good buildings there.

25:00 They hadn't been damaged at this stage. And we were able to be partly kitted up there. So, I had a draft then to the, an N-class destroyer. And we, [HMS] Nepal. But anyway, I was on draft to that for about 16 days, but she never came in. Those ships

25:30 went over to Mombassa and were out of the way. But I would have liked to have gone aboard that ship, because she was modern, better armed, and it would have been interesting, faster ship.

What were you thinking at this stage, having, you

26:00 **know, being through so many experiences of ships going down, and seeing, you know, others, Sydney go down and other ships go down, and Singapore falling? What were you thinking about things?**

Its, yes, we were. I suppose one of the thoughts that go through your mind, is you wished we had about 500 Spitfires up there, or something, you know.

26:30 It would have stopped this catastrophe, and probably another 500 down in, in Java and probably another 500 in Australia, New Guinea. But you know, they took all the islands, the whole lot. They didn't get all of New Guinea, fortunately, but by crikey, it was close. So, all the islands

27:00 to the north of it. So, yes, so you know, we were taking in the news a bit. It was going to be a ten year war, you know, to get all this back again. But it's amazing. Britain was building Spitfires faster than they could be shot down by the Germans,

27:30 and we actually got a few of those into Darwin. The Yanks were building the Kittyhawks at pretty rapid speed, so, we had a few of those in Darwin until they built up quite a force. And Darwin of course, was knocked about. We'd pulled in there before the Japs come into the war, and I drank in all the well-

28:00 known pubs there, at the time. And you know, a small town. What amazed me, was the money these wharfies were getting. We were talking in pounds those days, and they were getting 13 pound a week, you know, it seemed a massive wage, but, you know, at that time. Bottles everywhere,

28:30 heaps of them, beer bottles, you know. In the gardens, you know, footpaths, bottles marking the things, down on the beaches, heaps. So, anyway.

Well, speaking...?

Darwin got these raids, I don't know how many raids. But that first raid was worse than Pearl Harbor.

29:00 You know, you always hear about Pearl Harbour, but you don't hear of the damage, so much, that happened in Darwin. And they, goodness how many raids they might have had, 60 odd, after that, probably more, I don't know.

Well, tell us about how you were recovering after this experience in Colombo?

Well from there...

How were you able physically and mentally able to recover from this?

29:30 Oh we were young, and I think this fear doesn't affect you like it would an older person, I think. I had no wife or kids to worry about, or come to that, the only one in the family was alive, was old Dad. Sort of wasn't expecting to see him again, at a few stages. But, I think for most of us,

30:00 we were young. And from there.

What, what about losing mates though Bill, what about...?

Oh, that's a different thing.

How were you recovering from this?

Well, you never recover from that. No, you can't recover from that. No way.

30:30 But, so, anyway, we were shifted from there up to Diatalawai that's right up in the hills. And the sixth, some of the sixth divvy [division] were there. And Curtin, who was prime minister at the time, he was calling all our troops back. And [Winston] Churchill [Prime Minister of England] would have liked us to stay in the area, I think.

31:00 Churchill done a good job, I wouldn't be too crook on him. But anyway, we were up there for several days, and this N-class destroyer didn't turn up, so I don't know how long we were up there. We were supposed to go up to

31:30 one of the Indian cities, up the Indian Ocean side. And there would be a ship pick us up there. Then there was another one coming down to Colombo. And anyway, it arrived, I think it was already full or whatever, so that couldn't take us. So then, the

32:00 Dominion Monarch, we were supposed to go up to India to, to catch that. Anyway, the next signal we got, that she was coming through to Colombo. So we must have been clear of the Japs a bit at that time. So this was a 27,000 tonner, there was a lot of army fellows, ourselves, and

32:30 she was full, brim full. I don't know how many we took back, but. She was a fairly fast ship. We only had one armed merchant ship taking us back, which is the Manoora, I think it was. So, she'd be flat out keeping ahead of her,

33:00 I think. This Dominion Monarch was a fairly fast ship. We all had jobs, most of us just cleaning jobs.

Most of the guns had already had DEMS [Derived from DEMS – Defensively Equipped Merchant Ship] on them. They're naval men that are put on merchant ships. There was a few

- 33:30 directed to that – I wasn't one. So yes, and running round that big ship for exercise, was a big thing – it was a long way round it. Getting us fit. And by this time we had a set of clothes,
- 34:00 what we called come out of slops, that's out of stores, navy refers it to as slops. And these were slops, they seemed to fit where they touched. And so, anyway we arrived back in those, and we arrived just outside Jervis Bay while
- 34:30 the small submarines were in Sydney Harbour. We didn't come in there until almost the next day. And they couldn't unload us onto Catapult, because Catapult had been sunk. That was a place where you could usually bunk in there. If you were on draft, you were often waiting for a ship.
- 35:00 Catapult used to take quite a few sailors. Anyway, one of the subs had fired a torpedo, I think, at one of the American cruisers, missed anyway, and had a near miss on the old Catapult, and sunk it, so there was 22 sailors lost there, on that.
- 35:30 I don't know what size they would have had on those small destroyers, but they must have had a fair bit of kick in them. Not destroyers, submarines. Only three men driving them.

So you came in to Sydney Harbour, what did it feel like to be back in?

Lovely, wonderful. Especially as we got on the train, and

- 36:00 when we got to Melbourne we were on 28 days' leave, what they call survivor's leave. No, it was good to get back. I had a girlfriend in the town and we went to a lot of dances and all these sort of things. Anyway,
- 36:30 she was fairly keen on me and I used to write to her a lot, but she had more friends than I thought. So, what I was told when I come back another time. So, that was a near miss. Another near miss. So, yeah. Another lass I had to, was
- 37:00 yes, she was an army girl, a sergeant, clerical work, and a very nice kid too. But I lost touch with her. Had another one up in Townsville, who I'd met on the way up, we were going to Singapore, she was a lovely kid. And I didn't write to her. After a while I did, but I was on the Sydney
- 37:30 for a while. Then I thought, "Oh well," you know, "I'll never get back there." She was tied up with a flight winger or something, better prospects than I had, obviously. So, the Yanks seemed to have the rest of them – it was crawling with Americans. But there was a lot of girls there
- 38:00 that stuck to the Aussies, there was quite a few. They were pretty few and far between, but yes.

What did you think?

Of course, they were getting a pound a week. And they could get flats and everything, treat the girls pretty nicely. Bunches of flowers. We never even thought about bringing them flowers.

- 38:30 Did you, Tom?

What did you think of this situation?

Well, in a way I was glad to be there. It was our draft up there. And anyway, we'd been out at the first raid that was there. We were out at a

- 39:00 sort of a racecourse and they had army tents there. And anyway, saw this plane overhead, the searchlights were on it, there was only one plane. And after a while, there was a Kittyhawk up there. To see these in night action, these shells leaving the Kittyhawk, they seemed to track terribly slow. Anyway, the plane got away, and it knocked out a coconut
- 39:30 tree. There wasn't much damage at all. So, oh, Townsville's reasonably safe, but not if we get a big fleet of carriers in there, you know. So, had to clean up the town pretty quick.

We have to just pause there Bill, 'cause I've got the poke.

- 40:01 - tape ends.

Tape 8

- 00:38 We were in Townsville, there was a quite group up there, just waiting to be drafted different places. Anyway, somebody contacted us, a group of us, said, "We want three men on the wharf," because in the first raid, there had been a

- 01:00 hell of a panic, a lot of ships, almost hundreds at times, they're anchored everywhere. So anyway, there was a lot of panic, no way of contacting the ships that were tied up, which ones to get out first, whether the munitions ships or oil ships, or what. So they wanted three to work on the wharf putting these on. And by that time,
- 01:30 I thought, "That's not a very safe job, this. If you ever get a big raid here, they'll knock the wharf out first." Anyway there was two of us survivors off the Vampire, and another chap, and our job was to put telephones on each ships as they came in, and connect them up. And they were connected up to an office in Townsville.
- 02:00 So, and there was always one of us, we were in the pier master's office. It had a bit of a veranda out the side of it, where we had a hammock. There was always one of us there in the night-time to take messages. And so that was the idea of that, to get a bit of organised panic and get them out in the proper order sort of thing. But fortunately,
- 02:30 we never got a big raid there, so it turned out a pretty safe job. And I was living ashore, getting 30 shillings a week too, for board, which wasn't far from the wharf. So, it wasn't a bad position. Anyway, from there, I had a draft to the Colac, and when things were safe and they reckoned they didn't
- 03:00 seem to need us. So, and another thing about that wharf there, the old wharfies, they were good fellows. They brought a crowd up from Sydney, and the first thing they were, they fell out, they were on strike complaining about this and that. And we had a sergeant there, he'd been drilling
- 03:30 army blokes there, and he said, "I'd like to get you bastards on the Kokoda Trail with a thousand pound pack on your back, give you something to whinge about." I'll never forget that little incident.

What was their response to that comment?

Oh I don't know, I can't remember. But I enjoyed the comments. It did shut them up, yes. They wouldn't know what to say to him.

- 04:00 He was a pretty savage bloke. So, he'd probably come back from the Middle East or somewhere too.

And how would you describe the atmosphere in Townsville at the time?

Full of Yanks. It was crowded. There was troops, and it was a place where, there and Cairns, where you could, particularly

- 04:30 Townsville at the time, get aboard these smaller ships. They weren't sending very big ones up there at the time because the Japs still had an air force. So we just convoyed these ships, a lot of it back from Townsville to Moeresby or Milne Bay. And so
- 05:00 we arrived there. The ships wouldn't go into the jetty, they'd drop anchor a little bit further out. The corvettes would go alongside and pick them up, pick up the troops, run them into the jetty and out again for another load. And there might be two or three corvettes doing this, depending on how many ships we had in there. But if we had to, to fight back
- 05:30 on the Kokoda Trail.

And in terms of the strikes that were happening on Townsville, and also that theory of the Brisbane Line, and things like that, what was the general morale like in Townsville?

Everyone knew whether we were going. The, those that had relatives out west, they were going out there. I know the pier master's son, that's where he

- 06:00 was going to go, and he was pretty well up in the shipping business too, had the Japs landed. They reckoned at that time they'd only need two divisions to take Australia. Had they won the Battle of the Coral Sea, it would have been bad, real bad. But anyway, so, anyway,
- 06:30 we used to get these ships unloaded and get out before the morning, if possible, you know. You'd get them out to sea, hopefully a hundred mile away or whatever, back for another lot. So we were doing quite a bit of that. And also to Milne Bay, when we secured that. Milne Bay was
- 07:00 almost under Japs there for a while, we just hung onto that by the skin of our teeth.

Well tell me about when you went to the Colac?

Well this is, when I mentioned I joined it in Townsville, from being on the wharf, that was my next ship, so.

Well tell me a bit about the ship, what?

Well, this was a

- 07:30 corvette. I forget the tonnage of these, they weren't terribly big, but we'd have, oh, possibly 80 men. And not terribly well equipped. We had Oerlikons, we had one four inch gun, and we had

08:00 a lot of depth charges. We had asdic - we could pick up subs if they were about, underneath us, or whatever. And they were fairly good ships for that work. And they were coming off the slips that fast. We were building them, you know, as I said, they were being built here in Maryborough too. They were being built right almost round Australia, I think,

08:30 at the time, particularly down in Victoria and possibly a lot in Sydney, would have been in there.

And how did the corvette run in a rough sea?

Well, the biggest sea we had, this was after we'd been on her a fair while. We'd been down in Melbourne for a refit, and down in the Victoria Docks there, which is a pretty flash place. Now, I think, there's no docks there. And

09:00 so anyway, it was a pretty cold place, we were down there in the blooming winter. So, I think it was round about August, after we had, got the refit, whatever they did, probably boilers and different things, the engines, were all looked after, ship painted,

09:30 we were ready for sea. So we had a fairly big convoy, which at the start was reasonably big. I don't know how many corvettes we had, maybe only three, I think. So, some of them when we got to the [Port Phillip] Heads, there was a terrific sea

10:00 going, with these south-east storms, you know, south-west rather, and I was on the wheel at the time. And we were getting thrown around, this was a steel box, it's not very wide, you know, and you had to be pretty careful, you didn't, we were getting thrown, you know. So anyway, we went through the rip,

10:30 and being this was my third ship, I understood seas a bit. And these blooming waves, and I thought, "Well I hope we keep heading. I don't want to be on the side of a broach," because that's about the worst thing that can happen to a ship, it'll tip you over. So,

11:00 we were going straight out into them, and I thought, "What the hell's going to happen here when we turn to go east, with these behind us?" So anyway, we managed to catch the wave right, and we got up to a 47 degree angle on the inclo-meter, as they call it.

11:30 That's, you're just about gone, you know, you're over that far. If it'd got to 50, you'd probably been taking them a bit. So, but quite often, we were around the angle of 30 and that, that sort of thing, and being thrown about. And as we were getting through this Bass Strait,

12:00 you'd be coming off these waves and you'd just drop. Not too many could stand that. We had a few new recruits that joined us in Melbourne and they didn't get out of the hammock bed. That's where they stayed, in amongst the hammocks. So hopefully their own, because they were pretty sick. We had water everywhere, shoes,

12:30 towels everything, floating around on the mess deck, even though we had these water tight doors, you had to step over to get in, water had gone in. So, yes, it was, it was the roughest sea I've ever been in. Probably if you'd been on the Sydney or something, you wouldn't have noticed it so much. But, we probably hit seas like it going, across the

13:00 the Bight. But they were, they seemed to be bigger and you know, the waves seemed to be, sort of, not, a little bit further apart. You might have to drive through them, or come with them. In a bigger ship it's not so bad. But handling one of these corvettes, we were lucky to hold the wheel on the course. We couldn't hold it on the course. We were steering up to 15 degrees either side,

13:30 because you were getting hit on the quarter, which is the back part of the ship, and it was just pushing you round. You correct it all, you'd get hit again, and it's... And then watching other corvettes, you'd see them up on the tops, and their props out of the water, you know. And this was happening to us, of course, and that's when you'd drop,

14:00 when you've gone over the top of the thing. You had to be a pretty good man on the wheel, too, to control the thing, you know. You're going down, but you want to steer into the next one. Was using a bit of me own knowledge, actually. Still trying to hold their, their course, but, you know, a bit of common sense come into it at times.

Tell me...

So, you know,

14:30 you'd be on the wheel for the best part of an hour before you'd get a relief, so it was hard work.

Tell me about some of the runs you did around the islands, in New Guinea?

Well, we did a few convoys coming down from...as the war progressed. We'd been up round the north there too, even though the Japs were just over

15:00 on New Britain, we were around there, Lae and all those places up to Padang, and ferrying troops and one thing and another. And I'd like to mention, we had a couple of ships hit on the

- 15:30 east coast, with torpedoes. Nobody had spotted them, the torpedoes running, they were faster than ours. They were driven, I've forget what they were driven, whether the, a few of Britain had been working on them, and gave it up. I think, once Germany came into the war, they didn't press on with this. But these were, pretty big.
- 16:00 They were submarines. They were firing these 24 inch torpedoes, and once they hit a ship, she stayed hit, you know, it only needed one torpedo. And we lost the Limerick, we were on the way north with her. And we got around her. There was no way of saving her, she was red hot, she was on fire,
- 16:30 blew the bottom out of her, I think. So, we had to pick up the survivors. And another time, we were coming south, and we noticed the hospital ship,
- 17:00 our hospital ship, the Centaur. I looked over at this, thinking back to the Vita, which the Japs didn't sink – Japs don't sink hospital ships – and she was all lit up, great big Red Cross, and lights on the deck, and you couldn't mistake it. You know, I must have been on the
- 17:30 wheel there at that stage, when I see this thing. And she was going north and we were going south with a convoy. And I thought, "I'd love to be on that, you'd be safe." And next morning, we were the last to see her – she got sunk by a Jap sub. Why, we don't know. She took
- 18:00 three minutes to sink. There was hardly anyone saved. And one of the chaps on board there, was a Reverend Laverick, we knew pretty well, he was in charge of the scouting and that, in Tongala, the local minister. And we, we had a particularly good scout club at that stage.
- 18:30 And that was part of my training. It was a bit like the naval cadets, it did you good, you know. I suppose I was 17 when I left that. I might have been nearly 18, 'cause I was going for a while. So think of those fellows, gone, didn't have a chance. They probably just blew the bottom out of the ship, yeah. Why?
- 19:00 **Looking back, what would you say, the highlight of your time with the Colac was? What were...?**
- I think when we got on leave, yes, especially around Sydney, it was quite a good town. Yes,
- 19:30 we did get another ship hit, yes. We were going north again, and this was the [SS] Ormiston. We had a fairly big convoy, there'd be a few corvettes around it, and nobody saw this, this torpedo coming. Next thing, we see the Ormiston with
- 20:00 almost the bow blown off it. But she didn't sink. And these merchant seamen, they must have thought she was going to sink because they were diving overboard. We had to pick them up and put a lot of them back on board. Because the next idea was to tow her, so we put a signalman on board for a while, so as we could keep in contact
- 20:30 with the ship. But yes, that was one ship that was hit, that just wasn't sunk. It would have taken a long time to fix her up.
- Was that a change of pace for you, not seeing the ship go down?**
- It was, yes. So, yes.
- And after the Colac, you went to the?**
- The Gerard.
- 21:00 Yes, we were. I must have got down to Melbourne again somehow. And I put in for a leading seaman's class. So, anyway, passed that all right, and then I said, you know, "I want to do a diver's course." I should have put in for a gunnery course, I think.
- 21:30 I may have gone to a bigger ship. I had this feeling I'd love to be a diver, for some reason. And in those days, you had the heavy boots and the helmet and the whole lot, and blokes pumping air down to you. So, that didn't eventuate. So the next thing, I'm drafted up to Milne Bay. This was another
- 22:00 camp, where you could be, when they wanted a sailor or two, you know, ships wanted somebody, you'd be drafted to these ships.
- What was...?**
- And I was hoping, you know, I'd probably get another destroyer or something. Anyway, I was picked up by the [HMAS] Arunta and
- 22:30 I think I was taken up by another destroyer too, it wasn't the same Arunta. This was such a beautiful ship after the Vampire, you know. So, I must have been dropped off at Milne Bay. Anyway, apparently the Gerard wanted a very experienced
- 23:00 seaman. They had some good boys on there. But, anyway, they wanted a fairly experienced bloke, so. Anyway, I was picked up by the Arunta and dropped off in Padang. And anyhow, I'm waiting out there at the shore, somebody said, "She's due in any minute," this Gerard.

- 23:30 So here it comes around the corner, and they said, "Yes this is it. Gerard." God good, what an awful ship, you know. And every now and again, it had this engine, she'd go bang, and you'd get a smoke ring go up, you know. And then, another few turns, then bang, because she had a very big fly wheel.
- 24:00 So they said, "That's it." And I thought, "Oh, no." So, when I got aboard, fortunately the beer ration was on. So, you weren't allowed to bring a bottle of beer on it, to this period. But they decided to give the army two bottles a week. So they had to give the navy blokes
- 24:30 two bottles a week. But if you were caught bringing grog aboard, it was a punishable offence, a pretty serious offence. And so, anyway, cheeky blighter says, "Do you drink?" I said, Yeah, bloody oath, I do." So I got me two bottles and fairly quickly knocked them off, too. So, anyway,
- 25:00 it become a very friendly ship, I had some pretty good mates there. I've got a photo of one down below.

And what sort of things would you do to relax?

It was a store ship, this one.

Right.

We were carting stores. It was too slow to go with the ones that were moving up into the islands. So we were just up and down the coast there, and

- 25:30 we might pull in at Lae, or something. There was a good place to pull in there. We got a case full of these cigarettes for six pounds. That was about 50 cartons in this.

Who did you get them from?

I forget how we won those. Somebody was able to get them, you know, I don't think it was

- 26:00 Albert, but it could have been. And that was amongst three of us, anyway. It'd be Albert or Lofty. And you know, that was worth a lot of money.

And being a stores ship, were you able to get your hands on things that...?

Stores, yes, not a problem.

Was there any kind of under the table trading, or?

- 26:30 Yes, we did well alongside wharves. You know, if you got in with the army blokes – natives were very often working, or army fellows. And if we wanted anything, they'd just kick it into the net and we could get it from underneath. But this wasn't till a bit later, until we had this open belly tank, as it was, that the aeroplanes had,
- 27:00 so many extra gallons of fuel that they could carry. When they'd finish with them, they'd just jettison them. So anyway, somebody had already cut this thing out and we hit upon getting this thing, 'cause it was just what we wanted. So we got the army fellows to weld a rudder onto it. And at this time, we were
- 27:30 held up again, there was something wrong with the damn ship. So, we went out to the 17 Mile Depot, the dump as they called it. We get plenty of rigging there, stuff you wanted, sheaves and those things, rigging. And we had the naval ducts, that you know, you can make sails with. But, we cut out our own, and
- 28:00 fitted it with sails. The main benefit we had was working in with the army fellows. If we wanted something, they could just kick it into the net and we could unload it down below. The natives were always interested in this, what's going on, looking over the side, didn't make us feel embarrassed. So, just under the wharf,
- 28:30 and straight into the Gerard. We got away with a few things that way.

What sorts of things?

I'll tell you about one. We had this officer, which we called Snookums – we didn't have a great deal of respect for him. He was a stevedore or something, I think, before he joined us. I don't think he had much naval experience. Somehow he had a seniority over another fellow, which

- 29:00 should have been above him. So he was next to the skipper. But anyway, we called him Snookums. So my friend there nearly got him. We had a boom out attached to the mast and ropes and one thing or another that you could swing it out and pick up stuff.
- 29:30 Anyway on the end of this was a big hook. And Albert tells the story. He said, "I kept lowering this and," he said, "I was only a couple of feet above his head." I don't know whether he was ever fair dinkum, but you know, he said he was. He said he'd got rid of him. But anyway, Snookums. We'd picked up this
- 30:00 side of bacon, and so anyway. Jefferies, he was the other killick on board – killick is a leading seaman – so he was in charge of stores. And anyway, Snookums is down there, having a look at what's going on in the stores, and, "What's

30:30 this Jefferies?" And he says, "It's a rabbit, sir." "What do you mean, it's a rabbit?" Now a rabbit in the navy is when you're going ashore, with a pound of butter or something, and you're getting away with something. They might yell out to you, "Tuck its ears in." But he didn't seem to be up with the terminology. "Don't be silly Jefferies," he said, "it's not a rabbit, it's too fat." So, "Anybody

31:00 can see it's not a rabbit." So yes, we had that joke on him for a long time. But he didn't knock back any food that we offered him, neither did the skipper. The skipper was a good seaman, a merchant navy man. He had about 20 years at sea, I think. It probably would have been a come down for him to be on this blooming ship, as it was for me, you know.

And was it on this ship, when the

31:30 **war ended?**

Yes.

Can you tell me about how you got the news of that?

Well when the war ended, we were back in Moresby. And there was a bit of undersea cable, a massive amount of this stuff. And we were trying to coil all this down in the hull, and

32:00 that was a big load, plus other stuff that went in there. That took us quite a while, to get that aboard. And of course, we set off to the nearest port, which I think was Cairns, because we went inside the reef fairly high up, and come in pretty close to the top of Australia.

32:30 And down through the reef and down to Cairns - you could come down the other side. There was another store ship, it left, but it went straight across. And the Coral Sea there, must have struck a rough sea, 'cause never heard of it again. Another ship lost with all hands. It was about the same size as the Gerard. Anyway, we got away safely.

Well what

33:00 **was your reaction to the news that the war was over?**

Well my reaction was, that I'm a permanent navy and I'm looking around all these blokes, and they're all reserves, and three years or the duration, whatever. So if they'd only been in a couple of years, they still had another 12 months to go, and that sort of thing, you know. So, at this stage, we'd saved up a fair bit of

33:30 grog, because we'd been held up in Moresby. We were away from the Yanks a bit. We'd been down south, we'd bought some whisky and that was worth big money with the Yanks. I think a bottle of whisky was about 13 pounds or something, which was big money in those days. So,

34:00 anyway, yes, we drank all the grog, there was mostly three of us: this Albert, Lofty and myself. Three good blokes. Lofty's brother was the highest decorated air gunner in the air force, at the time. He became

34:30 an MP [Member of Parliament] at one stage, from Hobart. But he went against... He went across Menzies. You know, he must have crossed the floor or something, and he didn't get elected the next time. But that's how party politics work, you know, that. But, yes his brother Lofty, he was a pretty good kid. He was pretty well educated,

35:00 too. He'd been to a top school in Hobart. He'd have made a better officer than Snookums.

And what sort of news did you hear about the bombing of Hiroshima?

Well, it's a little bit of a surprise, because we were expecting the war to go on for quite some time, you know.

35:30 Even though we were getting ahead of them on the islands, we didn't expect it to finish so soon. And they were, they were getting towards their end, even if we hadn't have dropped the bomb. At the time, it didn't worry me much, but, afterwards, later life I thought it was a dreadful thing to do. They dropped

36:00 two. Had it been on the docks or something, it might have been a different thing. But on the civilian population, it was a brutal thing really. You know, thank God Germany didn't get it first.

36:30 Or the Japs. Yes.

When you look back at all of those years during the war, what would you say is your best memory of the time when you served?

Best memory. I think, probably Flinders Naval Depot because of the sportsmanship.

37:00 Also on the Sydney, I really loved that ship. The Vampire was a bit of a shock, mainly because it was out of date. The air conditioning was shocking, we only had this motor that seemed to be giving trouble all the time. They always seemed to want to

- 37:30 pull it to pieces when they got into the harbour. And you know, it travels round through ships and you've got these air vent things that you can turn onto you, you know, in your hammocks somewhere. And so, being without that is a real sweat box. And I can tell you, this was a sweat box in this ship.
- 38:00 The deck-head was dripping a lot, just with condensation. And I remember the white blankets I had there were showing a lot of rust, you know, marks on it. One of the worst places you could be in was a blooming toilet. Cause the heat and the sun, if the sun happened to be on that side of the ship, you got out of there as quick as you could.
- 38:30 **Well thinking back on things like that, what would you say your worst memory would be of the time that you were in the navy?**
- Oh probably the day we were sunk. Yes, you know. It had come to that when we'd witnessed dive bombers. We knew
- 39:00 it was over. They got 31 ships in four days, that fleet air raid by the Japs. They were up into India a bit, knocking the merchant ships out. And us, Indian sloop, tanker, goodness knows what they
- 39:30 got up. And then, they got two eight inch cruisers in very quick time, and they got us and this aircraft carrier in fairly quick time. This was a bit of a frightening experience, you know. You think, "We're not winning this war."
- We're just about to reach the end of this tape,**
- 40:00 **so in the last couple of minutes, do you have any final words that you'd like to sum up your time with, or your life with?**
- Yes, well, when I finally left the Gerard, the war had been over about three months, I think, by the time we got down to Sydney. From there down to Port Melbourne, thinking I was going to get out, because I'd
- 40:30 requested to get out, and that turned out they still wanted me. So next thing, I was down to the guard. For a little while it wasn't too bad. Still a lot of the old sailors there. But once the new recruits were coming in, I don't know what it was, you know, they were different to us. They were just
- 41:00 new boys. Good kids, mind you. They were back to pretty intensive training, too, again. Yeah, playing a bit of sport there. Fortunately I met Doreen, and I was lucky she was left over. She was going with a
- 41:30 chap, Michael Maloney, and her father didn't like these people for some reason. Not Michael Maloney, he was a lieutenant or something. Anyway, I don't know whether I was a rebound or not. I met her at the dance. She was a fun loving girl, Doreen. And a
- 42:00 couple of the girls that were with her.

INTERVIEW ENDS