

Australians at War Film Archive

Ronald Bergman (Rod) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/136>

Tape 1

00:30 **Ok so we will start with a little bit about your early life first off.**

Ok, we will go right back.

Ok right back to day one, where were you born?

East Malvern, Victoria on the 9.6.27.

Who were your parents, and what were their names?

01:00 August James Bergman and Flora Daisy Bergman.

Did they have other children?

No, they didn't, I was the first.

You were the first born and a boy.

Yes that's right.

Where did you grow up?

Dandenong West really, all though originally we started off in Tasmania because my father had a business down their building ocean going ships.

So your father was a seaman?

01:31 He was an engineer seaman, engineer.

Was he Australian born?

No, Swedish.

Swedish born and when did he came to Australia?

That I don't know, he must of come out in one of the early sailing ships, so it must have been in the period just before the First World War.

So what do you know about your father's story?

Not a great deal, all I know is that he

02:00 was quite a clever person and I found this purely by accident, I was working for Colonial Mutual Insurance and I had to go out and interview Mr Wade who was an engineer, and he had his own engineering shop out in North Melbourne, and I presented my card and he immediately said "Your father's name wasn't August James Bergman?" and I said "It sure was", he said "Do you know what, your father taught me everything." and that's Wade Camshaft, that's the camshaft

02:30 that they use on the Holden today.

Is that right! So your father brought that to Australia did he?

I don't know whether he bought it but he taught him everything, he was his apprentice down in Tasmania.

Isn't that great?

There building the ships down their in Tasmania, any rate he was quite excited about it and told me things about my father that I didn't know, apart from what my mother told me.

03:00 I was 3 when the marriage broke up, it was only because he got wiped out in the big flood down in

Tasmania and the Torrens River came down the gauges and flooded all of Launceston, all the ships that he built got washed out to sea. Big flood.

So that ruined him financially?

And that really ruined him that way and he took to drink

03:30 and threw my mother down the stairs when she was pregnant with my sister, that wasn't very nice. And my grandmother apparently came over from Victoria, he grabbed her and brought her back to Victoria and we landed in Dandenong West.

So then you were living with your mum and grandmother?

Grandmother yes. And that was pretty tough, pretty tough.

Why was that?

She had two or three sons living with her to and a daughter

04:00 and we used to sleep out on the veranda with one end closed, only the rest was all open and that was in all weathers, that wasn't very nice, a bit cold, now and then, but we survived and went to Dandenong West School.

This is you and your sister? This is you and your baby sister?

No my brother, I have a baby brother Don, sorry about that.

That's all right.

And he, my brother took over

04:30 where my father left off, he built ships, very clever, he went to school. We went to Dandenong West School and we were there for two years and along came the infantile paralysis so we missed out on 6 months of education; we had to learn from home.

Who taught you from home?

My mother. She gave up in the end until she got sick of it I think. I can understand

05:00 your mother that you wouldn't know.

Had she had an education herself?

Not that I know of. She would have had it ordinary. She came out from England when she was 5, her family originally came from Sussex in England and her grandmother had 9 children altogether, about 9 children. She married a commoner,

05:30 the family was very wealthy in the name of Copbot in England, very wealthy family and when she married a commoner they disowned her, and I always remember going out to Toorak to this big place with my mother, to meet my other relatives on the "no no side", it is just amazing that all the daughters are very

06:00 well bred but have high cheek bones, they are all very good looking women.

Your grandmother's daughters?

Yes they were, very much so. They all had a bit of class about them, one of them married a fellow called Tunbridge, and Mr Tunbridge, he was a gold miner and he was up in Kalgoorlie and ended up striking gold, they had a gold mine up there and bought a couple of hotels and he ended up being aide to comp

06:30 to the Governor here in Victoria as far as I know. I stand to be corrected but he actually won a VC [Victoria Cross] in the Boar War and we didn't know. He used to come out to this house in Dandenong West with all this regalia and we didn't know, great big tall fellow really big, he must have been a man of nearly 7 feet tall.

Sounds impressive.

Well it was impressive. That's what happened there.

So tell me about going to visit

07:00 **the "no no" side of the family, what was that like for you as a kid?**

You mean the grandmother's side?

Your grandmother's side?

Well we grew up under them and because being little boys we got up to all the tricks and that. Two of my uncles were in the First World War, and they used to have these 22 bullets lying around. So my brother and I got the idea, we wanted to see how these worked, so we got a couple of them and put them on the footpath and dropped a brick on them.

07:30 A bit silly wasn't it?

Very lucky not to have hurt yourselves.

Well, very much so, they don't fly up when you drop a brick on them, the things just exploded, it was so funny.

So these were your uncles, were they?

Yes, they were living in the sleep out at the back of the house.

Did they ever talk to you about the war?

No, they didn't actually, they didn't. Not until

08:00 I used to go fishing with one of my other uncles and there were 3 of them all together. I used to go fishing with him and he used to tell me a lot of what they got up to, he had a sense of humour and he told me about this time they were in France, he was the tunneller, he used to tell me he used to tunnel under the German lines and he said to me he had to advance and had to billet somewhere so they dived into this old chalets below and they found

08:30 all this wine, so they all got sizzled". He was laughing his head off about that, he was a funny fellow.

So you heard some funny stories from WW1.

Yeah. He didn't tell me anything else about the rest of it. He wouldn't. I didn't pressure him. And reading between the lines, reading the story that was enough, I think I know enough.

Had they been wounded in WW1?

09:00 Oh yeah, they had, one uncle Charlie he was a little short fellow, he was in the 59th Battalion, he was with [William] Donovan Joynt VC and there were 129 of them stopped the Germans from taking Calais, the Port of Calais. They stopped the Germans a big division, all they had was rifles and pistols and they stopped them, re-enforcements came up to give them a hand, so that was quite exciting and I found that out by accident.

09:30 **Amazing. So going back to your grandmother and her toffee relatives, that cut her off, can you tell me about going to visit them in Toorak?**

All I remember is that we had to go up these slate steps, and these big beautiful door frames and the big doors, like that, and that is why I am up with

10:00 that sort of thing. I don't remember what they said but my grandmother received very courteously, one of her sisters and my mother that came with me, but I could never find out the address.

And how did they ever treat you?

I was a nice little boy, pat me on the head.

How did you feel going into this really wealthy house?

10:30 Nothing, I was only a young kid 3 or 4, I was between 3 and 4 and that is when you start to remember things, so that was it.

So is that one of your earliest memories?

Yes it was.

Because I just remember as a kid if I would go into a really toffee house I would be scared, scared I was going to pick up my tea cup in the wrong way?

I am looking at everything, I remember the carpet going up there

11:00 and polished boards on either side, little stands that had little things on top of them, and the ferneries like the ferns, I remember that.

So it made an impression obviously?

Yes it did, but I had that feeling about it and that would come from my grandmother because they were a pretty posh family and just imagine being bought up with the best of everything.

11:30 See all this house I built here, like this renovations, that fire place, I did all of that, there is a feeling in it, it is not the look, it is the feeling.

What do you mean by that?

It is the warmth of it.

So what feeling did you get from the Toorak house?

When I look back on it I felt as though that was where I should be, that's it, that's me.

This is where you belong?

12:01 That's right, and I have built houses exactly the same, that is me and that must go back a long time, my mother's side of the family and cause part of their family originally came from Austria up on the Tech on the river Erl [?]

Did you every go to visit that part of the family?

No I haven't, might one day. Wouldn't want to go

12:30 these days would you?

Bit expensive.

No a bit tricky up in those places these days. Terrorist, you have got to think about it.

Yes, I think that you are right there. So Ron was it a happy childhood?

Yes and No, because, I did a few silly things. I pinched my uncle's medals and went and

13:00 sold them. There was this Don Kerkin[?] and we used to go to school together at Dandenong West, oh boy did I get the raspberry over that. My mother belted me, oh did she what. And I ran up to my aunty Jello's home, the window was opened and I got in there and I slept in the baby's cot all night.

13:30 They couldn't find me anywhere. So I rocked home the next morning at about 9 o'clock, wondering where I had been, they didn't touch me.

I bet your uncle was not happy?

No, they weren't, but I tell you what he got those medals back quick fast. It was a bit sad because later on those medals,

14:00 my mother married again, she divorced her first husband of course, and married again and her husband got the medals when he shouldn't have and I am a bit crook on that. Also my aunty Doris, who is still alive, they went and burnt his photographs, went and burnt, it incredible, but I have other photos of him,

14:30 which I salvaged. Uncle Arthur was in the landing of Gallipoli, went to France, and he got a piece of shrapnel in the back of his head and they sent him home and got discharged and he was at a reunion at the RSL [Returned and Services League] in Dandenong, and he was walking up the Dandenong Highway outside the scout hall and a little Morris Tourer came along, knocked him over and killed him. He died from loss of blood, someone that didn't stop after

15:00 they knocked someone over.

Isn't that terrible?

Uncle Arthur, that was sad.

So he was the one who talked to you about his?

No, he was killed just after the WW1, he was only home a little while, that was 1918-1919 and that was it.

As a child growing up were you aware of the Anzacs then?

Very much so,

15:30 every Anzac Day, my grandmother she was really into it because she had her boys being in there, and because the old uniforms were around us all the time. My uncle Charlie he never talked about it because he got shell shocked and he was stuttering all of the time. He never said a word about anything, never.

16:00 He never married and he was only 16 and he would have been about that high (and I have photographs of him) and he would be only about 4ft 8, red hair but good value. He always treated me all right. In those days we had a farm in Dandenong West, which was fortunate and the 3 of us grew up on this farm. We used to go out and

16:30 we had these cows and I used to have to take the milk to various people around the area, across the railway line, up to the fellow with the big poultry farm, down the road to Buckams all in the dark, I was scared of the dark. The beauty of living on that farm I recon saved us because we used to eat all the bran, pollard, wheat, everything out of the big bags, we had a market garden, we used to go out and eat all of the beans, peas, carrots

17:00 and had all the fruit around the place, the sunflower seeds, the apples, pears and all of the milk that we wanted.

So during the depression you were still able to eat well?

Yes, we did. Although we went to school with no shoes on, most times, we managed to get a pair of runners and that would be it.

So were you aware of the depression?

Yes, we were aware of it because we had that many people coming around wanting

17:30 things to eat and my grandmother would never turn them away. And I always remember one fellow who was a fish monger, he had the beard and everything, summer, winter he would always be coming around with his fish and there were other times just swaggies would come around and they were a sad lot they really were, yet I always remember that. When we shifted from Dandenong

18:00 West we went to Noble Park and I used to have to go out and get the wood for the fire, there was Noble Park then Harrisfield and the forest was in Harrisfield and I used to have to go out there, get the wood for the fire and bring it home. And when I was out there I got up to one of the roads there called Corrigan Ray which was next to the Sandown Racecourse which it is known now, and there were all these

18:30 humpies and things facing Corrigan Road, they were all ex soldiers every one of them, and they were really lovely fellows, they used to give me a penny, and wasn't that nice, they just needed someone to talk to, they didn't molest me or anything and that was great, all ex soldiers.

That was really a strong contrast then between one hand you are going off to the Anzac Parade and they're all in their uniforms

19:00 **and they are the heroes, then you were seeing them living in shacks.**

First World War.

What did you think of that, as a kid do you remember?

It impressed me later on, not so much then but later on. I always remembered them; I never forgot those fellows. That is probably why I respected the First World War fellows more than anything. They were really in the raw; a lot of those fellows they had no jobs for them so they signed up and look at the job they did.

19:30 So I have the greatest admiration for Australians, best in the world, they really are, you get dinkum Australians. I have an old tape out there that tells you about "Lets take a trip to Melbourne" and it says on it something about when you get to Melbourne, when you are getting of the train, be the dinkum Aussie

20:00 thing, give the guard a hand, and I thought that was terrific, dinkum Aussie, you don't hear that much today do you?

I don't know. My friends today still say 'fair dinkum'.

I haven't heard it much at all. I must spread the word. I call a lot of people; they just stir you up a bit so I am going to stir you up. What do you call it? I will try and think of the

20:30 word in a minute and then I will continue on with something else. We stayed there quite a while at Noble Park right up till after the 2nd World War and I joined the Boy Scouts there - the 1st Noble Park and we built our own scout hall.

Sorry, what year was this that you joined the scouts?

1938 - 1939 this was.

Were you still in school then Ron?

Yes, Noble Park State.

21:00 **Did you enjoy school?**

Yes I did.

What were your favourite subjects?

I was very much into drawing and with my books, I still have my school books actually every one of them. Doing all the art work and drawing, getting all the pictures out of the books and pasting them in. The teacher must of thought I was all right because he sent me to the top of the grade. So I must of done

21:30 something right.

So you were a clever kid at school?

No, not clever, just lucky there were just about 8 of us in the grade. I just happened to be lucky. We had a good teacher but I always wanted to go into the navy and at that particular time I was only 13 and a

position came up with the navy and if you wanted to join the navy as a cadet you could but you had to sit

- 22:00 for this examination to become a trainee officer, wow this is all right, so I got the entry form, and I thought this was alright and I got up to where I was going to sit for this exam to become an officer cadet down at HMAS Cerberus

And how did that go?

I sat for the exam and my headmaster Mr Haller, he was so thrilled that one of his boys could possible become an officer cadet, and officer. Well lo

- 22:30 and behold I went to Wilson Hall with all of these other prospective young lads, sat the exam, didn't know anything about Algebra or Geometry, because they cut that out of school when they had the infantile paralysis scare, and fortunately I passed and couldn't believe it. The headmaster got a letter from the Australian Navy to say that I passed and they would fit me in as an officer cadet but they

- 23:00 wanted a 5 shillings a week for my upkeep, now nothing was said about this before the exam.

What you have got to pay them?

We have to pay them for our upkeep, we got pocket money of 1 shilling a week and that was part of it. My stepfather was earning I think about 18 shillings a week in those days, and we just couldn't afford it and I found out later that my grandmother had the money and she

- 23:30 could have done it, and I don't think that my mother said anything about this, because I am sure she would have loved just for the big noting that my boy is an officer cadet in the navy, and I missed out, and my headmaster, I was not very popular with him after that, just wasn't.

So Ron when did your mother remarry?

She remarried about 1937 - 1938.

So you were quite

- 24:00 **a young man then weren't you, a 12 year old?**

Yes, I would have been about 11.

And how did you take that?

Well it just seemed normal and he seemed a nice fellow and he always loved my mother even before and we thank him for where we are today. He used to work at the Dandenong Baking Factory, could you imagine working with slaughtering animals.

- 24:30 He used to ride to work from Noble Park in all weathers right to Dandenong Baking Factory and back, and that was a pretty hard slog in those days, it was an 8 hour day plus Saturday. So we owe him everything. He was a hard man but it was really terrific when we think about it later on but he could never get on with my sister,

- 25:00 my sister could never get on with him, because he was very strong willed you see, and the willed would just go bang crash.

Really.

But unfortunately she still doesn't believe that we owe him everything, better than I knew you know. Any rate the long and short after that I failed the exam and I decided well this is it and low and behold, this must have been after I sat for the exam and along

- 25:30 came 1942 didn't it and the war was on and I had a little look out up the back of the next paddock at the back of the property, I built this and I had my binoculars and everything and I could see right out to the bay and I saw all these ships coming up the bay, I couldn't believe it, and I rushed down and told my mother "All these ships are coming in mum, who are they?", "Oh, it's the Americans". They had arrived, so I started thinking

- 26:00 "I am going down to see them". So I go down, had enough pocket money, travelled all the way to Port Melbourne, didn't tell mum or nothing, just went down. Right down to the water saw them unloading, that was really exciting, it was really something. Great thrill. And I thought something twigged in me and I said "Mum you always knew I wanted to go into the navy and this is my big chance. "I want to join the Merchant Navy". So they ummed and ahned for about

- 26:30 9 months and in the mean time I joined the Navy League Sea Cadets, so I was in uniform then and I had a lot of training and fortunately that put me in a good seat to get a job in the Merchant Navy and I did all my test for eyes and everything and I had heard about the ship coming to Reynella it was the Italian ship called the Reno, it was in for loading, refit and everything and I got to know that they wanted one deck boy and they already had nine

- 27:00 and they wanted another one, so I got onto the first mate, he was obviously second in charge, and I kept

going there for 2 months and eventually got the job.

So you were really determined to get that job?

I wasn't going to miss out on that. I was just lucky to get that ship.

Why do you think you were so determined you were going to be in the navy, why were you so keen?

Because I always wanted to be at sea, with my father being an ex merchant seaman.

27:31 **But you hardly knew your father did you?**

No, I didn't but it was in me. He came out in the sailing ships as I explained and so once it is in you, I always like the navy, liked the uniform and everything, but we didn't have a uniform in the Merchant Navy until later when I joined the American ship and I had a uniform.

So you were disappointed on that score at first?

Yes in a way but gee I grew up fast,

28:00 gee it was tough.

Well look, we will get into that a little bit later on, I just want to ask a little bit more about your life before you joined the navy?

Yeah right.

Were you aware when you were growing up that things were bad in Europe, like in the late 30's?

Yes, we did because we saw a lot of people that weren't well off and they were hard done by and there wasn't much money around, they were doing all

28:30 sorts of work and even I had a job to help subsidize the family, paper round to earn extra money for them and as I used to go out and collect all this wood as I told you, for the fire and that saved a lot of money, but while I was out collecting there was a road called, I think Kelvinside Road, which ran alongside the creek the Dandenong Creek, it runs through

29:00 that Sandown Racecourse and they had a big dam there, all along that street every house was vacant, and there were bikes and things and I used to collect all the bits of bikes and bring them home and that is how I became a bike mechanic, I made up my own bikes.

Why was that? Why were they all vacant?

Because it was the depression and they had been turned out, they couldn't pay the rent or the mortgage, they were all vacant right along there couldn't believe it, I will never forget that.

So you were aware that things

29:30 **were difficult in Australia for people?**

Yes, not so much about Australia, I didn't know much more about Australia, we used to get the newspaper and I could read a bit between the lines that things weren't too good and the people coming around the house begging for food and things like that.

Had you heard about the troubles in Europe, had you heard of Hitler?

No, no didn't know anything about that until a bit later, if we did, it didn't sink in or take any notice of it,

30:00 that's the way that I read it but it was in 1941 or 1942 I think that I started to wake up a bit and notice what was going on.

So Ron, where were you when war was declared in 1939?

I remember sitting in the lounge room at home on Eldale Road Nobel Park and the old up right radio and Mr Menzies gave the speech to say "Australia is at War", I remember that

30:30 I think it was later in November or December wasn't it, that right we were going to go on holidays down to Flinders, we used to go every Christmas and that was the end of the holiday because they closed West Head, closed all that off; the navy had been building forts down there and we didn't know this and that was the end of it, it was a bit disappointing.

31:00 **And what did your mum make of it, do you remember?**

Mum was the sort of person who was very quiet, she used to take things in and a very caring mother, oh terrific and because she had to look after children and look after her new husband and all that and where we were living at 9 Eldaler Road, guess what? We had a poultry farm

31:30 and I used to have to look after the darn WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s before I went to school, had to feed them and water them before I went to school. So I was up pretty early in the morning.

Did you have to rake out the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK house as well?

No, my stepfather's grandfather was up there too in the sleep out and he used to do all of that and I think my stepfather did a bit to, but I used to have to feed them before I went to school, save my mother doing it.

32:00 They had about anything up to 10,000 WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, that was a lot of WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s in those days but at least we ate well. It was hard for a lot of other people and we used to have the butcher coming around with his great big wheels cart and the baker coming around and the iceman came around in the summer and all those things and I never forgot those.

32:30 And of course I was with the boy scouts and I was very busy with them and a lot of the boys older than me they joined the services and we had a fellow called George Hobbs. Now George was number 1,000 pupil in Noble Park State School and I just happen to have on hold, looking after them for the family the medals that he was awarded and all that sort of thing, I have his photograph there

33:00 and I was the last one he saw in Noble Park because I walked over the bridge, he ended up the back of me and he was walking down the road and I caught up to him I wanted to see him because he had been on his leave from HMAS Sydney, I walked across the road with him and I say "I am going to join the navy" and he said "Don't join the navy, not very nice". And I said "Mr Hobbs, I really want to join the navy, I have always liked the navy". He wouldn't

33:30 tell me much and that was the last time that I saw him. He went back to Western Australia to pick up the ship and of course it got sunk with all hands.

He was on the Sydney?

He was on the Sydney, HMAS Sydney, yes and we still say to this day that the Japanese sunk it.

You reckon.

No question about it, it all adds up. I don't care what other people think I worked it out in my own mind.

So he was in the navy?

Yes

34:00 **He was telling you not to join the navy?**

Yes that's right, because it was hard in those days, very hard. You know you really worked hard; it was no different to what I was doing in the Merchant Navy. Yet the navy later on was much easier than the Merchant Navy because you had people more your own age, but when he was in it, it was tough, they really worked him hard. Even though he had a gunnery rate and was a naval seaman, but

34:30 and he had probably been in it about 6 years I'd say, and lot of those fellows joined because of the depression, they joined the navy and that's the re-troop.

Makes sense doesn't it?

Yes. Nice fellow George. Number 1,000 pupil at Noble Park State.

So you were just a kid when he was telling you this?

Yes, that right.

Did it make an impact on you?

I thought about it.

35:00 I know I wanted to go and join the navy.

You didn't consider any of the other services?

No, never, it didn't interest me.

So Ron after 1939, September 1939, when Menzies said "Australia is at War". Were you then following the war news after that?

Yes, in my school books I have got, all these, the Artics Newspaper[?]

35:30 had the best description of what was going on overseas, they had a lot of photographs and they had the charts, the red and blue charts in the Artics Newspaper was only small like the Sun Herald today, and they used to have a pictorial and they used to have a lot of stories in that, so I knew what was going on.

What were the events of those years that you can recall now that made an impact on you?

The overrunning of Belgium

36:00 and France and how they reckoned the imaginary line [Maginot Line] would hold them and because what happened they didn't worry about the imaginary line they just went around it and over the paratroops and that was the end of that. To save their own country and buildings they just gave in and France capitulated and it made it pretty hard for the ring man of course.

So the surrender of France, the loss of

36:30 **France?**

Was quite devastating. Because the recruiting really did start to go on and there were so many men that they lost in the work force and that was mainly single people then, they asked the married men, and that was very devastating.

Did your stepfather want to enlist?

They called him up, they called him up,

37:00 they didn't have a choice to volunteer they just called them up, certain age groups all the way through.

So they called him into the militia?

Yes, it was the militia.

Do you know which battalion he was in?

Yes he was in the Anti-Aircraft Battalion, I can't tell you which one it was, I really don't know, they had the colour patches, the triangle with the red and

37:30 blue on the triangle the same, and that is all I know. He did his training out at Watsonia and then they were for a time, you won't believe the ship The Rodalla [?] I was on, he was actually there on the anti aircraft gun out in the paddock, he was actually there and I have got some photographs of it I took of him, you wouldn't believe that would you? From there he got sent to Darwin

38:00 and because later on I went to Darwin when I was in the navy and that was a few years later and he went to New Guinea, so I didn't see him up there. He was telling me about one of those raids that we had up there was nothing compared with what the earlier raids were and he was in the thick and this officer I met, we were walking down Collins Street one day and this officer, he introduced me to, a really nice fellow, and he got killed the first day he was there,

38:30 and that was it. It was not a very nice place Darwin.

Pretty rough?

The Japanese wanted to bomb Darwin and were going to invade it and that was the starting point, there was no point bombing anywhere else. There were no resistance, there was nothing there. And that would have given a really good porthole. If they got in there I don't think we would be here today.

The fall of France had an impact?

Yes.

39:00 **What about the fall of Singapore?**

Singapore, yes now I am trying to think about that. When I did that came over pretty sad, the thing that devastated me was that they sunk the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the other big cruiser there [HMS Repulse]. The Japanese came out of the air and just dropped the bombs straight on them and they sank them, and we thought that Churchill said that they

39:30 would never be able to take it and I always remembered that and the main reason why I remember that is, he had a mouth organ band in Dandenong West and there was a young fellow there and I think he was only 13 and he joined up, and he went with the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] straight up to Malaya and I never saw him again and when I passed that house where he used to be he squashed my finger in the gate one day

40:00 which one is it, and the gate is still there. He was a lovely fellow. He had a good mouth organ in those days.

Tape 2

00:00 **You were just about to enlist, you finally got your chance?**

We got signed on to the Reynella

Reynella, so that is an Australian Merchant Navy?

Yes it was they captured from the Italians in the Roads called the Roads, where you go out

00:30 and the ships leave the harbour, and they go out through this road like a channel and they try to escape there, back to Italy and it was called the Reno and they renamed it the Reynella after Reynella Wines. A very good ship and it survived the whole of the war, it was only fired on a few times.

01:00 I go right to the very first and we got on board and there was these other fellows and these were the ones that I was telling you about. Boy were they were rough, they were really rough. Some of them were all right, one was there who was a well educated fellow and another young fellow who was pretty naïve, he came from Victoria but they were baddies .

Were they really?

They were baddies.

Tell me what you mean by that Ron?

They tried to use me once and they used to try to get

01:30 these boys and they used to go.

So you are enlisted? Now tell me again how old you were again at this point?

14.

14, and you were a deck boy?

That's right.

So what were your first impressions of the crew?

Well, I didn't see much of the main crew because most of them weren't there but the deck boys were there all of the time and most of them were Sydneysiders.

02:00 About 4 of them were Victorians but the Sydneysiders were bad boys, gees they were bad, they used to go out and want a bit of extra money or a bit of fun and they used to go out to the Alexandra Guards and get the puff up boys and line them up and they would have a silly [?] there and get them and knock them out and take their money and rob them, they tried to get me to go and I said "What. No way!"

So what is a puff up boy?

02:30 These are men that prefer men. I had to put it that way.

So they would pick up a puff up boy, can you tell me again?

What they used to do is have a stoolie [an informer] there, another bloke and he would think I'll go into the bushes so waiting in the bushes they would be ready to knock them out.

So they'd set a trap?

Set a trap.

Basically.

Rob them and do them and do nasty things to them,

03:00 that's what really put me off about them you know. I didn't take that at all, so I kept out of their way as much as possible and kept to myself. Fortunately we had some good older men there, there were the ship's carpenter, couple from down below they steered me in the right direction and looked after me, so I was a bit lucky there but those boys they were bad boys.

03:30 **Well tell me more?**

That was one time but whatever they did other times, but when they went overseas we got to a place called Bombay and in those days it was full of rice all the time, and you weren't allowed on your own, any rate this fellow he wanted to get some tattoos done so he went into a shop and said "You boys go off and roam"

04:00 around on his own for about an hour, so we called back. All of a sudden he charges out, runs like the billyo, the owner of the shop came chasing after him and we had to run with him, we got caught, we didn't get caught but we got caught in his little circle of what he was doing, that was rotten.

Why did he have to run?

Because he didn't want to pay for it, he was a criminal; he had a record we didn't know,

04:30 you could tell, your intuition was telling you something all the time, don't go anywhere near them and of cause at sea they would play all the dirty tricks on, would always be getting out of work and you would end up doing all of the hard work.

What were the stewards like?

On that ship alright because we didn't have many, the stewards on that ship would be part of the crew, they would be either

05:00 cooks or in supply, making sure you get all of the supplies right, because there was no passengers and the only passengers we ever had on that ship were boys that we were transferring from the armed services and they use to look after themselves any rate and we brought out a crew of lascars and they were right up on the foc'sle, there were crews quarters up there too and there

05:30 was about 40 of them I think and they were all right and we didn't have any trouble with them and they were Sikhs and they were all mixed up together every night they would get together and they would be praying to the sun.

Where were they from?

From India.

What did you call them?

We called them Sikhs but I think there were a few others mixed in with them and we bought them out to man another ship in Western Australia

06:00 I forget where it was. We stayed there and it was quite a story a few days and we unloaded and loaded and the Japanese came over and bombed us and there were quite a few casualties but no one on our ship thank goodness, we had to protect ourselves a little, we left 2 days later if I remember rightly and the whole place blew up.

06:30 The birth we were at another ship came and took our place and had gun cotton on board and with gun cotton you only have to touch it or rub it up against something and it will ignite, it had something and any rate it just blew up about 3 or 4 ships wrecked and a great loss of life and everything. We were lucky we got out of that place.

And what was your cargo, rice?

No, no, we took a lot of supplies over for the AIF,

07:00 butter and this sort of thing, cigarettes, Wrigleys chewing gum and all that, soap and just everything imaginable and we took a lot of ammunition over, and we didn't carry any deck cargo thank goodness. But on that ship we, I will go back to the time that we left Fremantle, got a new gun on board supposed to be new but it wasn't,

07:30 we did a practice run with it and I was the gun layer and one of the other younger boys, young crew doing it, we ran the shell in and that and we thought this would be alright, went bang and the gun went up right just like that, while for 2 weeks we had no gun and all we had really on each side of the ship were browning automatics, twin browning

08:00 automatics, that is all we had.

So the gun blew itself off the ship?

No, the barrel went like that.

So it split?

Went up and that was the end of it. So we got to Bombay I think it was and we got another gun an American gun and gee it was a good gun, gees

I just want to go back a little bit, Ron, back to leaving Melbourne when your first crew.

Oh right!

Got on the crew, how did your mum take it?

08:30 I didn't tell mum anything. I didn't want to worry her.

So what, you just took off?

Oh no, I'd come home and leave and I saw mum and just said all the good food that we were having and it was really good and everything was fine you know

But how did she feel about you joining?

She didn't want me to go. I said "If you don't let me go I am going to run away", and I would have too.

You were dead set on going?

09:00 Yes definitely, nothing surer than that, I knew I was on a good ship, a good safe ship, a big ship and I didn't like one of these other things that I went on later.

And what did you take with you from home Ron?

Just all my normal clothing and what you would normally take and plenty of wool and needles, so that you could darn all your socks because you couldn't get any socks in those days

09:30 and whatever you had you had to keep darning them, great big patches like that on the bottom, but we made do.

Did you have any special things from home, photos or lucky charms?

No, no I didn't, I don't remember that part of it, I really don't. All I know is I just took my Navy League Sea Cadet uniform that's right took that, because I have a photograph

10:00 of me in a tee shirt, shorts and my shoes and that is one thing that I did do and I brought a camera worth 4 pound 15 from Kodak, still got it, folding camera and it is one I could put in my pocket and I took some photographs with it and that was quite handy that. I wasn't supposed to have it, you weren't allowed to take photographs you know. That was quite good that.

Anything from your dad,

10:30 **did you have anything of your dad?**

Anything of.

Of your dads?

No, no I didn't, no, no nothing no.

Were you still in touch with your dad, Ron?

No I don't remember him, you mean the first one?

Yes

No, as I said I was 3 and I don't remember him, don't remember him, none of him at all. All I remember is that

11:00 when we were sleeping out in the sleep out I think that I said this to you, that I remember someone trying to smother me, knock me off, I will never forget that, suffocated, at any rate they must of heard the disturbance and they came running out and chased whoever it was, and he did try to come and find me and they hid me under the house at one stage, because I think he thought he was

11:30 becoming liable for all of the upkeep, maintenance and all that. So I will never forget that, that wasn't very nice and I was the one sleeping on the outside and my brother was on the inside, we used to sleep in this big double bed together, yes so he probably would have done that to spite because my grandmother I feel should not have interfered, my mother told me later

12:00 she said "She should have left him", only because of my grandmother, she should never ever had left me when I was down, he needed me and see how people can interfere, it wasn't very nice, yes, so there we go. So I had a sea trip over on the Lungarno [?] I think it was.

From Tassie to Melbourne?

Yes from Tassie right to the island,

12:30 they called this the island. So there we go.

So Ron setting off on the Reynella at 14, and your part of this much older crew, were you scared?

No, no I wasn't, seem to be a part of it. No, it didn't worry me at all, I wasn't worried, I seemed to be meant to be there.

And what was your job on the ship?

13:00 Deck boy.

And what did you have to do?

Deck boy, he'd do anything on the ship, he'd be painting the ship and my main job was one week at a time to scrub the crew's quarters and they were wooden decks and they weren't like you had a line aisle end, they were wood and you had to hand scrub them, so that was pretty tough going, and you had to just clean everything

13:30 and help serve up meals and what have you, so that was pretty tough but it was good grounding, good grounding for later on.

Now you said that there were a couple of older officers or older mates on the ship who looked after you?

Yes they did, they'd make sure, that things, you were looked after and weren't interfered with and things like that and they gave you right way to do things.

Who were they?

14:00 **Tell me about them.**

Well one was a ship's carpenter, one would be one of the lower engineers and also a bosun in the ship you know, the first officer used to come down to make sure that we were alright. I was all right. It was really good like that. That was the Australian ship.

So who was in your cabin, Ron?

In my cabin? Now let me see, actually we had

14:30 4 in our cabin, which was quite good and we didn't have any troubles there, no trouble at all, it was quite good. We would be doing sea watches during the day when we were at sea and it would be 4 on 8 off all the time. If there were any action or anything like that it would be 4 on 4 off because everybody had

15:00 to be on deck all the time virtually.

So what was your action station?

On the gun. That was my action station. I didn't mind that at all, actually it was quite good.

So they put you on the firing line?

Yes, had only a little thin shield, right out on the poop deck that is right down the very end of the ship.

Had you been taught how to use it?

Yes, by

15:30 what they call the DEMS [defensively equipped merchant ship] gunner, defensively merchant ship seaman, he ran it, he was in charge and that was quite good.

Did you ever have to use it?

Yes, the first time it blew up, remember, the first one. The next one we did lob off a few firing shots and any aircraft around we used to have a pot shot at them, not that we ever hit them, or if we expected any ships

16:00 that they call dowse or anything like that, you could never trust them, so we used to fire a shot across their bows, that was quite good. That first trip was quite exciting because we did not know at the time that there were 13 German U-boats in the Indian Ocean, we didn't even know, well the lower deck didn't know but the officers might have known, but the 13 of them.

16:30 And we stopped dead in the Indian Ocean because the engine broke down, one of the generators broke down in the middle of the Indian Ocean. We were stuck there for 3 days, nothing, 3 days that was exciting. And how that came about was because we struck a mine on a miniature tidal wave and it came down and thank goodness all the Indians, Moslems or Sikhs were down in their quarters sealed up in the middle

17:00 of the night and it went bang and knocked the big steel door off its hinges, right down the alley way, it would be about 6 foot wide, this wall of water up waist high came all the way down, went down into the engine room and all and there was rubbish everywhere. Got into the tea and the sugar in the bunks everywhere, this wall on that (UNCLEAR) was unreal, I will never forget that, because I had to get to

17:30 and clean out the generators down below, that was hard, never mind we got out of it.

So I imagine the first time you saw Japanese airplanes coming over would have been quite nerve racking?

It was and that was my first taste. I wasn't worried, it was just exciting, you wouldn't think about the bomb dropping

18:00 on. That wasn't the first time that happened, on another ship later on, so I was quite used to it, some of the poor cows that did get hit, well that was just bad luck you know.

Did you think then about the possibility that you might get hit?

No, it didn't worry me, its just exciting, to a young bloke its just exciting to you, you don't worry about it. It's like playing a game of football or something like that you might get hit but you don't worry about it you just play.

18:30 **So was there a point at which it stopped being a game?**

No, not really. Not until in the navy when I got old and it got a bit serious then, because on a navy ship

you are a gun ship, you have all that ammunition on board, torpedoes and what have you and you have got to be on your toes all

19:00 of the time, particularly at sea, that was where we used to sleep out on, I am getting a bit ahead of myself here, sleep out on deck during the night not during the day, you couldn't sleep it was so hot up in the tropics, there was no way.

We will as you say get to that further down the track?

Not that much to tell you really but anyway.

Back on the Reynella, what were your main cargo routes then?

As I said before it was ammunition, supplies for the AIF which were transported

19:30 from there over to the Middle East, see up to India it's the Middle East, we are a lot higher up than that and we could have gone but they wanted us to do this run up there which was important. With the supplies, it was everything, spare uniforms, medical supplies just about everything.

So you were going from Australia to India?

Yes

You didn't take it up, the war in the Middle East was just about over by then?

20:00 Oh no, it was well on the way I can assure you.

But the Australians had been pulled out by?

Some of the Australians yes, you are quite true, I think it was the 9th., 6th divvy [division] was pulled out, some of them, and the 9th divvy was the last to go really and they had to come back to Australia and defend Australia and the 7th divvy and they were mainly in Syria.

20:30 **So through 1942 and 1943 you were running up to the Middle East were you?**

No, as I said we were running, we ran surprise and they were transported by land a lot to the AIF because there was a run across their, or they were all on smaller ships which is more easily transported, and if you noticed the Suez Canal could be choco block with ships all the time, that's the way I worked it out anyway

So your main run during those years was?

21:00 We had to run to Windy, really that was our main run and around Australia, that was the main run.

And what route would you take? Would you go through the Sunda Strait, or right around Sumatra?

No we didn't, we went right around the Bight which is the worst sea in the world. Went right around the Bight up to Sydney, come back into Melbourne, go to Fremantle. We didn't call into South Australia and we didn't go to Albany just from that run and we used to go in convoy most of the time around Australia

21:30 because it was pretty hectic, they were looking at the number of ships that were sunk around Australia and we were lucky and a few got lost around us and we just got lucky.

And they got lost because of?

The Japanese, there were German ships and subs around but they never got any of our ships, I think they were laying mines, they used to lay the mines from the subs it was, the German rode around to and it

22:00 laid mines. Actually landed on Wilson's Promontory, found German cigarettes, cans and things would come ashore apparently, at some time but no one spotted them. And a ship would pass you in the night and you wouldn't know who it was.

You didn't make radio contact?

No, we had radio silence,

22:30 you don't send out any messages in the night unless it was urgent.

And you had?

Could you imagine it is just pitch black, you couldn't see your hand and you are going by the charts, the chart, radar like a sort of a radar thing and that's the way you were travelling at night, and the same with convoys, pitch black at night, many of times we got that close to getting sunk it was just

23:00 that unbelievable, I was on another ship later and we just got so close together it wasn't my fault, it was one of the other ships, somehow it bored into us and I had the wheel and I always remember I had the wheel virtually 10-15 degrees on right all the time and he must of let go because of the coast, the tide could be coming in all the time and cause they must of steered what they call a true course you don't

you have to keep the wheel over so you don't get

23:30 dragged in by the tide, got a bit too close.

So you were at risk from being sunk from the ships in your convoy?

Yes

As much as by the enemy?

Oh yes, collisions, collisions, but the subs were the worst because you never know you could be in convoy and they fired a torpedo depending on the draft of your ship that's from the water line down to the bottom of the keel, it depended on

24:00 how low they set their torpedoes. Lucky enough it went under you and got some other poor cow.

So on those convoys were some of those other ships ever sunk?

Yes

Can you tell me about that?

Not really, it is not very nice to think about it because they particularly, when you happen to know one or two of them, and some of the ships on the coast, there is only about 3 survivors particularly what they call the iron boats, iron oar,

24:30 iron king, iron knob they only had about one minute to get off because they were loaded with these iron pallets, and the sub would go that quick. That ship later on, that one I was on the weir I got off, getting a bit ahead of ourselves here, went down next trip, I think it happened I'm not sure if it was a sub, I could never find out. Any rate

25:00 a mate of mine stayed up at the post all night and wanted to get to Sydney, he went down with it, he didn't know what happened, nice fellow too, he had epilepsy. He had the best skin I had ever seen on a person, it was all tanned, he was tanned all the time, have you ever met anybody like that? He was tanned all the time. It was sad that, I had to go and I saw the photograph and got down to the police in West Melbourne

25:30 not West Melbourne in Jolimont where they had the Police Station, and identified the photograph for them and let them know who it was. Poor fellow.

So travelling in convoy was that preferable, did you prefer to travel convoy rather than by yourself?

Well yes, only with the slow ships you were more protected and the whole trouble with those things is that you just

26:00 didn't know what was going to happen sometimes, you just never knew, you had your wits about you all of the time and just kept your fingers crossed.

And how would you know if submarines were approaching?

If a what?

If a submarine was approaching?

Well you wouldn't know really, until a ship had blown up, you just never knew, and once that happened the escorts, mainly destroyers and corvettes they would be around looking for it,

26:30 but half the time they were in the middle of the convoys.

So did that happen while you were on the Reynella?

No, not absolutely sure, yes on the Reynella, and on the Currenoey [?] it happened, fortunately we never got hit, but you never knew what was happening.

But other ships in the convoy were hit?

They certainly were. But mainly

27:00 by submarines, that was the worse thing about submarines, planes did not worry me.

Why was that Ron?

I don't know, we seem to be better protected by the plane but the submarine you just never and even just solely, in the end, mainly over in the Atlantic and they had that many ships out chasing and with bomber command and the sun and flying boats they were able to

27:30 sink a lot of them, they lost about 50,000 or 10,000 men in the German Navy [actually was approximately 65,000 killed], they all went down hard to with these submarines. You'd never get me down in a submarine that's one thing, you'd never get me on.

What did that do to morale Ron, when you were in a convoy when another couple of the ships in the convoy had been hit?

It just made you aware and wide awake, a bit worried about it, a little bit,

28:00 to me it was I just sort of wasn't fully adult I suppose, just exciting, just thinking I was more worried about ending up in the water with the sharks more than anything, the only thing I was worried about.

You said they weren't pleasant memories?

No, because a lot of those fellows you knew on those ships, you knew them. That wasn't very good. Another ship I was later on,

28:30 I'm getting a little ahead of myself here.

That's ok

No this was the Centaur the hospital ship Centaur it was sunk off Cape Morton in Queensland we used to have a place called the pick up joint, the pick up joint where the first mate or the masters used to come down to pick up the crew and we used to have this little shed quite a nice shed and we used to have a desk and everything there

29:00 and we used to play cards there waiting for someone to come down and choose you for the crew. This is at the back of what they call the Immigration Centre now and this particular day the master or the captain of the HMAS Centaur came down and he wanted 3 ordinary seamen, ok we were just playing cards, whisked in, if I had the book I would be able to read their names, you can't get me the book can you, no? Any rate

29:30 he came down and said "I want 3 ordinary seamen" and we lined up there like and he came along and said "You, you and you down stairs. Sorry son, what's your name?" "Ron". "I only want three". The blokes said "You lucky so and so" and they went with the master up to the shipping office and signed up because I ended up back in the room playing cards with a couple of the other boys. And I found out when they were going

30:00 to be on the ship and I went down the next day to see them and they left 2 or 3 days later. I went to the master and said "You sure you don't want someone else". "No son, I'm sorry we've got enough crew now". I did the trip to Sydney and loaded up with medical personnel. They took their rifles and ammunition, but I found out from this Ronnie Moat[?], he was a pantry man aboard this ship, he told me that they actually did load a lot of

30:30 ammunition on that ship and they went on strike and said "We don't want to take to sea" and they were going to threaten to bring in the army and going to put them in clink, they didn't take the ship to sea because the paper gone on it and blew it all up and the Japanese got to hear about it, so when they tripped up to New Guinea which was where they were going they got torpedoed, and Ronnie Moats told me, he did this lovely painting for me, he told me

31:00 that "They actually had real ammunition, a big supply of it, it was all loaded up at night time, highly secret". The long and short of that was they got sunk. They went down in about 3 to 5 minutes and he told me, and I believe him, he said "The only blokes that were going around, there were a lot of murders went on and in that particular time", he said "They were murdered,

31:30 they were murdering, getting even with the crew or the army or something, mainly the army, getting even with each other", so I don't know what went on, he said, "They murdered them", and he didn't go around telling stories and I knew Ronnie and he was very honest.

What an extraordinary tale.

I am going to ring Tom Ward from the Sun Herald and tell him that was told and I will show him the thing that Ronnie did for me, he told me. So that wasn't very nice

32:00 was it?

Ron, I'm just thinking when you are in a convoy like that, how many knots are you travelling at?

Well depending on the slower ship, it would be an average, a little ship called the Curroneoy would be about 12 knots, Reynella could do up to 17 knots, so that's why we went a lot on our own.

Even 10 knots that is a fair pace, you are covering fair distance?

Yes

If the ship goes down, how do you pick up

32:30 **the survivors?**

You don't. You don't stop to pick them up because if you do and the submarine is there it would just pop you off, he will sink you, you are a sitting duck. I will tell you another story about that later on,

something I did.

Tell us now?

No, it was on a later ship I was on called the American ship called the Contessa [?] and I joined that ship in Melbourne, yes that was Melbourne, almost the same spot that I joined the Reynella.

- 33:00 To cut a long story short we got to Townsville, that was our last stopping off point and we loaded up with a lot of US marines that had been to Guadalcanal. They had been down here to Melbourne to recuperate and retrain and so forth and anyway we picked them up and took them to Townsville and we loaded up with water, what we thought was water. Some sabotaged it and put sea water in it.
- 33:30 We had to pump the whole lot out. Any rate that was all right, and while we were waiting there, there were 2 air craft coming and they were going to patrol so far out to sea, a couple of American P40s [Warhawk] I think they call them and one got a bit too close to the ship and clipped it and it went straight down just out of Townsville, it is still there today I think, so that was the end of that fellow.
- 34:00 We were leaving there and there was a delay and I had to go down and give a fellow a hand in what they call a chain locker where the anchor and chain, you have to drag the chain and put it in about half that area, you have to pull it down with one of these long hooks and feed it in a circle, so when the thing went out again
- 34:30 it went out properly, because me being this little fellow and this big aide American aide, big fellow because I couldn't do the same as him he said "(UNCLEAR)" and up he went and I'm left on my own dragging this chain in, I got wound around one and that was it, and they had to stop the ship and everything, so they got some more crew down and I went back up on the wheel, where I was in the first place. So anyway we got out
- 35:00 to sea and the second night the commodore of the convoy flashed a signal to us to say "We had a light showing down aft and there were Japanese subs in the area", which they warned us about before we even left, we had a pretty good strong escort on that trip. The 3rd officer, a chap called Flygar[?], a pommy fellow he was, didn't like him at all, I suppose I shouldn't have said that.
- 35:30 **That's fine.**
- Any rate he got shifted after that trip anyway. We had to shift this light that was on the life raft on the jack stay at a 70 or 65 degree angle, and it was planted on there and I think they had these lights when you see when the things go down and you have this light on the raft, this was flashing and they asked for someone go up and no one would go
- 36:00 and there were fellows there and I said "I would do it", and so I took off my runners in those days to get a better grip with my feet, and I was half way up and the 3rd officer said "Bergman, if you slip and fall we cannot stop and pick you up". Thanks very much. That's what he said and I never liked him after that one. Anyway I made sure that I got a good grip,
- 36:30 and the ship was rocking all the time to, like this, so I had to be very careful but fortunately a star light night, so I was able to see what I was doing and I just ripped the light out and scrambled back and then the Americans onboard clapped me down and said "What a good job son".

So this was on the American ship?

Yes the American ship. The Contessa.

- 37:00 **Back on the Reynella as a 14 year old deck boy what do you get paid?**

What do you get paid?

How much?

I have it here somewhere in the house but I couldn't find it. Average about a pound a week I think in those days and that included danger money, and that was all we got but we got all our meals and everything, so it was pretty good money in a way. If you got sunk you got nothing,

- 37:30 you would only get what was due to you from the company that owned the ship. Once that ship stopped you were out of employment. But I never knew this until I found out after the war, they didn't tell you much some of them.

How long were you on the Reynella?

I was on there for about 6 months altogether, so I grinned and beared it while I was there and I learnt a lot and just kept out of trouble.

- 38:00 **So in that 6 months did you stay a deck boy that whole time?**

Yes, and then I became an ordinary seaman after that, because I had done my 6 months time.

So that is like your apprenticeship?

Yes, that's right and we had to learn how to steer the ship, learn a bit about navigation, they used to put me up into the crows nest because I had good eyesight. I could pick a ship out miles away and they said "They can't believe it", they had to bob, I said "You see it is coming", so

38:30 that was my main job up there and it was good, particularly up in the tropics when we used to see all the flying fish going along and all the fossil water it was really good.

That's a great asset at sea?

It was, yes at sea.

Good eyesight.

Yes, not so good in the rough weather. I was dead scared of heights you know, so there is only one way to beat this, so I got on the ladder and I went up and down up and down until I beat it,

39:00 so I'm not scared of heights anymore.

Now what about sharks? You did say you were scared, did you get over that as well?

They used to follow the ships and we weren't supposed to throw rubbish overboard but they did throw meat off and the sharks would be there running and picking it up. That was one thing I always thought was when those blokes got torpedoes that it was quick

39:30 and they drowned quick. I have a lot of photographs of blokes that got hit by a submarine and only damaged to the keel or something but it blew up, and particularly near crew's quarters the bodies were still in the quarters and they would sail into the harbour, you couldn't do anything about it, you just couldn't get to them, it wasn't very nice.

So they drowned in their cabins?

40:00 No, it just blew up, it didn't go down or anything but the blast blew that whole area and because no one could get in there and it was the crew's quarters, bits of bodies and everything around, fortunately it didn't happen to us. Another thing too, a fellow I new quite well was a JP [Justice of the Peace], it's another bad story and I had it verified too

40:30 and he told me about these fellows they didn't like onboard, what were these particular gentlemen that weren't good on a ship.

Tape 3

00:31 **Ron, you were just about to tell me about some of the people who weren't fit, some of the people who were no good?**

Weren't fit in the navy, where was this.

You were saying on the Reynella there were a couple of men who were no good?

You kept out of their way, you kept out of their way as much as possible, you didn't associate with them. Even when you were eating you try to kept out of their way, and we used to have

01:00 sittings of say half a dozen at a time. Just not good.

In what way were they no good?

Just their manners and their filthy talk they come up with all the time, they couldn't help themselves, and I wasn't a goodie, goodie. It was just their attitude, they were telling all these dirty stories; you just walked away from it,

01:30 not interested.

So you didn't appreciate that?

No, I certainly did not; it wasn't my piece of cake. That you didn't find in the navy and that particular in the time I joined and I was only saying speaking to a friend last night we had a class 89 and 90 in the navy and they were all a terrific bunch of blokes, they really were.

02:00 There was only one fellow there who would try to get me to fight him. He just wanted to have someone to punch up and I talked him out of it and showed him his ways and I said "If you want to fight, all right, but you will never want to fight me again". He did. That happened at school with one fellow and I warned him and said "Please don't pick a fight. I don't want to fight you, if I am going to hurt you I am going to hurt you", and I went whack,

02:30 he never got up. I have got to be careful.

Really?

Getting there. I think when people do the wrong things by you, you know.

Did that ever happen on board?

I'm not stupid.

Did that ever happen on board?

I kept out of trouble.

Good on you.

I kept out of trouble.

On the Reynella, by the time you finished your 6 months

03:00 **there you were a seasoned decky now?**

Yes I had a rest, at home. I came home and had a rest.

At that point of having a rest, did you feel like you had had enough and didn't want to go back?

No, no I just had a rest and wanted to go back, I really did. I just wanted to get home and mix with all of my school pals and they all wanted to know about me and what I had done and they all wanted my Wrigleys chewing gum, because I had tons of it, you know.

How did you feel about the sea?

03:30 The sea, it scares me, it scares me, it is the only thing I am scared of the sea. It is a very dangerous place to be, particularly when it gets rough, the Bight to my mind, it has been the roughest sea in the world that I have ever been and that is in the Bight. I can tell you about this because I have a photograph over there of it, a ship called the Mulimbimba [?] and from the,

04:00 what they call the gun well and that's the water line of the ship and right up to the top of the mast that was 80 foot, the sea swells were over that, and I was supposed to come and watch this night and we had crews quarters down aft, down the brig of the ship and I couldn't go on watch for 8 hours because the swell was so big, do you recall what trouble they had in the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race? That was worse because that was when they found the waves were 70/80 foot high. But they had caps

04:30 on the waves and the winds were strong and that caused the swell and this was just going right out, and we would go like cork screw roll and it would go down again, that scared me and that was the only time that I had been sea sick, I said "Gee, I would never do the wrong thing again", I wanted to go home to mum. I was really scared. That ship came that close to rolling over and not coming up again.

05:00 It was horrible, shocking that. That is one thing I never ever forgot that trip. It was on the ship called the Mulimbimba and it was they called the 60 miler and this was on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] morning show on a Sunday Macka's Morning and they were talking about how they put the last of them off, out of existence and

05:30 they used to do the trip between Newcastle and Sydney, but because of the war they wanted extra ships and few of them had been sunk and they needed the transport, so they got the old poor Mulimbimba and she did the trip down there a couple of times, we used to go up and take all of the stuff up there, it was a good ship, gee it was a good ship, a good sea ship that. I felt safe on that until I got those 80 foot waves. That was horrible. With the navy and on the destroyer

06:00 you used to sort of just go, you didn't worry about it so much even though you were on a smaller ship, hug the water a lot more and you would just float on the cargo, and you had a certain amount of weight, you have more width and balance and that, very hard to control, were as a destroyer, a smaller ship and you could control it better, particularly the wheel. Anyway that was that section.

I'm really

06:30 **fascinated that you wanted to be in the navy but you were really scared of the sea?**

Yes, I was scared after I had been in it, and that was why when the war ended I decided to not stay in, I wanted to get out, I'd had enough.

Did you find it beautiful?

At times yes, like I said up in the crows nest it was beautiful coral sea and tropics nothing to worry about, no wind beautiful sunshine,

07:00 nothing to worry about.

But those 80 foot swells sound pretty awful?

That scared me. No, that Gabo Island that was treacherous, it is bad enough out here.

Bass Strait is a pretty rough stretch too?

Dangerous out there, you get those 100 mile hour winds, dangerous.

Did you think about it when you were out in water like that, did you think about the sailing ships,

07:30 **how they would have coped?**

Yes, I thought about them a lot, I always wanted to go on a sailing ship but then I met someone who somehow joined the navy and he was trying to talk me out of it, and he used to go up the mast furl and unfurl the sails and he was a big fellow. Then I read the stories about them dropping off after a while, how can you furl unfurl with your frozen hands, wind blowing, yet my father did this.

08:00 **Incredible isn't it?**

Incredible how they sailed those ships, gee it must have been tough, they wouldn't live very long I don't think, sad.

I have only been on a 15 foot yacht but I know that pulling up the anchor in the storm is really hard work and I have got to ask, how did you get the anchor up on a big ship like that?

As I said before,

08:30 we were on an American ship that was the only time I had ever been down the chain locker, and to get this big chain, this great big links and there was a whole lot of them, chain coming down the halls and you had to pull it in and load it around with the hooks.

Was there a winch?

Yes, what they call the deck winch, a thing you use to bring it down

09:00 but you needed 4 men to do that job.

So it was manual?

Yes, it was manual not automatic, I think it is different today, I wouldn't be sure, I wouldn't even know about that but I think it is automatic now, is how they do it. It would have to have a pipe that went down and when it comes out, it comes up in the pipe, not just dropping straight down into the room because that was all it was, like a hole up there

09:30 and things dropping down that is all it is.

So you were the one who had to tidy the chain?

Yes

So it coils nicely?

Yes, because when the anchor had to drop again it had to drop out cleanly.

That is often how they had accidents isn't it, bring the anchor up and down?

Not so much in those days, I don't think, they might on these big cargo ships, I don't really know. I don't know what the setup is there.

10:00 **Did you ever have accidents?**

Only that time when we nearly got cleaned up. Another thing too, when there was a lot of accidents when they had, they had to tie up these steel halter wires, if they stretched and broke and the spring if you were in the way, didn't happen while I was on that ship, I did hear a lot of stories about what did happen.

10:30 Not good. They had to be very, very careful. Now what else would you like me to talk about?

Now, the ships propelled by diesel engines, is it?

Diesel, in the main, yes

Did you ever work on the engines?

No, I never wanted to be down below particularly in the war, I wanted to be up

11:00 on the deck. I didn't want to be down below, I didn't want to get hit down there, it was good night, no good.

I know the other thing that could happen with propeller driven ships, it's got a big propeller under the water? Sorry if my questions are really naïve.

No

I am just trying to find out about it, can a propeller get snagged?

Yes, that's right.

Did that ever happen?

Now when did that happen, I am trying to remember.

11:30 The only time that happened was when we had a little barge up in Sydney Harbour and we got snagged up and we were running around on the [HMAS]Warramunga at the time and we were doing some duty or other, and it got tangled up in some rope and we had to dive down and untangle it and these sharks in Sydney Harbour they're pretty keen, didn't stay down there long.

Because that was what I was going to ask, who has to go under?

The crew has to go and unravel it.

12:00 **How?**

Just go and unravel it.

With your bare hands?

Yes that's right. That was all we have got.

Did you have diving suits?

No, we just took a deep breath and do the best you can.

How could you see?

Pretty well in the clear water, on this little barge and it was only a run around barge we were using, to pickup stores and stuff and got tangled up in some rope. But on the bigger ships

12:30 they would have to have diving gear, they would have oxy torches to cut the stuff away, and that would only happen in the harbour I think.

So after the Reynella you had a bit of a break?

Yes, then I joined the core, the ship called the Wear, it was a collier, and it was run by James Patterson

13:00 and we did 2 or 3 trips to Tassie, mainly to Hobart and that was where I had my first experience with the other gentry. They didn't like that very much.

The other gentry?

The other puff ups, the ones I was telling you about.

Tell me about that Ron?

Not really, they didn't like that at all.

What happened?

He tried to take me

13:30 and I just let him have it.

With your bare hands?

Yes, I just let him have it, that time. Anyway they didn't like it.

So was that in your cabin?

Yes that was, it was one of the stewards onboard on this, he was in charge of the

14:00 supply, you can see in the photo what he was, I can pick him out in a mile these days, but that wasn't very nice and I got over that one and I left that ship after that.

So he came into your cabin?

No, I had to go and see him about something and that was when it happened. I had a supply I just can't fully recall, he thought he

14:30 had his chance.

So you whacked him one?

Yes and that was the end of it.

Did anyone help you?

No.

Did you tell anyone about it?

No.

Why not?

I was a bit embarrassed you know. I didn't say anything. I would now. But those days I was just a young bloke and half of the time they wouldn't believe any rate.

Well same story

15:00 **now really.**

Yes now, no hesitation. They just wouldn't believe you.

Obviously you were completely unwilling in that instance?

Yes.

Were there other men who were willing to have those kind of relationships?

I didn't see it but I would say that there would have been, I didn't see it. You could usually pick them. After that I couldn't look in their eyes, and I can always tell in their eyes

15:30 and just the expression of their eyes, and they only had to say a couple of words and you could pick them out on TV, radio, pick them out a mile.

So did you learn that from being in the navy?

Yes, I learnt that.

Was that tolerated? Was that kind of behaviour tolerated onboard, if men were having relationships with each other?

16:00 No, I don't really know, it would have been amongst the stewards, it would have been pretty right amongst the stewards, well known, that I did find out, but not amongst the general crew the AB's [Able Seamen] and that, not generally.

So amongst the stewards, was it open or did they hide it?

No, they would be hiding it as much as they could. A lot of people would have known. That's what I don't like, they always seemed to get the best jobs,

16:30 certain airlines are well known for that, even the boss he was on the TV the other night and I said "You're one". You just stayed away, and they are loaded with them and that's how they get all of the good jobs.

So it must have been tolerated to some extent?

Yes.

Like people didn't gang up on them or bash them or anything.

No they didn't, not on the ships, no.

17:00 Though one ship, it was one of the Q Class ships it actually happened a fellow murdered another bloke who was one and whole ships crew had to be demobbed [demobilised] off the ship and a new crew put on. I think the fellow was charged and that was the end of that lot.

17:30 **Do you know the circumstances of the murder Ron?**

No, I didn't. There was another case I heard about recently. These fellows got caught playing up when he shouldn't have been and this fellow was going to put them in and they were going to murder him, any rate they got those 2 blokes and put him off the ship, that's the end of them. They would not tolerate that sort of thing but I did find out about another ship,

18:00 I have got a photograph of it, and I believe the whole 4 of them were into it. You didn't find out these things until later on.

Still that must have been a scary experience for you as a young fellow and you were a good looking young fellow?

Yes apparently they were all pretty keen to get me. Even when I went to Darwin these fellows, navy blokes, they should have known better, we just got off

18:30 the trucks and one bloke, oh good looking bloke, and he just grabbed me, just like this, and everybody was there and I couldn't believe it. The next best thing is you. I reported him but he couldn't do a thing as everybody was around, then I started to worry because I then knew what he was like and I couldn't get out of it.

So what did you do Ron?

19:00 I just reported it to the master, the master of arms and they dealt with it. You know the people I joined up with the navy, up in the tropics we used to sleep with nothing on and nothing every happened and there was no suggestion, there was nothing that sexy wise, its just unbelievable and to think what I had been through and if anything had happened I would have been aware of it straight away.

19:30 And I never ever told the blokes of the experience that I had had.

So you would have been on your guard after that?

Yes

So look Ron for those blokes the absence of women probably wasn't an issue, but for most of you did it worry you, did you miss that there were no women all of the time?

Funny thing, I had a beautiful girlfriend Nancy

20:00 when I was in Darwin and I did the wrong thing by her and I came out of the navy and I thought being school pole [?] was going to be my new girlfriend but I got conned over that one, but any rate she was really nice, I let a nice girl go but anyway she wrote to me all the time and I wrote to her back, she was really a nice person. I think you would know that a company of women, good women, means a lot to a man

20:30 and that's how our blokes got through the war a lot of them, they had the writings from home and I was missing their home, obviously their sisters and mothers loved them and it happened in the First World War and all wars. If you don't have that home what is the good of being there.

So were you getting letters from your mum, sister and your brother?

Coming home?

No, when you were away, how often would you get mail?

Yes, they used to write,

21:00 but could never find where I am. I think I only got 2 letters from mum because they used to come back home "Address unknown", or "Left" and sometimes when I got home the letters would come back.

So that must have been hard, you were a young man, and you weren't getting much contact with your family?

It was hard really, you sort of miss the home comforts and company and I missed really and that is the thing that swayed me to stay out of the navy.

21:30 When the war ended, I was on the Warramunga we got talking about this. If you stay in the navy and it is not fair if you get married, it is not fair on your wives, and that is why a lot of blokes left and they are leaving today, they get married and they have trouble and they leave and I just found out the other day that one of the fellows I knew in the navy and he's left, had too.

22:00 I helped him with the book that they put out, photographer. Peter had to leave because of the breakup/break down of the marriage and that is understandable. No woman, I don't think wants to be on her own.

No or no bloke for that matter.

No, and its tit for tat, isn't it. What's good for one is good for the other. It is very important to have a very good partner.

22:30 Very important.

So Ron, did you get close to some of your crew mates, I mean you changed ships quite a lot?

Yes, did I get close to the blokes?

Yes.

Yes, I have got a lot of terrific pals and they all thought highly of me because they thought I was one of the hardest workers they had ever seen. We did a trip to Western Australia and I was playing in the navy band and playing hockey over there at the same time and any rate

23:00 I came back and called in on a few friends and they couldn't believe how hard it worked, when I was up in Darwin. That brought me up; up there I spent 10 months up there. Ron Tomley, he was a boxer, weight lifter, fitness fanatic and I was telling him last night how fit he made me and he taught me how to saw, lift logs 8 foot long, green logs it would be about that thick, I could lift them up,

23:30 he taught me how to lift them.

So what ship did you go to Darwin on?

I didn't, we went, after we finished the training at the navy depot at Cerberus, we went by rail and semi-trailer all the way up to Darwin, right through Central Australia, we went to Bundaberg first of all from Victoria Road up and then by rail across to Mount Isa and we dropped off at Canoil,

24:00 one of the first airports in Central Australia then we travelled by, went from Mount Isa and we travelled by semi-trailer and I quite enjoyed that actually, we had about 2 or 3 weeks of that and we saw a lot of dingoes, we use to be shooting dingoes from the semi-trailer with our 383 rifles.

So you were issued with

24:30 **383s were you?**

We had 383, yes.

Did you carry them around onboard?

No, they would be locked away onboard, but we got transported up and some of us had 383 on us and that was a bonus.

So the poor old dingoes copped it.

Yes, when you saw them. They didn't stay around long. They are a vicious animal those things.

Actually I was going to ask you about animals, did you ever have animals onboard?

Yes we did actually

25:00 on the Reynella we had a little black cat and when I left the ship it was still there, I always knew if the cat was going to leave the ship it was going to sink.

What would a cat do if you were in the middle of the ocean?

It couldn't leave then, it would probably go and hide. It would hide. And that is what happened to the Perth, you know the navy ship the [HMAS] Perth and the Sun of the Strait, and they had

25:30 to call in to get some oil supplies from a Dutch place and forget the name, and this ship's cat left the ship and it sunk. When you see the rats leaving the ship too, that is a sure sign that the ship is going down.

So you had cats and rats?

Plenty of rats and cockroaches.

26:00 God they were everywhere cockroaches, horrible things they are.

How did you keep them out of your bed at night?

Actually, I didn't get many in bed, I only recall maybe once or twice and maybe that's it. Every time the ship came in it had to be fumigated, the whole crew had to leave the ship and it would be fumigated, so they kept them down but you could never seem to get rid of the rats and I don't know why.

So if there were rats, were there fleas?

26:30 Didn't strike any.

Bed bugs?

No, I didn't get any, we had a pretty good linen service onboard, every second day there was a change of linen, it was pretty good like that. Not so much in the navy because we only had hammocks in the navy, wasn't so good though they didn't have fleas bite hard, then we only had two blankets and a mattress and that was it

27:00 and a hammock.

At least bed bugs can't live in a hammock?

When we were in the tropics we could sleep outside, just lay your mattress down and sleep.

From the Reynella you went to the Wear, and that was the one that you didn't like and you got off?

That's right and it went down the next trip. A bit lucky there.

So what was your next ship?

27:30 The next trip was on the Curroneoy [?] That Curroneoy was a captured German ship from the First World War and I found out about this later and it wasn't a bad ship but it only did the run from Melbourne to Devonport, the collier, and I did a couple of trips on that and didn't particularly like the colliers that much, cold dusts around all the time, you were always filthy.

28:00 Nothing much happened on that.

Actually I just want to go back to the Reynella again. Because that's the one when you were going up to India. Was that your first time of seeing another country, isn't it?

Yes, actually it was quite exciting and the thing that impressed me the most was about 5 mile out of Bombay there is sort of a bay and all of this water turned purple, what the heck is going on

28:30 here, just purple water. All the Indians, the first one I did see on the bundoes [?], but they are called a dous [?], they were purple too, I thought oh my god it probably was all the dead bodies. They put all the dead bodies out to sea, but I don't really know and that was just the way it was, just purple water.

So what were your impressions coming into Bombay? The water was purple?

Yes

What does the city look like?

29:00 I just stared. The city? I just came in there, and as you remember the British had it then in those days and they had one section which was yuppy, which was really good, beach candy and indoor pool or outdoor salt water pool and they had all guards around and then about a mile away you see the slums, and when you go ashore you see

29:30 all this dark stain around the streets and I thought "What the heck is this?", they were spitting blood, they would be spitting a lot of the time, I thought it was blood but it was betel nuts.

Same colour isn't it?

It really got to me, it got me in there.

So what did you make of the Indians?

They were a bit funny too.

In what way funny?

30:00 We kept out of their way. It wasn't a very nice experience, we were altogether, we didn't like those people at all, they were all funny people. But what I saw, that upset me was all of the cripples, they had their legs crossed underneath them, and that was the way that they were sort of walking around on their arms, all the time.

30:30 It wasn't very good. A lot of poor people there, the beggars begging all the time coming around all the time. So it always made you appreciate what you had back at home, you don't lose that memory.

And what did you think about the British in India because you said they were living really well, then a kilometre up the road?

That sort of stuck in my mind a bit too, and I thought "These poor people there"

31:00 and what were they doing, not looking after them, because they were the ruling class and that is about as much as I thought of it, but we went to beach candy and the thing that I got over the impression with the British standing over these people particularly the British army provo [Provosts: Military Police], they were real animals, they really were, we have got security blokes

31:30 in these clubs, they're the same, they are not good, they are not good at all. There was a story, a true story, the AIF up in Malaya before the Japanese over ran it. The AIF boys used to go into this club quite a lot, any rate the provos [military police] people all happened to be in their drinking, and they said "You are not allowed in here". We said "Yes we are". There were about 8

32:00 of them I think, there was, about 6 or 7 AIF boys. Any rate one of the boys said "You boys go outside". So this bloke just cleaned them all up, he was only the world light weight champion of Australia, he cleaned them all up. I struck them too in India. "I am a white man, a boy, get out of the way". Didn't like them one bit.

What are they like?

Next time I struck it up in Sydney with a

32:30 policeman up there, "Get out of the way Aussie", very vicious up there, and they still are. I was up there when we did the 2000 Anzac parade and they still look the same.

So what did the British Provos in India look like?

Just big burly blokes, nasty look on their face, swaggering around like a big skite, "I am it

33:00 and Mr Big". I would have loved to have been there when that Sanford bloke cleaned up these fellows, that private bar in Singapore, that must have been funny.

Ron, is it true that sailors have a girlfriend in every port?

If they can find them?

Did they find them in Bombay?

Yes, they did and only in one particular place.

33:30 **Girlfriends that you had to pay for?**

Yes, well put. Yes a lot of the boys went up there.

Had you been given any instructions about fraternizing with the locals and the local women and so on?

Yes, we were told to "Keep right away from them", particular us deck boys, kept away from them, but some of them didn't.

Were they taught how to protect themselves if they did mix with the local

34:00 **women?**

No not really, it depends how you put that, I don't know what you really mean.

I mean in terms of catching diseases?

Yes, but I don't really know about that I am not sure about that. I didn't hear much about that at all really. When I got back home I found out all about it, when I joined the navy, I would have been older then.

34:30 **You were just a young chap weren't you?**

Yes. We were never told anything about that sort of life, it was mum who ever told me, "Watch the man with the gold watches, son". It's wrong.

And was that a useful tip?

Too right it was, I was awake to something and when people sort of touched you and made advances, this is the gold watch job.

35:00 Should have asked them for one.

So after the Reynella then there is the Wear then there's the?

Curroneoy.

And what was your next one after that?

That was the, Reynella, Wear, Curroneoy

Mulimbimba.

35:30 Yes that is right, I knew there was 5 ships I had been on. Mulumbima, that's the one where we struck the 80 foot swells and it could have been over that because of the height of the mast and I measured it, I knew it was over the height of the mast and that was a good ship just the same and we did trips up there up to Newcastle and back, and we actually called into Coffs Harbour, we didn't go,

36:00 we did tie up there. Anyway this other deck boy and I and an ordinary seaman and I were walking down to the wharf and we saw this little dinghy so we get the dinghy and hopped in and rowed around the harbour.

So by now you were an ordinary seaman, is that an AB or an ordinary seaman?

No that is an ordinary seaman, the one below the able seaman. But that was good.

But where did that ship run?

36:30 Between Newcastle and Melbourne and we did a lot of fishing because we had a set travel and you couldn't be ahead of time, so it was a pretty fast ship that did about 50/60 knots it was really fast and we were ever only once in convoy. We came out of Coffs Harbour and stopped

37:00 almost and that was all right, so many fresh barramundi fish I think it was red fish, and we pulled up one of these obnoxious looking thing, a rock cod, and I threw the thing back and that was good.

So you can't do much fishing on a moving ship, it was too fast?

No, you can't fish on a moving ship too fast.

So what would you eat, what was the food like?

Very good, mainly cooked in fat, not oil,

37:30 biggest black heads ever, I had them all in my nose I had them everywhere.

You were still an adolescent weren't you?

Yes and we used to mainly get good food, baked potatoes, cauliflower plenty of meat, rice, three good meals a day, which was good and it built me up a bit, but I didn't like the black heads, took me awhile to get rid of them.

- 38:00 When I got into the navy we cooked in oil and the black heads started to disappear, the oil made a big difference.

Was there a lot of drinking?

Yes. Now that is a different story altogether, with the drinking side of it the only time I ever struck that was on the Reynella, the first time, those young blokes were drinking gin, and that was the cause of their trouble that they got into half of the time, they were just drinking gin,

- 38:30 they tried to get me into it but no, no way, drinking gin. They used to go off their rocker, they go screaming and one fellow we had to get him out and get him down and put him under the shower to cool him down, not good.

Were you allowed to drink?

They got away with it, I don't know whether we were allowed to or not, I don't recall

- 39:00 any laws was against it but that was while we were in the harbour, at sea no you wouldn't get away with it, they got right onto them.

So when you did pull into a port, would people go onto a bit of a spree there, cooped up on this ship for ages?

Only those on the Reynella, those others no, you were just glad to get ashore and have a bit of a rest, you were working pretty well flat out all of the time, and you got really tired. That wasn't good on that Reynella and the only other time we ever struck it was on the American ship where they were not allowed to drink onboard, and they got ashore and they made up for it and one fellow the bosun, he, we were down at No 17 South Wharf I think it was and he went up to the pub the one right on the corner I think it is still there, the one on the corner of Flinders and Spencer Street and he just spent the whole

- 40:00 day in there and he came back onboard and he hadn't had anything to eat all day and he came back going great big loud noises, so they got the ambulance down, the Americans had the Royal Melbourne Hospital in those days and they rushed him down and never saw him again, don't know what happened to him he just never came back again, he had had it.

Tape 4

00:33 **Tell me about the Calcutta Cowboys?**

This was very interesting. These Calcutta Cowboys got wind somehow that the British hierarchy were concerned how the Germans were finding out about these ships and the exact point where they were, they were getting sunk in the Indian Ocean or around the coast of South Africa and they wanted to find out how they were getting sunk,

- 01:00 they started to make a few enquiries and traced it to a spy in India or Bombay who had a tie up, with that place in Portugal, owned by the Portuguese, this bit of area of India on the west coast.

Goa?

Goa that's right, so they traced it to there, the British hierarchy got together and they sorted out

- 01:30 that there must be some way they are getting a message to those two German ships that have come in and there forever until the end of the war, cargo ships. Found out they were sending messages out and the spy given all the information, the only way to get to this we can't do it on land, on a neutral port, on a neutral country, so they worked it out how about we get an old barge and sail it around

- 02:00 and go up in the port and blow them up and sure enough they did. They got a crew together, engineers, most of the light horse men, in private life they were engineers, owners of plantations and all ex-light horsemen they sailed this rust bucket around and it took them days and days and days, they had a couple of hold ups at sea, the war was going on and held them up any rate, it was chuffing and smoke out all of the time, they called into the Coach Inn.

- 02:30 We had to call in to Coach Inn to pickup supplies, water and lo and behold we saw this darn thing upstairs, what would they do with a dredge in this part of the world? It was right up out of the way towards the port and it wasn't tied up. I didn't think anymore of it and we came home

- 03:00 and it wasn't until I read the book and saw the film and said "There's that dredge we saw". What they did, they got up to Goa and got on these ships and they had to get down into and get a hold of the

codes, jam the wireless which they did in the end and blew the ships up,

03:30 they all caught fire and that was the end of it.

So they were the Calcutta Cowboys?

The Calcutta Cowboys and I was trying to find the book before and they made a film about it and David Niven was in it, quite a lot of the well known actors were in it and that is a true story.

So Ron, the next ship after the Reynella?

The Wear.

Then the Mulimbimba?

No the Curroneoy?

Curroneoy

Curroneoy,

04:00 Mulimbimba then Contessa.

Then the Contessa is an American ship, how did you get a job on an American ship?

They lost a lot of their crew and were looking for men and I happened to be an ordinary seaman, at the time, aged 15. I wasn't qualified as an able seaman, I boarded that ship and they made me an able seaman straight away, they took my finger prints

04:30 and your finger prints are going to Washington DC, thumb prints and they gave me inoculations and they gave me a uniform and books to read and that was it. I was in the American Merchant Marine, it was that quick.

Did they issue you with uniforms?

Yes, we got uniforms there, it was quite good.

What was your uniform?

Got it in there and I will

05:00 show you later one of them.

Can you tell me about it?

We had a working uniform which did not have things on it, just to work in, to do general duties, and we had dungarees, depending on what you were doing when you wore them, to go ashore you had a going out uniform.

05:30 **Was that a bit embarrassing?**

Not really, but I could have had that many girls, it was just unreal, we just got mobbed, Ashem and I, and Ashem from Tennessee was a better looking bloke than me who was dark and a lovely fellow, he had to push them away, that was unreal.

Did they think you were American?

They did in the uniform. Then I'd talk, that was great and they were quite

06:00 intrigued about that.

We have been hearing that the Americans had better uniforms and more money?

Well, you know what the uniforms were made out of mainly Australian wool, beautiful. The uniforms today are made out of synthetic but they still have their grey coat, p coats they call them and I still have mine, and I managed to pickup a few others, they were all pure Australian wool, really thick

06:30 and so comfortable. They tried to get rid of that uniform only about 2 or 3 years ago and the public kicked up such a stink they forgot all about it.

So you were popular in your US uniform?

Yes, and also because we had plenty of money.

What was your pay?

100 pound a week.

That's a fortune.

It was. That was including, that was why the Americans weren't

07:00 very popular, even the army, navy they all had good money, but with the merchant marine there was a lot more because they had nothing to come after and if the ship had got sunk at sea you got nothing, no pay from that day the ship was sunk, you didn't have a place to work did you. Not like the navy, no matter where you were you got paid all of the time, you earned your money and I earned that money I can tell you, I really did.

What was your job

07:30 **on the Contessa?**

Able seamen.

What were your duties?

The same as what I was doing as ordinary seaman; we were working on the decks we were doing the watches, thank goodness we weren't part of the gun crew because they had US navy and US army onboard to man the guns.

Did you have any aircraft onboard?

No, there is quite a story about this ship, very famous during the war,

08:00 they made a film about it, it was a ship that ran the gauntlet in North Africa, when they were running short of ammunition so they loaded up, they got rid of most of the crew, kept the officers and they went to Alcatraz and they asked for volunteers to man the ship, and told us what it was all about it, "If you do this trip you will get your pardon". And they said "Don't think of nicking off because the navy gun crew,

08:30 the navy is coming on as part of the gun crew and they will be looking after you". Volunteered, they did the trip and all got pardoned. But the trip itself, the captain had to go up this river in North Africa, and he couldn't go up the front way, so he backed the ship all the way up for about 4 or 5 mile and unloaded this ammunition to save the Americans in the North African campaign, and made a film about it and

09:00 onboard that ship in the foyer outside the purses office was a plaque out there, citation from the President for what they did on that ship.

So that was before you got on that ship?

Yes that was before I got on.

Where did it run while you were on it?

We went up to New Guinea across to America and back and we had a lot of marines on board and they used that ship mainly for transporting the troops because it was an old banana boat

09:30 and guess what was lying down below, cork. It was a cool ship and the troops loved it and I was never ever allowed down there because it was taboo, the troops said it was really cool in the tropics particularly when it got a bit cold and the other climates were really good, it was still warm.

So you were running now from San Francisco?

Yes, San Francisco

10:00 to Panama and back, but I only did that one trip and that was it.

And what were the American girls like?

We didn't get ashore, we weren't allowed ashore.

Why not?

It was just the way the Americans were, we were a troop ship and we would load and unload and begin back again with more troops.

So you didn't get to meet any American girls?

No, but I did meet them by post, through various contacts.

10:30 **So where were all these girls who mobbed you?**

In where?

So where were all these girls who mobbed you, you said they all mobbed you in your uniform?

In Australia, in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane not so much in Townsville they were taken up there with that many American seamen.

Were you interested in girls by this stage?

11:00 Yes, I suppose I was being just a normal boy. By that time of the ropes I started to get to know things, I had grown up a little bit, I think.

Because you were what, 15 on the Contessa?

Yes, still kept my nose clean.

And where did you sleep on the Contessa, did you have hammocks, bunks?

Now they were very good quarters.

- 11:30 I was bunked in with a South American steward, we had a top and lower bunk and I had the lower bunk, there was a fellow onboard called Mario Violino, Italian, and he had been sunk 3 times before he got on the Contessa, the South American didn't like him, he must of done something, I don't know what
- 12:00 they used to say to me "I will get that sea so and so, I am going to get him", he must of gone ashore and had a few drinks and come back, "This is it, I am coming to get him", he went to the galley and got this great, big, long knife and came into the cabin, no, he went screaming after the steward and the steward opened up, poor fellow was coming up the alley way, he chased him and I got out of this and hid under the bunk.
- 12:30 He came back and he said "That so and so couldn't get him" and he was going berserk, and I just stayed under there and I am not sure how long it was, and he all sobered up and I said to him later "I wasn't going to trust you". He said "I wasn't going to touch you". Didn't look like it, so I changed cabins after that, that was just one nasty little incident.

13:00 Was it tough discipline on the ship?

With the Americans yes, I had a folding camera and I knew I shouldn't have had it and the one I carried away with me on the Reynella and I wanted to take these photographs which I did and now the American army want the photographs because they said they don't have any photographs of what happened onboard. I would have been put in the clink, next port of call, transported ashore and because I was in the

- 13:30 merchant marine and working for the US army, they had the right if they caught me to shoot me, I didn't know this at the time and I found out later also, if you go to sleep on watch they had the right to shoot you, that is their discipline, their pretty tough the Yanks. I heard in the beginning of people getting shot particularly in the arm. There was a case up in New Guinea where these American Negroes raped
- 14:00 all these beautiful Australian nurses and they shot the whole lot of them, just lined them up and shot them, you didn't hear about that did you, that is a true story.

They were seamen you say?

No, they were army fellows, Negroes up in New Guinea. I travelled up to when I was on the Contessa when we called into Port Moresby and we were there for about

- 14:30 a day and a half and I thought this was a change to see a friend of mine up in 7 mile strip, they renamed it Jackson Field, later on I got out there and he had left that very day. I got on this utility covered ute with all these Negroes and they gave me a lift out there, and I got a lift all the way back and I didn't have any trouble.

So you got on all right with black servicemen?

Yes, I got on really well because I treated them as an equal but not so much the Americans with them, they didn't treat them right.

15:00 Were there black servicemen on your ship?

No, the only black servicemen onboard that ship was the chief cook, big fellow, I would always remember that.

Was he a good cook?

He was a good cook and a very hard task master too. I had to do a day's duty in the galley, I knew I would be working that day, they use to cook all that stuff, they'd cooked all

- 15:30 of them and that many of them and I had to clean the whole lot out and it nearly killed me. Sorry about that I shouldn't have gone on.

So was that harder work than swabbing the decks?

Yes, I didn't line up for that anymore, I was just helping out.

Did you make some good friends on that ship?

Yes, all the crew I got on really well with all of them.

So it was a happy ship?

Yes it was good,

- 16:00 got well paid and everyone seemed to do the right thing except that time when I was down the chain locker thing, don't know what had happened to him after that. I think they might have gotten rid of him, you don't go around leaving a young bloke down there. What he should have done was try to do it while he could on his own and let me rig up while he was doing it but no he caused the ship to be held up, and that held the convoy up.
- Did the Contessa mostly travel**
- 16:30 **in convoy?**
- Yes, except across the Pacific. It was a really powerful ship, it did one trip on its own, then the next trip on convoy, depending on what ships, what they are doing.
- So when you are running troops would you be escorted?**
- Yes, but if you are cargo you would be mainly travelling for a certain distance and they might pickup a convoy,
- 17:00 this happened quite a lot.
- Did you feel better in a convoy, did you feel safer or not?**
- Yes, because you had a bit more protection didn't you. There was someone on the outside screening but like I said the sub would be in the centre of the convoy and you wouldn't know.
- Because they were very dangerous waters?**
- Yes. The only dangerous water in the Pacific was up near the islands really or out from the coast, you know what I mean or around Pago Pago and places like that because the Japanese subs
- 17:30 would know who was coming and going and we used to have ships coming out to meet us at times, like to escort us in, that is all I can recall about them, actually.
- Where were you when one of your convoy got sunk, you said that happened to you a couple of times?**
- On the coast of Australia.
- 18:00 **Western Australia, or the Bight.**
- No, on the East Coast that was where most of the ships were sunk, not very nice. I'm just glad that we didn't get it. Most of those crews on those ships were mainly older fellows, there weren't many young fellows that had been at sea for a very long time, you could always pick out an Australian merchant seaman because he had this flat cap
- 18:30 just like the Americans used to wear in the Gulf years ago, flat white hat but they used to play it hard when they got ashore, they used to drink a lot.
- Ron, why did you get your tattoo?**
- It is very interesting - fancy you asking me that. I did that because I was in Dandenong at the time and I wanted to get this blanket to take away
- 19:00 with me in case I was travelling on rail, so I could cover myself up and next door was a tattoo shop, we didn't have ID tags in the merchant navy and that's why, and mums gone "What did you do that for?" "Head blown off, know who I am", and it is on my papers, tattoo on the right arm.
- You thought you might get your head blown off?**
- 19:30 That's the way that I thought, if, if it happened, and that's it I just put it out of my mind.
- Ron what was the thing that you feared most at sea?**
- Getting sunk and the sharks and water. Not so much drowning because I could swim. It didn't worry me and if the ship was going down you had to really battle to get out of it. Luckily I never experienced that.
- 20:00 **Were you given instructions about what to do if the ship went down?**
- No, the only instructions we got was how to man the life boats, we were thoroughly trained in that and also we had to wear our life jackets properly and we were trained how to use those, those silly cape box things, they only lasted for two or three hours and got water logged, we didn't know that.
- 20:30 Some of the life jackets they used to have in the navy, they used to jump in the water and they would break your neck. We didn't know this, not very nice.
- When you were on the Contessa were you ever near any battles, did you ever see the enemy in action?**
- No, we were part of a formation in the first part of a formation

21:00 in the first park and what they call the build up for the landing higher up, that was all part of the group and that was what we were, it was alright, we used to have a lot of escorts for that, but fortunately we only finished up in New Guinea, unloaded and we got

21:30 left then, thank goodness.

So you didn't get bombed on the Contessa?

No, thank goodness.

What did you make of New Guinea, were you able to get off shore?

Yes, got off there up in Port Moresby and it is quite a humid place and I think we gone up in the hottest season and I never saw so many, remember the war years and sweets and lollies were hard to get,

22:00 they were everywhere in the canteens. That was quite good and we saw a lot of goings on up there, saying we never got bombed where we were in Moresby and the Japanese came over and what happened was the two lighting fighters came out with the twin

22:30 tail jobs that came out from 7 mile strip; they use to head out to sea and come right up and these Japanese were higher up and they must have been a mile up, and all silver and the Japanese bombers were going to drop their bombs and these lights come up and they turned and dropped the bombs in the jungle, so we were a bit lucky there and they just chased them off.

What would be going through your mind when you saw the Japanese approaching?

23:00 There is nothing much you could do about it, just run for cover and we didn't have to man guns there, thank goodness.

What was your action station on the Contessa?

Just kept out of the way, just keep out of trouble and that was all it was. I wasn't even part of the fire crew, I just kept out of the way. The Yanks were funny like that; they had everything organized for the army and the gun crews.

How did you get on with the officers on the Contessa?

23:30 Captain terrific, steward terrific no worries, but that rotten third officer, no.

What was he like?

Tell me, when I am half way up the light to say "If I fall overboard we can't pick you up". Why didn't he tell me that before I left, because he knew that I probably might not do it and that really

24:00 because he couldn't get anybody to do it. If I had not done it, he would have had to go up and he was scared stiff to go up and do it. I worked all of this out later. I wasn't very happy about this and I told Donald, he was the agent aboard the ship and he used to hire all the crews, told him about it and I said "I am leaving the ship,

24:30 I have had enough, I can't serve under that man and I am only 15 year old". He wanted me to stay and he begged me to stay and I said "No" and guess where that officer ended up? He ended up on a ship later, I saw him in Melbourne and he wouldn't even talk to me and I knew he had been sacked. A man like that is no good aboard a ship like that. I just did what

25:00 my intuition told me to do and I didn't want to get anybody the sack but that was really mean.

Was that consistent with what he'd been like all along?

Yes, even to be on watch with him he was nasty, for some reason he didn't like me but I didn't know. I didn't do anything to him, maybe he was just jealous of me because of my age, probably how I had a more friendlier attitude than he did and I don't think anybody liked him, from what I remember

25:30 nothing much was said. The boys were sorry to see me go and I really had been working very hard and physically I was worn out, I was a slim 15 year old, I really was, and I had it. The money didn't worry me anymore.

So did other

26:00 **people get on all right with him or was everyone having trouble?**

I don't really know. I was reading between the lines. He didn't seem to be a very happy person, never had a pleasant look on his face, never saw him smile, and he was just the third officer the flyogar, we called him flea gear. I have got it all down on the crew list there.

26:30 **Earlier on you were talking about what were the qualities you need to have to be on a ship and what were the qualities that didn't work to work on a ship, the qualities of a person I mean?**

Their attitude to their work and their attitude to other people and that was all there was to it, if you didn't get on with other people and if you didn't do the right thing here, particularly your attitude to

your work and that put me in good step

27:00 for the navy which was just automatic for me to change over from that to that, I had good advice from the petty officer in the navy put in, "(UNCLEAR) and I chief but thank you very much for telling me you had no worries with me" and that was it.

What are the qualities that you need to have to work on a ship?

Your integrity and be always thinking about the fellow man and always do the right thing,

27:30 and be honest. Over in the navy now they have it on the side of street and that is what all the youngsters over there now be yourself, be honest and be sincere, work hard, put in, be dedicated and you will be noticed, you can't go wrong.

You were also saying earlier the worse thing you could do on a boat was panic?

Yes that is for sure.

28:00 If you panic that causes all sorts of problems and it is only the people in charge who have got a cool head and they are the ones that have shined through.

Did you see people panic?

Yes, saw them, they are just scared.

And when was that Ron?

Trying to think where that was, particularly where that gun barrel blew up,

28:30 scared look on their faces, it just seemed to be automatic to me a couple of those people had been drinking.

So how did they react when the gun split up?

They screamed, I thought "You were lucky it didn't blow up in your face", but they were lucky they were all clear of the, what happens

29:00 the (UNCLEAR) go out and the thing just backfires, the shell didn't go as it should have, and just cling, it is just a blockage and that is it. I hope that is clear enough for you, is it?

So what happened to those people who panicked?

I think and I am not too sure but I

29:30 don't think they are not part of the gun crew anymore because they just panicked, remember they were only just young blokes, they were a lot older than me, 16 or 17 and should have known better but they just panicked. When I am playing sport I don't panic. If anything goes wrong and there is danger there, I was playing hockey one day at Melbourne High and pretty scrubby grounds in those days

30:00 and a big dip in the ground and the ball came along and just lobbed there and I managed to get to it and this bloke charged from there to there and I just turned around and put it in the goal and he says "I have never seen anybody do that" and you were charging and you just stood there and I did and it didn't even hit me because I did it automatic and I didn't panic fellows. I have always been trying to tell when I was in charge of a team I used to tell the boys "Don't panic". We played with 7 men on day and almost beat this Waverly

30:30 team and I told them what to do, "Don't panic". Yet we have a doctor in one of our teams and he is a panic merchant; if there were only 7 men in a team he won't play, how's that for courage? I can't be bothered with people like that, I am not blowing my trumpet there, but that is the sort of thing that happens.

What was the hardest thing for you about

31:00 **being at sea?**

It really wasn't that much as I say the sea and trying not to be sea sick; the first time I was away on the Reynella I had a bit of a headache and that was it but not until I got to Mulimbimba was I sick, and from then on it was the hardest part, great big 80 foot waves, they were big. I have great respect for the sea, if I go fishing I am very careful

31:30 of what I am doing, where I am; you quite often hear people at Cape Shank they get caught with the big waves and we used to go fishing down the Flinders at West Head and my uncle used to teach me how to fish and said "Never turn your back on the waves" and that is when you get caught, it happens in Sydney and some of those waves have travelled thousands of miles and it is only that one that you get caught with.

32:00 **So you're more afraid of the sea than you were of the enemy?**

Yes, I was, and it still is my worst enemy. I don't want to be buried at sea. I want to be on dirt.

Ok you have put that on record forever now?

That's good because that is the way that it is going to be unless I happen to be at sea or something happens to the stupid ship.

Did you ever bury people at sea?

32:30 **Did you have any deaths onboard?**

No, fortunately we didn't but we did bury a fellow who had died at sea, this is getting a bit before my time, had to take him down to a place called Adelaide River and we had to come down in the old Dodge truck we had up there being a depot there and made up a red coffin for him.

33:00 He burst his appendix and it was too late to do anything for him and they brought him ashore and the medics did everything and covered him up, we made the coffin and they put him in the coffin and put him on the back of the truck and we went all the way to Adelaide River, 60 mile, something like that. We gave him with our rifles down a general goodbye.

What medical facilities were aboard?

33:30 On the destroyers they had a doctor but on the ships, corvettes they would only have a petty officer sick birth attendant, he could do just about anything.

In the merchant navy?

We would have a doctor; mainly on the big overseas ships they would have a doctor there.

No surgery facilities, to be able to?

No, the doctor on the Reynella, he was a rustic Tobruk fellow.

34:00 It is funny you should say that about the 9th division and that ties in, and I don't know how he came to be on that ship because he must of come back with the 9th division, you said that before. He was on the Reynella and we left Bombay and we called into the Coach Inn as I explained to you, and he gave me these two dirty big vaccinations one there, two of them together he said "I was on the end of the line again"

34:30 and "I don't want to waist it and I'll give you another one", in my arm, like this. I went swimming, and I wanted to go swimming in the harbour and swim with all these kids who used to come down and we use to throw coins in and they use to collect them. That was painful.

Do you know what they were for, the injections?

Yes, smallpox.

Smallpox?

35:00 You had to have a booster now and again. You get used to them after a while. I won't talk about it.

They come up in a great big abyss, don't they?

I'm glad you said it, very bad, but it could have saved a life and that is the way to look at it.

Was it nice coming into Cuching, sounds like you had some fun their?

35:30 Yes, it was quite good because when you come into Cuching there they have all these big prawn nets on these great big poles, they have like a pole with a "V" on it like a y, they have these great big poles with nets on them and just drop them in the water and catch all these prawns, on the end of it they had these great big stones, I don't know how they lift them, that was my first impression and we got in there and

36:00 I think it was in the afternoon and I had to see this dredge up there, the rusty old bucket thing and I didn't take any notice of it like I said it was the Calcutta Cowboys. It's amazing how things stick into your mind.

You liked playing with the kids there?

Yes I did, they were funny. I love kids and I love old people; they can tell you a lot, the older people have the experience and the kids are new,

36:30 fresh and you can teach them a lot. We have got two, three, no four youngsters next door and I really look after those kids, get them books and things, I have pictures to put on the walls, the young bloke nursery things and the reaction you get from them and I don't expect to get anything from them and I know that it is appreciated.

37:00 I don't mind doing anything to anyone as long as it is appreciated, kicked in the behind ,that is it for me.

Fair enough too?

It is either one thing or the other with me.

Tape 5

00:30 **You were on the US Contessa?**

Yes

How long were you on that ship?

About 5 months.

Was it a happy ship?

Yes, we were ok and I was the only Australian onboard, and that was good.

Were you the youngest?

Yes that's right. I was 16 then,

01:00 and an able seamen to boot.

You made some good mates on that ship?

Yes, the American seamen, what was left of them. There was one fellow there and boy could he sing, they are all about 2 or 3 years older than me, they were all graduates and they just came out of college instead of being called up into the army they joined United States Merchant Marine, this one fellow could sing.

01:30 There was another fellow there, called Rocky the butcher, he always used to be singing that one Lucky Old Sun like Paul Robeson used to sing, and he used to sing this "That lucky old sun, ride around heaven all day, but that lucky old sun has nothing to do

02:00 just roll around heaven all day", that's not quite the words but it was great, it relieved the monotony.

What other things did you do to relieve the monotony? Did you have lots of time when you were twiddling your thumbs?

No, we didn't. Your whole sleep pattern was broken up, you were sleeping most of the day if you were on at night, say go on at 8.00 at night and then be on the next morning you would be on at 8.00 till 4.00 then 8.00

02:30 next morning, they staggered.

Can you describe a typical working day for me?

We would normally get up and do our watch, didn't do anything else but go and watch and sleep, if you were working on the ship itself you were doing maintenance, painting, washing down the decks all that sort of thing and also watch up in the

03:00 crows nest, my favourite spot. There was a lot of work to do, there was maintenance all of the time. Get rust off and painting so it was just a bit of a drag sometimes. With a lot of troops onboard and I got to meet a lot of them, got talking to them, where they came from, it was good like that.

So you would sing together, did you used to sing with the guys?

No, I used to love

03:30 listening to them, I couldn't sing for nuts then, they were great, just listening to them they were really good. The American students they used to have their own sing-a-long group and they did those, sing-a-long groups they used to have, and that is how they produced so many good singers.

When you were on the Contessa, you said you were earning 100 pounds a week?

Yes that is absolutely true.

04:00 **That is a lot of money?**

It was.

What did you do with it all?

I took out a savings bank account with the Commonwealth Bank and I made arrangements with the purser onboard to be paid into the bank, so it would be sent through the bank channels and my mother had the book. Guess what? When I arrived home there was no money there. No, that

04:30 is not putting mum down at all because she put it to good use because in those days she married again and had my brother and sister and three other children to look after, and that money saved them, she was able to educate the whole lot of them and have proper food, and clothe them. I never regret it one

bit. I was a bit disappointed because I was going to do a lot with that money. I was going to buy a house that was my ambition,

05:00 however, it was put to good use.

She put all your younger brothers and sisters through school?

Yes, they all went to school.

That's fantastic.

That was great, so it made them, they are all reasonably pretty well off.

Did they ever thank you for it Ron?

Only one person really knew what really went on. Only my sister,

05:30 she found out the eldest of the girls, she found out, and I think she was spreading the word around a bit, because I wouldn't talk about it. I was a bit disappointed about that.

I'll bet?

400, I never got a penny of it. Then what happened, my stepfather's father died and they found a lot of money in his sleep out

06:00 and I was to get a certain amount of that for being a good boy, never got a penny. I didn't go too well with my stepfather after that, I forgave him, all along the line of being done with, with money speaks all languages.

That is true isn't it?

Yes, no it doesn't. The thing in my life can't

06:30 buy happiness, and this is what's in you that counts.

So Ron, all that time were you very home sick, you were very young?

Sometimes, when it dragged on a bit you said "I want to go home". I said before because on that ship I was really worn out with the hard work and everything and being only a little fellow

07:00 as I was in those days. I reckon I was doing a two man's work because we were short of crew, and you seemed to just double up on everything. We were sort of go, go, go all the time.

You didn't have a full compliment?

No. It was very hard to get people in those days and particularly when they had lost a few of the crew.

How would they lose crew?

Well I never really found

07:30 out how they did it and they were lost before I got on it, so I don't know what went on before I got there, they would have seen some action somewhere, and a lot of fellows couldn't hack it.

What couldn't they hack, Ron?

Just the pressure of it all the time, the pressure, it is real pressure as I say

08:00 and particularly when you got into action. It is not good at times.

What sorts of pressures?

The fact that they're there and they might, and working hard and the strain of bombs dropping around them and worrying about the subs at night and all this sort of things, and you would be working hard and you would be stuffed, you really are.

08:30 I wanted to tell you something about that ship to, when I joined that ship in Melbourne there was a fellow on there I shared a cabin with up in the folks haul and his wife was a Japanese, and he told me because of the war he couldn't get back to see his wife, because he was really mad on the Japanese, I was the only one he ever told, that I know. He taught me a lot about life and if you did the wrong thing

09:00 with him he wouldn't talk to you again, no he wouldn't, not for days he just wouldn't talk to you. So you got the message, be careful. But as we were going out of Melbourne we came down the South Channel, he and I had to go on watch on the folks haul, now up in the folks haul, which is up the front of the ship and all we had there was a bit of a cover, down and there is a phone up

09:30 the side of the ship, if I saw something I was supposed to ring, it was pitch black I couldn't ring because the ship was going up and down, I had to ring in every hour to make sure I was still there.

Can you describe that part of the ship for me, what did it look like, what did you call it the

folks haul?

The folks haul, just the front of the ship where the anchor goes down, they had two anchors in those days with a,

- 10:00 got down below and there is a paint lock up there too, it is the worse part of the ship that you could ever be on. If you had a submarine attack the mid ships like it did in the Centaur you would have a chance of getting out. It wasn't a very good place to be, not at my age and it was pitch dark.

Why wasn't it a good place to be?

To me it was pitch dark.

- 10:30 I couldn't see anything; I couldn't do anything, a no-no, I might as well have been asleep. They checked up on you to make sure that you were awake, they would have rounds about every two hours to make sure you were still there.

Did you have somewhere to sit?

No, no you just sat on the deck, there wasn't a seat around; oh no, you don't get any mod cons around there.

Did you have binoculars or

- 11:00 **night vision glasses?**

No, that was only at the night time, no need for binoculars at night time, these days you would have the night field glasses, they would be a lot better but you wouldn't need them up in the folks haul, not now.

Did you ever see anything?

No.

What about on moon lit nights?

Yes, in moon lit nights it is totally different altogether,

- 11:30 you saw mainly the flying fish going by, the fossils going either side of the ship you got used to that I can assure you.

What was the strangest thing you ever saw out at sea?

A big sun fish, it was a big whale I spotted, saw it down in the east cost of Tasmania. I was on watch the port side of the, where I think it was and I happen to look over and I couldn't believe it;

- 12:00 this great big spotted whale. I reported it to the officer, the watch at that time, and said "That was a spotted whale". He thought nothing of it, it was tremendous we just kept going past it. They are massive things those are.

Bigger than the ship, as big as the ship?

Almost in length but width I wouldn't know.

- 12:30 **When you say that the pressure got to some people, did it get to you?**

No, only in the last bit when I had had it and I wasn't appreciated by that third officer and I was pretty worn out by then I think, I just wanted to get off, on one or two of the ships I had just had enough. Particularly when I tried to make a special advance, I had to leave.

- 13:00 **Am I right in saying the same for you, it was the other crew that got to you more than anything?**

Yes.

Or was it a combination of things?

Only certain parts of them plus the pressure of the work all the time, it wasn't easy.

What about the pressure of the possibility of attack?

I didn't worry about that much at all. Once you are busy, you are busy, I didn't have time to think about it very much.

- 13:30 **Were you attacked ever on the Contessa?**

No, not that I know of, you didn't really know because if you were in convoy most of the time with the Contessa except when it went overseas we never knew we were attacked, only when we were up in New Guinea, we were attacked by the Japanese when they tried to drop those bombs on us, but apart from that there was no gun firing or anything like that, it was mainly just bombs.

Well that is bad enough, isn't it?

14:00 Yes. You never knew when they were coming.

What would you do when you saw the Japanese aircraft coming?

I just run for cover, get away, get out in the open spaces if you could.

What happened to you physically, what did your body feel like when the planes are coming?

I didn't think much about it at all, just hoped they don't get me.

Would your heart be racing?

No, wasn't racing, too young

14:30 and silly I suppose back then.

What about the other fellows, did you ever see anyone panic?

There were a few scaredy cats amongst them. The nationalities I would hate to tell you - they were the ones, only the Australians not on that ship, because I was the only Australian, Australian are all right but certain races you wouldn't want to be in an open boat with them.

15:00 **Why was that?**

It would be you first and then last, they would just turf you overboard. They wouldn't be hesitant to cut you up and eat you, it had been done many of times during the war, that wasn't very nice.

Why did you leave the Contessa?

Because I had had enough and hard work.

15:30 That third officer - that particular fellow I didn't appreciate him and the outcome of that one was he said, he went up later and recommended me for an award, meritorious award apparently, but I never ever saw it but they probably lost my address. I should ring John Howard and see if he could follow it up for me; it would be on the records there somewhere. They had all of my details overseas in Washington.

16:00 I wrote them and that was how I managed to get my official discharge from them, and an honourable one too, thank goodness. I was able to keep out of trouble.

So where did you leave the Contessa?

I think it was Townsville, when did I leave that, I forget now whether it was Townsville or Brisbane? I am not sure

Queensland?

Yes, Queensland

16:30 **Did you come home?**

Yes I came home by rail, we had special passes, merchant navy passes. I liked the old rail travel in those days, the single compartments, wide seats, racks to put your things on, not like this today, comfortable, not rowdy like these trains that they have today, you might as well as put them out to sea because that is all they are good for. They ride like an old ship, destroyer, they tear

17:00 ride along like this. That is why they are always having trouble up there, the carriages are too light for the bogies down below, they haven't got enough weight, and that is why that train ran off the rails, that is why they had that disaster up there, remember when they had that bridge come down on them, they go too fast to, bad engineering.

How was it when you got home,

17:30 **you had been at sea a long time?**

It was good coming home, it was great. You got home, out of Spencer Street onto the train and back home to the good old Noble Park. I used to have a kit bag and I used to walk from Noble Park Station up about a mile all up hill, I had a fair bit of weight in those days, I had cigarettes, god knows what and it was pretty heavy.

Did you bring presents home for your brothers and sisters?

Yes, I brought them things home.

18:00 **What did you get them?**

I brought back home black elephants, white ivory elephants, suite cases and everything, I think they still have got them, and I brought my grandfather an old big box of cigars, he liked them.

Was it strange being home after being away for so long?

It was just a great feeling, it was just great

18:30 to be home, and sleep with no noise, no sound, no nothing.

And not have to worry, I guess?

And not have to worry, and also to be between nice clean sheets and a nice pillow and very quite, and have good home cooked meals. My mother used to make beautiful scones and apple pies, it was really great. I was always glad to get home, go down to see my pals

19:00 down the street, see the local shop keepers, it was good.

Ron, why did you leave again?

I had to earn a living, you see, I had to go back, didn't I?

But after that, you joined the navy didn't you?

Yes I did join the navy and that changed everything.

So why go back to sea?

As I said I had to

19:30 earn a living.

But there are other ways to earn a living?

I didn't want any land jobs, not for me, no. Wait a minute I did take on a job for a week, guess what it was? Market gardening and I was out in the fields and I was on my knees all day, except for a bit of a break and I had to do all the hoeing or planting or things like that and I said "This isn't for me". I didn't like it at all.

20:00 That was only to earn a bit of money, so I went back to sea.

And you joined up with the navy?

After, I finished the merchant navy time I joined the navy, yes. Best thing I ever did I would still be working with them today, that was the best investment that anybody could do for a fellow was to get into the services.

Why was that Ron?

Because they can do so much for you. I get the health benefits,

20:30 I did have a war service home loan, there are other ways in which you can benefit particularly medical benefits are really good. I have got a few things wrong with me relating to the war and they bob their little head up now and again and it makes it a little bit awkward. The one thing I will tell you about is the tinnitus you know, going right through. It is about 245 decibels, it is

21:00 there all the time and that is why I can't really sleep well at night. Just have to wake up and put on the radio or get some nice music and that is what I like, and when I get home to help me out during the day I just like to get out the back, I don't want the TV or the radio I don't want anything, beautiful music, not high music, to relax me.

What was the tinnitus from?

Just from firing the guns that's all.

21:30 **They didn't give you hearing protection?**

Not in the merchant navy, never ever thought of. In the navy they did but they used to pop out the stupid things, hopeless. Because another thing was if you were chipping the decks with a hammer, could you imagine in a compartment up on the deck a big clang, clang, there would be four or five of you chipping, imagine the sound, on a steel deck,

22:00 steel walls, steel top, that wasn't good, you hear "Chip, chip, chip", chipping the rust off.

Was that something that you did regularly?

That was part of the work. Yes, manually we didn't have any automatic machines like they have got now, it was hard. They were steel hammers, they weren't wooden ones, they were steel,

22:30 with a steel handle. That was when I was on the Wear, I must tell you about that one, I forgot about that. The Wear, I was in the seamen's unions and if the crew went on strike, everybody goes on strike. I wanted to know why and they wouldn't tell me,

23:00 so the whole seamen's union going on strike. I said "I don't want to go on strike, I want to stay. I haven't done anything wrong". "If you don't go on strike you will never get another job with the merchant navy", so I thought, and it stuck in my mind and that is another reason why I joined the navy, it is just

the way they are.

Did you ever find out what that strike was about?

No, I can't recall.

23:30 They went on strike so much during the war on various shifts you know, I think it was after a better pay or whatever. Can I jump back to this other ship the Centaur, I've just rang Neil Wilson and he is away at the moment, and given the report the information they got on the Centaur. They went on strike about all the ammunition and arms and that came on the ship

24:00 during the night, they tried to cover it up, there was no light or anything for the war, they just loaded them up, they all just put them down the hole, they are probably still there today, ammunition up the forces up in New Guinea. The crew got to be weary of this, someone saw what was going on and they called the seamen's union and they went on strike, and guess what the army came along said, "If you don't go back to

24:30 the ship we will call the navy and they will crew the ship". Now they didn't want to lose their jobs, they were forced to go back to the ship and they didn't want to, but the navy was going to come in and sail it. I remember it was a navy ship the HMAS Centaur, hospital ship, they had every right to crew the ship. They would have been getting good money on that ship and the hospital ship.

25:00 They must of thought twice about that.

What was their objection to sailing that ship?

Because of all the ammunition, it was a hospital ship, no arms suppose to be onboard that ship. There was ammunition, apparently other bigger ammunition like the grenades and all that sort of thing. You only had to re-label it and no one would know, but these fellows knew, they had to, they wouldn't have gone on strike,

25:30 so that really happened there. That was told to me by Ronnie Moat who was a pantry man onboard and he did that painting for me.

And he survived?

Yes, he was one of only 63 survivors, there are only two left now out of all that, and my two mates went down on that. I will never forget those two boys

26:00 they were about a year older than me I think, we used to get on well together.

Where had you met them Ron?

Remember when I told you we use to all get together to be picked up by the various ships, they used to come down from that rear of the Immigration Centre, they used to come from the shipping office. You never know when your time is up, do you? Obviously my time wasn't up. Although,

26:30 if the ship got hit depending where you are, you could have survived it maybe with a bit of luck. Could you imagine with all the ships' ropes and wireless aerials all in a big tangle, and the ship is going down and it is flying around everywhere and the chances of getting out are very slim. Being a swimmer that I was, I would have some sort of a chance, and I always made sure of that -

27:00 that I could swim. I always used to practice getting in and out of the port holes, I was small enough to get in and out, I used to practice that.

Did other blokes practice that too?

No, they were too big.

Did you do that in secret?

Just separate on my own, they probably would have thought I was stupid.

27:30 **When it comes to your own survival?**

That is right.

So that is something obviously I would do a lot, the idea that your ship might go down?

It is only natural, it didn't worry me that I would be prepared, if it worried me a lot I wouldn't be at sea, would I? That is one of the risks that you take, I suppose. It is just like driving a car, you had more risk driving a car

28:00 than being out there, it really is, because you have so many people driving against you.

Where did you go to enlist in the navy?

The navy, down at Older Fleet Building and it is still there, ground floor and

28:30 you walked in there, I said "I wanted to join the navy". "Yeah all right", he signed me up, signed the papers and arranged for a medical for the next day. He must of put down on the papers "Fill it in", he said. "What did you use to do?" "I was in the merchant navy for two years". "What do you want to do after the war?" "I don't want to be in the merchant navy". So he put down "Salesmen".

29:00 Guess what happened to me, I didn't get sent away to a ship or anything. Normally, I would have been sent away because of my experience, they were looking for officers in those days, and it didn't say anything about me passing an exam being an officer, that would have been a good job. I would have loved that, I didn't realize being a young kid.

What was the difference between the officers and the ordinary ranks?

29:30 It was more of a heady job, thinking all the time you had charge of certain parties and directing other people what to do, knowing me I would have been working with them, because later on when I became leading seamen. I was working with the tall ships on the Baintent [?] and the PA [personal assistant] said "Why are you working there? Let them do it". I said "All in everybody in as far as I am concerned, and if I can help I will do it", and he didn't like it

30:00 and the blokes appreciated it, I set an example and I knew what to do and I thought something needed to be done straight away. I would just call the crew; I would go and do it straight away. That is the way that it is.

What rank did you enter the navy with?

Just an ordinary seamen, Class A B C D, dud, nothing

30:30 because it was on the papers that I was a salesman. That stupid clerk, god I could kill him for that. We use to have some stupid people, writers in the navy.

So that annoyed you?

Oh yes, I realized later what had happened, it was a big mistake, in one way but at least I didn't go straight to sea it could have been on one of the ships that were

31:00 in an accident, big convoy duty, out there with maybe 300, 400, 500 blokes, it is not easy cruising, your bunking down, pretty cold, and the water is dripping off the ceiling. If it was up in the ice country, everything ices up. I wouldn't have liked that, so I am lucky to have gone to Darwin. I ended up there

31:30 for 10 months and got a beautiful tan and everything, I worked hard. The food wasn't too good, we had dehydrated potatoes in kerosene tins, like a kerosene tin but no kerosene in it of course. Eggs, could you imagine the eggs, after being made and everything and open and we had to eat them and we had bully beef, no sauce

32:00 or anything with it, bully beef that was about it, oh no orange juice. That was rationed because Ron Tomlin and I used to go out into the forest, cut all the wood so they could burn the fire and cook everything. We got big rations of orange juice and we would take two tins out with us, sweating so much there was hardly anything left of them when we came back. We used to go out in this black Dodge truck, we used to load that thing up,

32:30 load bushman saws and he would be at one end and would be at the other and that is how I learnt how to use one of those saw, that was hard work.

Because you would have been cutting green timber weren't you?

All green. Yes.

Were there any black fellows around the camp?

Not in the boom depot itself, but out, we had struck a few out there and in the town, they were around all the time.

Were some of them working at the depot?

33:00 No, we were the workers, we were the slaves. I use to have a duty up in Darwin it was called boom depot, while I wasn't on one of the ships, I used to run what they called a panatroop [?], now a panatroop is one of those things where you have two parts of the depot, one on top of the old courthouse and the other one was down below, where they had a lot of gear and stuff to service the ship,

33:30 they used to do the broadcast at night about 6.00 o'clock till about 8.00 o'clock at night, and I used to play all the records, so I was one of the first DJs up in Australia. That was good.

So you slept in the courthouse?

Yes. I was under the judge's box, right underneath it, but we, first night we didn't have any mosquito nets, we all just arrived and flopped in, later on after some of the other regional

34:01 fellows had left we were able to get separate beds. That was interesting that in the courthouse.

What was your bed?

Just a mattress, an old iron bed with a hollow thing at the top so you could drape the nets down, so you wouldn't get eaten alive, there was one fellow there he was a bit dry and we used to get these little rock lizards and we put one in his bed one night, it was about that long,

34:30 middle of the night a scream, he had just come back from the pictures. He didn't like that at all so we didn't do that again.

Because there is lots of bugs in Darwin aren't there?

Yes, but we only struck the lizards. We had ticks, I have got that photo over their from the fellow I was speaking to the other night, I remember I took a photo of him because the little dog

35:00 there had ticks, I would always remember that turned my blood cold, ticks, inside oh, the only bugs I ever saw.

Did you ever get any?

No, they are ticks. Dogs have them you know. I believe some humans can get them too. I never got them. Only because we were sweating all day and we would take a shower every day, we did keep ourselves pretty clean.

Were you attached to a ship

35:30 **up in Darwin?**

Yes, on the ship and these were supply ships, the gate ships called the Kapooka and some other, they were Chinese dredges and they used to be the one operating the gate open and closing the big boom and stopping submarines from coming in. The Kookaburra, Koala and Kangaroo, they were the three supply ships, what tender ships, we served a bit of time on each one of those for a little bit of experience,

36:00 good little ships those.

So they were much smaller than the ships you had been working on?

Yes, just like a big tug.

Can you describe one to me in detail?

Yes, they had a sort of a thing at the front where they could operate a cable, and drop it down a lift a part of the net up and repair it,

36:30 things like that. They were very low in the water very low, and because up in Harvey you wouldn't get that much sea like right out in the ocean, and if it was too rough they wouldn't go out at any rate, but they are very low in the water. They used to go down below and get into the bilge and clean the whole bilge out, where you collect all the rotten oil, and it was my first job when I got up there.

37:00 The next day, I had just come up from Melbourne and it was stinking hot and I had to go down to this bilge. I got down to my shorts and I was really like a black fellow when I came out, good job, I think it was my initiation the big test.

That is the least favourite job, isn't it?

You didn't have to do it again. I never complained, I just did it.

When you joined the navy,

37:30 **were you given any training?**

Yes, we were. We went down to service and we were given training, we learnt how to march first, you know in a squad, if the temperature was all right and not raining we used to do it in the open and then if we had to go indoors we used to do it in what we used to call the old tin shed, which is still down there and they still assemble there and train,

38:00 so we used to do all of that. One day we were doing this squad drill, left turn, right turn and I happened to be on the extreme front right hand side and I always paid attention to the orders because if you didn't you could come unstuck, this day I was really listening to the orders the others didn't, I kept marching forward and these fellows did a left turn, and all those fellows gave me the raspberry because I put them all on show but I did the right thing.

38:30 We played a lot of sport, did sport training and sport. One day a fellow there, a banana bender, that was a Queenslander, that was what we used to call them, he was a pretty fast runner. Watson was his name, very tall fellow, he used to always skite about how he used to always beat everybody, "I will get you", I just bided my time and practiced a bit of running because he was so (UNCLEAR) and he didn't have to wait, oh I didn't want him to beat me, so I just

39:01 started off like a jack rabbit, he couldn't believe it and I beat him right on the line, and he never forgave me for that, I beat him, and I did that to someone else when I was playing hockey, because he was fast too, so I thought "I would get you", and I did the same thing, and I always remember telling him "I beat you, didn't I, Ron"?

Tape 6

00:00 I was operating a panatroop and was doing all the broadcasting right around and used to get all the requests for playing the old records like Stardust, Bolero, Lucky Old Sun because they were always very familiar with all of that but they were always stuck on Lucky Old Sun and Stardust. I was talking to them the other night and they still remember it.

How does Stardust go?

I forget now. I could play it for you. I have got

01:00 the record here. I just can't remember it now but I can remember Lucky Old Sun in the back of my mind.

Is that where you joined the navy band?

No, it didn't operate from there, it is just the navy band when I joined up, they wanted seaman drummers and buglers straight away. "This is good I am going to have a lot of work". We used to have to practice and we used to have to do parades, they were called divisions,

01:30 everybody had to meet outside the drill hall and form up into various class and they then had to march off, we used to have to march and form the band, then march them off and then we would take our class, there would be a couple of drummers, and a bugle and we used to march them around to where they ever had to go.

What were you playing at that stage?

I was either playing the bugle or the drum, one or the other.

Can you still play your bugle?

Hardly ever. Once I get

02:00 about an hour's practice I'm right.

Do you want to play for us now?

No, I couldn't now the lips aren't right.

Fair enough.

I can hold that up for you.

What did you get up to in Darwin for fun?

We played cricket, football and went to the pictures, that was about it; that was about all you could do.

What did you see at the pictures?

We saw all the old movies,

02:30 the ones that I recall we saw Casablanca at that time, who else was on, I don't know but I would have written all this down and memorized them, but there was a lot of good films, I love English films and we'd go see the British News, (noise) that was there introduction, going on

03:00 British News, taking you to all points of the world.

Is that where you got most of your information from about the war?

Up in Darwin, yes that would have been about it; they had what you would call the Darwin News and that was put out by the army, army signal core, that was where we got our news from up there. Once a week we used to have to go out

03:30 in truck and collect all the beer and bring it back into the depot, and we used to get two bottles a week. There was a big base of Americans up there and I used to swap all my beer with the Yanks for the cigarettes and bring them home.

Were you too young to drink, or were you drinking as well?

No, I didn't, as I said it before mum told me not to drink and I didn't.

When you went out to the pictures, would you take girls with you?

04:00 No, where were the girls? The only girls up there were a couple of WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] or some nurses, that was all we ever saw.

No girls in Darwin?

Hardly at all, they were all just army nurses, some WRANS writers and that would be it.

Did you get to know any of the nurses and the WRANS?

Yes, I sure did. Did you want me to explain something to you really funny? We were playing this game of football against this Aboriginal

04:30 team, did I mention this before how we played on the ground of the Melbourne Oval, which I think is still there? Had hardly any grass on it and it had one little patch of grass, we had arranged to play this game, they had a full team and we had a full team and there was only one set of jumpers, we owned the jumpers, we were very sporting like, so we tossed for the jumpers and guess who won them? They did. Can you imagine what happened? We got rolled through grass on our backs, front, our knees.

05:00 They were so fast it was just unbelievable, and we were talking about it the other night; we had a couple of Victorian League footballers, we had about 4 from South Australia, a couple of Western Australian, we had a couple of top footballers and the Aboriginals just cleaned us up. They had me on the wing because I was pretty fast in those days, and I went and got this ball and was running with the ball in my hand and the next thing the ball is out of my hand, put his hand on my shoulder and down I went.

05:30 I couldn't get up, slipped disc, they had to bring the truck in, and lift me on the truck and took me into Darwin Hospital and that was my first meeting with one of the girls up there and guess what I had to do? I was standing there and she said "What's the problem and how do you feel?" I said "Fine", she said "Take your pants off"?

06:00 **What did she say to you?**

"Take your pants off? I just want to have a look". You were right. I was embarrassed, any rate I did it and I was embarrassed.

Did you have underwear?

She was there only for a minute.

So she had a good look at you?

She sure did, mind you it would be different these days.

06:30 **Was that your first time having a woman telling you to take your pants off?**

Yes, apart from mum of course. That was embarrassing, I will never forget that.

How long were you in hospital with your slipped disc?

I wasn't in; they just treated me there and manipulated my back, gave me some ointment, rubbed it on and I was out of action for 3 days. I got back to the depot and lay on my back for 3 days virtually.

07:00 That was it, they put me on light duties and I ended up with a job looking after the Governor's Residence, because there was no Governor there at the time and it was vacant. The whole place had been virtually blasted to bits and I was going around to look after what was there. That was quite an experience.

In what way Ron?

Just looking after the Governor's resident it was quite a cushy job.

07:31 At the Governor's residence I rather liked that. I still had to work hard and the one thing up there we weren't allowed to touch any of the damaged buildings, did you know that? Although I nicked some golf clubs out of the NSW because I wanted them, I used to be a caddie and I got some golf balls and I used to hit the balls around Darwin, and on the Melbourne Oval. Because Melbourne Oval was right into the street

08:00 about a mile down I think it was. Up there they had a comforts fund, a place you could go and read books in there. The YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association], open air theatre, which we used to sit on these canvas seats they had. What else were there? We used to go swimming down to the bars which were suppose to be boarded in

08:30 to keep the crocodiles out, you used to be swimming and crocodiles would be on the outside looking at you. I used to go down and that was where I really learnt to swim down there, I used to go down and swim for a full hour in the water and never got out, I just wanted to develop my swimming. Next to the swimming pool they had the Catalina base, we would go out and patrol and escorting, if anything suspicious.

- 09:00 One day a big liberty ship came in and pulled in down on the main oil wharf and we happened to be down at the wharf this time and we saw this fellow dived in, a big yank he was, a navy bloke, big red hair, just hopped into the water at the wharf and we said "Get out of the water, the crocodiles", he was in there for about 10 minutes and the next thing he came racing back, a crocodile was chasing him and only just made it.
- 09:30 What an idiot, you couldn't tell him.
- I was going to ask you if you saw crocodiles?**
- We saw them all right, don't worry up there. We used to go out to a place called Mendall Beach, beautiful, it is not sand like we know it, thick sand, it was good. We used to go down there and we used to take our 383 rifles with us and we had a couple of fellows on guard
- 10:00 while we were swimming there, we have photos of that. We used to get these navy trunks, they were like shorts, they were tight fit and that was our shorts. Berry Springs, have you ever hear about Berry Springs, fantastic place? It used to be a convalescence place and this was towards the end of the war when this happened and they
- 10:30 shipped the army further up New Guinea and you just come to a place and go there any time. We didn't have a lot of time to go swimming. We used to take this big rubber tubes, aircraft tubes and just go swim with those, and we used to go down from the spring and go down for about a mile and then come all the way back and I used to get off and go dive down, and you could feel all this warm water, the springs had just come up, no one told us that before the war it used to be filled with crocodiles,
- 11:00 and how they got rid of them was they threw all these grenades into it, guess what, the crocodiles were back and we didn't know at that time, there could have been another crocodile, no one told us. Thanks very much.
- Were the 383s any use against the crocodiles?**
- Yes, if you were accurate enough, if you fire a bullet it won't go directly but it should spin then ricochet off. No, it would certainly kill a crocodile but grenades are more effective.
- 11:30 **Did you ever shoot any crocodiles at Mendall Beach?**
- No we didn't.
- Now I want to go back to the football match.**
- You would bring that up, wouldn't you?
- That must have been a shock to you?**
- It was a real shock, in front, PSUB [?], quite a nice person actually, good looking person. She would be
- 12:00 only in her 20's, about 28, nurse you know, probably her sister, you'd get used to that sort of thing, I think she said "Don't worry son". It was all right for her.
- Did you ever go out with any of the nurses?**
- No, there hardly were any of them there; if they were available they were going out with officers, not just ordinary fellows.
- 12:30 **This Aboriginal football team. How did you meet them?**
- It was arranged through our sporting arrangement; through our administrators of the boom depot, it was arranged through them. They got together and it was really fun, when I think about it, gee they were a good team, no wonder they won, they could run, they can run.
- Did you see them again after the match?**
- 13:00 We had a bit of a chat, get together you know, if there was drinking I don't recall drinking, but it was what we called lolly water. Lolly water was mainly full of tartaric acid, if you drank it for about a month you would all come out in a rash, here, but I liked it. You can't buy it down here, there is tartaric acid in lemonade but not as strong as it was up there, and there is also alcohol
- 13:30 in lemonade, did you know that, .0001%, it is preservative.
- Apart from that footy match did you have any other contact with Aboriginal people up there?**
- No, only on the road when we came up, we used to see them on the road, that was the only other time.
- What about when you went bush to cut the timber?**
- Very odd, we'd find them very odd, wandering around, it would be very odd,
- 14:00 they all mainly went bush after the big raid, I think a lot went bush and never saw them again I don't think. I don't blame them, those raids they had over 60 raids up there.

Did you have any raids while you were there?

We only had about 4 or 5 and then it just pleated out to nothing, as they started to get them they got less and less with their planes, it seemed to be

- 14:30 the targets were airfields, the radio stations and we were right in and they had already done the damage to the town, so why waste their bombs. If they did drop bombs it would have been just the odd one or two. We used to have to always go into the trenches just in case.

So what did you feel like, like compared to being bombed on a ship was it better or worse?

Better,

- 15:00 much better. You are just a sitting target on a ship, you are one, they had so much to play with they just take a pick. They didn't want to really attack us, they had already done the damage. We were billeted right next to the, we were sort of here in the courthouse and the post office was just over there, just
- 15:30 to the end of the block that was where the post office was and as it was bombed in 1942, the 19th. I have photographs of it standing out the front, still the same; no one was allowed to touch it. There were great big holes I have photographs of it that were there, they had to fill those in for the transport and that was the only thing.

- 16:00 **Did you have any contact with the other services in Darwin?**

Yes, the army, navy and air force, yes we used to just meet them and have a chat and that was about it.

Did you get on with the other service men?

Yes, I had no trouble.

Was there ever any attitude?

No, we didn't have any trouble, we had the Yanks there and they were pretty good, and we got on pretty well. They like the Australians, the Yanks.

What about the Poms?

- 16:30 I am not going to answer that one.

Are you sure?

No, I don't want to answer that one because if someone gets a hold of this in Pommy land they will kill me. Unfortunately, they didn't go down too well with some of us, their attitude. If I say these things they might get into the wrong places.

- 17:00 **Well if you don't mention anybody by name?**

I know this is public news. I will tell you what happened to our navy. Our navy boys went over to pick up the E Class ships, when they got over there they expected the ships to be spotless, in our navy they were very clean that was one thing, very clean indeed. They in turn had to clean the whole of them, out from top to bottom before they could

- 17:30 accommodate them, because they just stunk it was unbelievable. I found this out when I got to Bombay, I had to go out to this Pommy ship it was called an empire boat, a big merchant, an empire boat, oh the stink, it was just unbelievable, I just couldn't believe it. They didn't believe in, a lot of these people not all of the English people, a lower class

- 18:00 and they didn't have the facilities to have baths or showers or anything, so they weren't used to having a bath, so they would have a wash and that would be about it. They always thought they were better than us, I struck this repeatedly with them, they always thought they were better than us. "We won the war", the end of the war at the big parade "We won it! You were nothing. You were lucky we came out here, and saved the Pacific". And I said "What".

- 18:30 Just like the First World War they never ever appreciated what was done for them. Amazing isn't it.

That must of really rankled with you?

Yes, but not with me, it was common knowledge, you could find out by anybody that was on those ships.

- 19:00 It didn't go down too well.

What way did they think they were better?

They thought "They were it, they won the war, they were the best". It was Australia that had to come and save them time and time again, then to go on skiting, they reckon the Yanks are bad enough about how they yap a lot, but they don't go blowing their trumpet "How we did this and we did this", they don't go and do that. Particularly the American marines they are the best in the world

- 19:30 alongside our air force boys, equal. I gave a talk on that a couple of years ago with a naval association

group, and they couldn't believe it and I said "Yes", because I was with them and I knew and I met a lot of them and their attitude to women. I don't know what the modern army is like; it would be the same because they are so highly trained. They had an Australian there, a sergeant and he was an ex-policeman and he married this American girl,

20:00 so he wouldn't have gone in without finding out what the score it.

So what was their attitude to women?

Who?

You just mentioned their attitude to women?

Yanks?

Yes.

The best, it certainly was. They haven't seen a woman for ages and up in the Philippines and go through a village there, all women there and would love to get together with a woman. No,

20:30 no way, they wouldn't touch them. They would even protect their little children, pretty good going. That is the same with the Australians.

So you never saw or heard of any mistreatment of local women?

No, never not once, and I mixed with a lot of them. I can't find anywhere the story that I know, and the books and I can't find one thing, maybe there was

21:00 but I don't know.

That obviously impressed you a bit?

Very much so. Yes. I have always been brought up in the family to never hit a woman no matter what has been done. You can be provoked, bloody provoked, pretty hard at times.

21:30 I get on well with all the WRANs that I know over there at the depot, well respected by the officers, the WRANs and everything because they know me. I played in the team; we had about 7 or 8 girls they all regarded me very highly, without boasting, talked their language and they know they can trust themselves with me and I really got on well with them,

22:00 I was pleased about that.

Did you get any girlfriends in Darwin?

No, no girlfriends in Darwin.

No girls.

Only the sister, you couldn't get any closer, could you.

Were you lonely?

Maybe at times. A lot of the time it was darn hot up there

22:30 and a bit uncomfortable but I kept fit and that was the main thing with me. Ronnie Tomley, who I spoke to the other night, taught me how to box and wrestle and we had a champion NSW tennis player up there and he taught me how to play tennis. We had the Salvation Army right next to us and we used to play table tennis, it was brilliant.

23:00 We would get all the drinks we wanted, we used to play tombola [a lottery] up there, it was really good, they really looked after us. We used to have a little fellow, a salvo bloke he was funny, he was a real scallywag he was. Do you know what? This is digressing from Darwin, this is in New Guinea on the Kokoda Trail I think it was after they got the Kokoda Trail, or was it while they were there, the Salvation Army bloke would be up there

23:30 before the fighting men were there, they would be right up in front, they knew how to get there, and there they were waiting with a cup of tea in their hands.

Fantastic.

That's unreal.

Fantastic.

Remember when I was telling you about the 39th Battalion, how the 7th Division, the second 14th division came up and relieved and they couldn't believe the condition they were in and they came up and over and the 2nd and 14th could not hold the Japanese,

24:00 and the 39th heard about it and they were on their way back to Moresby for recreation that they needed and they immediately turned around and went back and gave them a hand and pushed the Japanese

back, how's that. Do you know what they used to call the militia boys that shocked the soldiers?

What do you think about that Ron?

That was pretty rough. It was only because these AIF boys had been away and were jealous of their reputation and they saw these fellows that had never been near the action,

24:30 it was only a natural reaction. They proved themselves beyond all equal to the AIF, that was really good.

When you were in Darwin and joined the navy, how much pay were you getting?

Not very much at all, about 2 shillings a day I think it was, wasn't very much.

What did you think about that? You'd been having about 100 pounds a week?

Yes I know, I was enjoying the company.

25:00 I didn't worry about it, I was in the navy and it was great.

So you didn't mind the drop in pay?

No I was relaxed, I was getting 3 rotten meals a day and that didn't worry me either.

What was the discipline like compared to the merchant navy?

Only when you are on parade or you had to be ready to go into action, things like that, that was the only discipline that we ever got, you do the right thing and you used to have to form up

25:30 and front up for the parade every morning, that was about all it was, or inspections at night that is the only bit, even onboard the ship the same thing.

Did you like it better being in the navy?

Yes, terrific.

Why, why was that, what was the difference?

I was with boys my own age, and we spoke the same language, mind you I struck a few crooks among them too but they didn't worry me, they had already been conditioned.

26:00 **So you still met men who still made advances?**

Hardly any. They were just the odd person and they seemed to disappear.

What do you mean disappeared?

They were shifted, drafted away somewhere else, if there was any trouble they got rid of them.

Where there still times when men made advances to you

26:30 **or the other crew?**

No, not up there. That all finished. They knew I had guardians up there, particularly Ron Tomley the boxer and the rest of them, we were only talking about it the other night.

So he was your mate?

Yes, they all were, there was a big group of us up there about 60 of us and we were all pals. I am still in contact with a lot of them.

27:00 **I imagine it must have been quite good being with men your own age?**

It was great, 100%, I grew up with them, I grew to respect them and they grew to respect me and they still do today. They keep telling me.

You were a seasoned sailor?

I was too, but I never big noted myself and they appreciated that, because I never talked about it.

Still they must have learnt a lot from you?

27:30 I'm not sure about that, they might have, it's just my attitude. Did I tell you about when I joined the navy and when we did our training? When we first got there during the day and put us in C Block and that was the mess at the time, and the next day we had to go down and kitted out

28:00 and come back to the barracks, we used to have these leading seamen that used to help us make our own name tags out of wood blocks, and we used to have to make, there was a fellow called George Ward there a leading seamen, a lovely fellow, a big fellow, had been in the navy a long time, he did my block for me and a couple of other things and about two or three days and he got drafted to the [HMAS] Australia. Guess what, from that time

28:30 till 10 days later the Japanese came over and bombed the Australia and blew them up. We were all sad about that and he was a lovely fellow. I will never forget that, it is just sad that, that is when it starts to hit you about the fellows you know go. I already had the initiation when

29:00 George Hobbs and he went along with a lot of others.

On the Sydney?

That's the biggest naval disaster we have ever had.

When someone you knew was lost at sea?

Yes

Would you hold a service for them?

Yes, they would, particularly where

29:30 it might have been they would hold a service, we had to, the parting of your friends.

Was there one for the Australia?

I think there was, I am not sure of that. It would be down at the depot, I can't remember that one. Yes they would have had a service and it would have been done in the church, it wouldn't have been a big parade, just a church service in the gymnasium,

30:00 that I can recall. There were so many of them it is hard to remember them all.

Some really sad moments?

There really are. As we get older it gets a bit easier to deal with.

30:30 **Do you still think about those men?**

Yes I do quite a lot, good blokes, Australians are the best in my books, they really are, the salt of the earth. I have a book called the Mail with all these photos of these civilians joining the army in the First World War in the navy,

31:00 just ordinary Australians, gee they were big tall fellows the lot of them, the victory parade they had in London in the First World War, great big, tall Australians.

A lot of them were farm boys, weren't they?

Yes that is right. Well built, just simple Australians. We have got simple, stupid Australians now in my book, a lot of them young blokes. I was only talking the other night what a pity that now we don't have national service, it would straighten a lot of them out.

So Ron, by the time you were in

31:30 **the navy did you feel like you were Anzacs, you were part of the Anzac tradition?**

No I didn't, only after the war, it really didn't hit me till about 20 years after the war that I started to do the Anzac parades because I wasn't going to big note myself, I thought I might have been showing off. Young people were having a go at them saying they were no good, always drunk and all this, and I said "That's it"

32:00 and I didn't start to go to the Anzac parade. I volunteered to join the reserve again and did a voluntary basics and just did the band, and from then it has just gone on and on.

Because I think for a lot of the ex-servicemen that Anzac day is the day that they remember the fallen, would that be right?

Yes,

32:30 they would only when they are marching they would, but after that they would go and have a drink and that and that would be it.

So what do you think about when you are marching?

My attitude has changed a lot and I think if I'm there and I am representing the boys that are not here and think that I am just damn lucky that I am still here. I now make sure that I have a contact with all these young children,

33:00 I go along and shake them on the hand and pat them on the head and all that sort of thing. When they had the big VJ parade [Victory over Japan] in Melbourne I went with the Warramunga group and they asked me to hold the rope for the end class destroyers, which I did and I was in the right hand side going up the street. I saw all these young kids and thought I should do something about this, so I went shaking their hand all the way along and they loved it, and I stopped,

33:30 wouldn't worry about the banner and they took a photo and put it in the Veterans' Affairs thing, a big

colour photograph, and the camera blokes came along and took a shot of me and wanted me to take my hat off, right next to the town hall. So I took my hat off, you should of heard the cheers,

34:00 all the people up in the thing, and it got on Channel 9 News.

Sounds like a great moment?

It was good, and from now on I am in the Anzac parade and I make sure of it for those young children and they love it, and they know that will go on for a long, long time. A lot of blokes in one particular group I am with, they think they are the greatest, and a few of my friends think they are the same and I

34:30 try not to associate with them if I can, they are very jealous of me because I can still get my old uniform on, and I have more medals than they will ever have and I have cut them down to about 8 now, I don't want to mention too many names.

That's all right.

Yes.

Ron, from Darwin you were then posted to the HMAS Stuart?

Yes, I went to the Stuart for a couple of weeks,

35:00 **Was that a voluntary thing?**

No, they were drafted to it in Darwin and I was coming back to Sydney, or whatever, they just put me on there and then they transported me back to the depot to do my gun retraining, but that was a good like ship that, that was the one that we cleaned the Italians up in the Battle of Matapan, in the middle of the Mediterranean. A friend of mine. No they were drafted to it in Darwin and atory thing or were you just? [?]

35:30 Lloyd Page, his dad was in the navy band during the war and his son happened to be at his place about three weeks ago. A fellow there, a son or a nephew, her husband was on the Stuart and she said she never told me about what when on, I said "You put her in touch with me and I will tell her the story on the Battle of Matapan". I have got it over there ready for her.

36:00 **What was your rank on the Stuart?**

Able seaman. I hadn't got my gunnery rate then, but when I came back to the depot I did my gunnery training and while I was back there I rejoined the band to give them a hand.

So what was your gunnery training, what guns?

Training on the 6 inch guns, we had to do all the pistol shooting,

36:30 training on the bovver gun and the bring gun and that bring gun I had pretty good eyesight in those days and I have pretty accurate shooting, line up on the assault course and used to lie down and I got a few bulls eyes apparently. "Right o Ron, you can carry the thing on the assault course". "Oh no", I had just come back off leave, I was stuffed,

37:00 everybody had to wait for me, because I couldn't run fast enough, I had to run with it, that was a good memory that one.

What did they weigh a Bren gun?

Heavy, I know it was darn heavy, geez it was heavy, and that is where I got a lot of my ear troubles from that. Then we used to have to go out to Summers and that was a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] airbase, and we used to do the shooting from out on the

37:30 point there; we used to shoot the 4 inch guns, it was the day that someone nearly got cleaned up, there was a young bloke there and they had the big guns and the small machine guns, and this fellow, and he was warned not to go anywhere near them and he put his hand on it and went "Brum". The petty officer took a bit of his hand away and somebody else got hit but no one was killed fortunately. They shut up shop pretty quickly then, that was close.

38:00 Those things are so touchy, that was close.

What was the idea of training you in gunnery?

To send you to sea to replace someone else, and so you could man the ship and take your place in the guns group.

So it was anti-aircraft?

No land, like when I went to Warramunga there were twin 4.5 but we also had

38:30 bombers on there, then we had bring guns if we wanted them, it was a pretty heavily armed ship that Warramunga, one of the tribal class destroyers.

So they were for land bombardment as well.

Yes assault. The Warramunga was up in Leyte and I wasn't on it then; it was up in Leyte assisting the Yanks for her escort was looking after the Australia, where the Australia got hit and it escorted the Australia all the way back to Sydney, so it could be

39:00 repaired and also helped in other things in the landing of Borneo, help the 9th division in support there, I wasn't on it then. I joined it after all this happened, maybe I was lucky.

Sounds like it?

I joined the ship in Japan all of a sudden after 3 or 4 months I came out.

Tape 7

00:30 **Tell me about the HMAS Stuart, was that a good ship?**

Yes, it was a good ship, we boarded in Darwin we had a meal straight away and that was good and we had good weather all the way to Townsville and then the weather changed, it was a fast ship with a low keel on it, very flat bottom, built for speed.

01:00 We got in this off shore troth and the waves were coming in like and the big waves were, had to go almost broadside and we were all like this, I was nearly sea sick but I wasn't, most of the crew was sick. Before that we call into Townsville because I hadn't seen a girl for ages and I nearly missed the ship and it was starting to go and I had to jump.

01:30 She was a lovely girl and I wished I could have stayed longer.

Do you remember her name?

No, I don't, I probably would have it in a diary somewhere, she was a lovely girl.

Where did you meet her?

I went to a dance and met her at the dance. I could only stay a couple of hours with her. We used to cuddle up in the old baking shop fronts

02:00 the only place we could be.

You couldn't go to a hotel?

No, no I probably wouldn't because I was so naïve. After a shock to the system. Still pretty naïve in those days. That was why I always had trouble, they thought that I had a disease but I didn't, it was only strain.

They thought you had a disease.

The strain used to come back

02:30 on leave. This girl I was going with in Melbourne doing my second lot of training and not being the sexually active type or anything like that, the man in the strain gets built up quite a lot and just comes out and I thought I had a disease and the fellows used to rib and they knew what it was and I had to go to the doctor, and he said "What are you doing here? Buzz off. Where have you been, on leave have you?" "Yes".

03:00 **No one told you, no one informed you about all these things?**

No, I didn't know, I know all about it now though.

Well at your age I hope so.

Now I know, but I though I would put that in for the six penny. The blokes ribbed me they really did, they had me worried and I thought I would be kicked out of the navy and everything.

03:30 **What were they saying to you?**

They were saying "You've got it, you have picked it up Ron, where have you been?" "I haven't been anywhere I have just been cuddling up with a girlfriend". It was out there in Little Collins Street near Kings Street in follies (UNCLEAR) a good little spot actually.

I bet you were relieved that there was nothing wrong?

Yes, I soon recovered pretty quick.

04:00 **The Stuart was it a destroyer?**

Yes it was a very good destroyer, it was one of the first ones that they ever built; it was a First World War ship I think.

Can I just ask you to act like a camera for me and just walk me through the ship and tell me what you can see?

I can see everything right from the foc'sle right down to the bridge, they had guns up on the foc'sle and on the other side of the bridge, from what I recall they had machine guns and down from

04:30 that, on mid ships they had torpedoes, three on the Stuart, then they had a galley where blokes used to come up and get their meals, then down aft they had another gun and I wish I had got the photo and I could show you, I could be describing it and you could see it on the camera and it had the camouflage on it, what is called war paint.

05:00 And that was about it and it was a very fast ship and in the Battle of Matapan where Nick Waller was on it, who went down on the Perth the Italians thought, and it was an Italian ship because he had all this captured Italian ammunition onboard and he was firing it and they thought he was Italian and they used to come past him and thought it was an Italian ship, he'd come up and go bang - he sunk them.

05:30 This was at night time of course.

What was the camouflaging?

Camouflaging is paint like a zig zag going down the side of the ship or a false bow wave half up the ship and it was to cut the silver of the ship at sea and only a part above would be seen by the enemy.

What colour?

They would mainly be

06:00 a bit of brown and black, that's about it because the rest of the ship was battle ship grey.

What was the ship made of?

Steel, riveted ships not welded ships; they were riveted ships, good ships.

Now the torpedoes you said they were mid ship?

Yes

Midships?

Amidships, with those they used to have them with room, and say this is the front

06:30 part of the ship and there is the bridge there, that's about right I think, and the galley and they were pointing that way but when they wanted to shoot them, they used to swing them right or left.

Did they stick out from the side of the ship?

No, they would be just in line. I don't know if it was just out from the edge of the ship or in, I think it must have been out from the ship, I'm not quite sure

07:00 but if they dropped suddenly they would damage the side of the ship, they would have had to been protruding just out a little bit from the side of the ship.

What was your station on the ship?

I didn't have on that, I was just the gunnery rate, while we were at sea with it that was it. I wasn't a torpedo man, there were special trained men.

Which gun was yours?

It was down aft the best gun, down out the way out of sight.

What type of gun was that?

That was a 4 inch gun.

07:30 **What would you be firing?**

We didn't have to fire anything, on that ship we only trained on it. When I was on it, it was only used as a transport; it had done all its work overseas in the Mediterranean and that, and was mainly doing New Guinea and running around Australia.

What were your main runs on the ship?

Just Australia - that was it. I did the run on the East Coast and that was it.

08:00 **So, Melbourne, Sydney?**

Yes, Melbourne, Sydney, Townsville that was it, just the one trip I did, I was coming down to do my

training you see and they thought not to let me bludge on the train.

So that ship ran troops to New Guinea?

Yes.

Did you do those ones?

Yes, what we did when we joined we called over to Moresby and then come down to Townsville, Brisbane I think we called into Brisbane, Sydney,

08:30 and then home and that was it, that took two or three weeks to do that. We had a few stores onboard and we transported other people. That is what I recall. I think that is right, I am not absolutely sure.

Did you get any shore leave in New Guinea?

No, who would want to go ashore there? We'd only be there half a day. We were probably loading oil or something like that,

09:00 for fuel, or supplies or picking up some AIF [Australian Imperial Force] boys, we transported a lot of army blokes around.

Where about in New Guinea?

Port Moresby.

Did you go around the top, around to Lae?

No, straight to Port Moresby and out and back down to the Coral Sea.

What were your impressions of Port Moresby?

Well I had already been there before, and it was about the same but a lot more people seem

09:30 to be there.

Were you ever subjected to air raids on the Stuart?

No.

Submarines?

No.

So you had a safe run?

Yes, that particular time, when was that about 1945, end of 1945, that's right because I was home, so the war was virtually over and that was what it was about,

10:00 there wasn't any need for the Stuart to be an ant or to be at war.

So you never had to fire your guns?

No.

Sounds like you had enough ear trouble just from the training?

Yes it is really bad. Because when I got that disc trouble I have always had trouble with my back, just watch it a bit. I exercise a lot and I have found

10:30 that taking tablets doesn't do anything for it whatsoever and I have a lot of cod liver oil and I have a lot of honey and I don't eat sugar which is the worse thing you could ever have.

Was the Stuart a happy ship?

Yes.

Were any of your mates drafted on with you?

We had a lot of fun on that ship. This one fellow his eyes were a bit green and we through all the offal on the wind

11:00 side, because he was so stupid the whole lot came back on him. We were nasty people, and they used to say if you want to go to the toilet go on the side that the wind is blowing, it would fly back on you. We used to get up to these funny tricks.

What were the latrines like onboard?

Pretty good on the Australian, very small, very antiquated we never had a bath, no baths

11:30 and the only showers were for the officers and we only had a little hand basin that was all we had to do everything, washing the lot, same on the Warramunga.

When you got into port what was the first thing you wanted to do?

Get home.

No I mean other ports?

When you get ashore have a look around if I had never been there before.

What was the first thing that you would do when you got on shore? Head for the showers,

12:00 **head for the pub?**

Well there was one thing about going ashore, you used to have a place to go to, a navy club or the YMCA and you could go there and have a shower and a really good clean up, and that was really good. More so in Melbourne than anywhere else, in Melbourne they had everything, they had down in Spencer Street that was the best one of the lot, the YMCA, now the YMCA

12:30 where the Trocadero use to be, which is that corner, do you know where city road South Melbourne, where the cultural centre is, all that area there.

Yes.

They have since pulled it down and that was very good accommodation. In those days I didn't drink but we used to always come past Young & Jackson's and the place used to always be filled with navy

13:00 blokes and they were outside on the road up the street, on the footpath rather, gee that place must of seen a lot of sailors coming in and out of there, very good. It was exciting and while I was, this was when I was a navy league sea cadet I happened to be up in Melbourne and I met this fellow and I wanted to speak

13:30 and found he had HMAS Canberra on his hat and I said "That's strange, the Canberra's gone down". He said "I'm very lucky as I am one of the 4 that actually got off the ship before it left Melbourne". He had actually fallen down a hatch head first and injured himself and got put off the ship and he recovered. I met that fellow

14:00 at Norfolk Island about 20 years ago, I met him up there and as soon as I saw him I knew him, "You're the fellow who was on the Canberra aren't you? You injured yourself, didn't you? I saw you outside Young & Jackson's, didn't I?" And he said "That's right".

Amazing?

Yes, I met him in the RSL up there, small world.

How long were you on the Stuart Ron?

Only a couple of weeks, that's all.

14:30 **After that?**

Went to the depot there at HMAS Cerberus and did my gunnery training. I was there 4 months something like that, we did a lot over there, we worked hard over there, really hard. I was still playing with the band then, of course. What else was I doing over there? I am trying to think of what it was? Something special happened over there, trying to think, that's right initially

15:00 we built our own wooden accommodation blocks by the mess hall but when we came down to do my training in the original A block, the original accommodation block when the service was first built in 1911 something like that, gee that was cold in those days it was coming onto winter. If you didn't get into the shower earlier you missed out on the shower. You had to get up at 5:00 in the morning because it ran out. That's where I ran into a fellow,

15:30 he was in there, he was doing some sort of training, and I had already been given an 39/45 star because of my service in MN [Merchant Navy], and a fellow came up and said "You're not entitled to that" and I said "Yes I am", and I just left it at that and the boys said "Tell him Ron, tell him". "No blow him. It's none of his business. It is mine". He kept telling me I wasn't entitled, so I let it go at that. Years later when I was building and I saw this fellow up on the roof, a roof tiler he was,

16:00 I said "Hello, aren't you the bloke that said I wasn't entitled to it?" I didn't tell him I just said nothing, he knew who I was. If I had of told him he might of fallen off the roof. I copped that a lot and that is where I don't like the Poms because they have always been pulling me up and always reckon I wasn't entitled to this and that, they are just so jealous, because I looked young and I look as though I wasn't

16:30 there and this has been the problem. I had a case there recently with the Warramunga last Anzac parade and a lot of fellows I have never seen at the march don't recall them on the ship and they said "Was never on the Warramunga". I said "What." I didn't say anything and had all their details in my pocket.

When were you posted to the Warramunga?

In 1946, after I had done my training. They sent me to pick the ship up in Japan

17:01 and came back and then straight back from New Guinea and spent 4 days in New Guinea, came back to Sydney and that was it. I stayed on when the rest of the crew went ashore and had been alert for ages and we took care of the ship, cleaned the guns and general things, and we actually slept in the officers quarters. That was when I met a lovely girl called, Carolyn. She was a lovely girl, I should have married that girl.

You met her in the officers' quarters?

Yes,

What was she doing there?

Because they had all gone ashore and they only came back when they had to do their rounds, they said that was alright and I was down asleep on their bunks and they used to mess ashore and that was alright. Michael Light, we called him I think. As I said I got on well with them. Carolyn, I will never forget Carolyn. The only reason I left the ship was because I thought I would never

18:00 get married, see how stupid when you are young, you don't make the right, you make the wrong decisions sometimes, not having anybody to advise me. I wanted to play golf, which I did when I came back and played golf.

Where were you when the war ended?

I was actually in Darwin. No big parades up there, nothing, nothing happened.

18:30 I think I played the records for all of the blokes, in celebration, but a lot of the blokes did get sozzled up there. Do you know what they used to do? They used to make their own jungle juice, what they called jungle juice. You get these paw paws and mangoes squash them all up and put kerosene in them. A few of them have died since then through internal intestine trouble. What happened they used to spill a bit on their shirts

19:00 and about a week later there would be brown spots and all of a sudden they would have holes in them and that was the kerosene, can you imagine what they done to the inside?

So they were drinking the kerosene?

They were drinking it. They would put the kerosene in to get the alcohol taste out of it.

I have heard of drinking metho [methyalted spirits] but never heard of drinking kerosene.

No, I have heard of people drinking straight kerosene, it is unreal, just the smell is enough,

19:30 course it would be diluted right down and that was just enough to give them a taste.

They must have been pretty desperate for a drink?

Yes they were, they paid for it later though, glad I wasn't involved.

VP [Victory in the Pacific] day in Darwin?

Pretty sombre affair as I said, I stayed in the barracks, I don't know whether it was a Saturday or Sunday

20:00 but I know we weren't doing much, I just played records most of the time for the blokes around the depot. I used to get 6 shillings a week for that. Yes big money. It wasn't that bad.

There wasn't any dancing in the street or leaping around?

No, I don't remember that, no there was no band there, pretty droll. I think a lot of the blokes said "It won't be long before we will be going home", and a lot of them stayed there till well after the war had ended,

20:30 or right up to the end of that year in 1946. They disbanded but had to keep a certain amount there for maintenance purposes and things like that.

Was this while you were still drafted to the Stuart?

No, this was just before I was drafted to the Stuart, that was when the war had ended; they obviously could see they had to have replacements on the ships, men were coming back and they were only signed up for 3 years, or the duration of the war,

21:00 and they were all coming back, they had to train some fellows very quickly to replace them. That is the way that I read it anyway.

Where did you join the Warramunga?

I joined it in Sydney actually, joined it in Sydney, I went to Sydney first but then I had suppose to join her in Sydney then they flew me to (UNCLEAR) [?]

21:30 didn't know how long I would be up there then had to come back to the ship.

Where did you run on the Warramunga?

I didn't run anywhere actually, no. I left.

Why was that?

The war had ended. I didn't have to stay the 3 years, I said "Ok", so we got talking and said if we get married and it is not fair to your wives,

22:00 we had a lot of talks about this, so about 4 of us decided to leave. Which I made a mistake, of course.

Why do you say that Ron?

Well I left the lovely Carolyn behind, her father was a prisoner of war. Her father was a prisoner of war, which is another thing I forgot about Darwin,

22:30 while we were up there and the war had ended the Angie [?] and the Caranga [?], I think it was, came in with all these ex prisoners of war, I have photographs of them and we went down to see them, meet them and we got onboard and had lots of talks with them and we invited them up to see where we were and they just couldn't believe the condition we were living under. We had photos taken with them and we looked thinner than they did,

23:00 we look horrible, I'm not kidding, we looked so thin, they couldn't believe it they said "What's been happening back here?", because they had been fed up and everything since they were prisoners of war. I will never forget that. The photos that we took, I couldn't believe that.

Did they talk to you about their experiences?

No, not really they didn't have much time, they were only there for most of the day but

23:30 had to leave, so they were only there for a certain time, I think they transported a lot of them to the hospital.

How was it for you meeting them?

It was terrific, prisoners of war. Been up there and all ex 2/28th and 29th battalion blokes and I was hoping I would meet this fellow I used to be in the mouth organ band with, but I never saw him there. His name was Ron something, never forget that.

24:00 **How did you feel meeting those fellows?**

It was great just meeting them, just being with them, it felt as though we were one of them, they had been through an ordeal and we had been through a bit of an ordeal in Darwin. I was pretty hard going in Darwin, working all the time, in the temperatures we were working under,

24:30 and by just some of the photographs, it was a great experience, great experience, that is all that I can remember about Darwin now, I don't recall anything else of the exciting of it all.

Did you ever come across any Japanese prisoners of war?

No, no I didn't, I don't recall ever seeing one.

25:00 I don't think I ever wanted to either, what they did to our boys up in Malaya and the Centaur, we still don't trust them, speak to any ex-service men that you know, we don't trust them. If they ever get the chance they would over run us just like that. Fortunately we have America on our side, thanks John for volunteering in siding with America.

25:30 The thing that stuck in my mind about John Curtin, I don't know whether it was in Darwin or not but when Australia looked as though it was going to be taken over, the Japanese were dropping bombs all over the place, and

26:00 he decided that he would bring back our air troops to Australia. Now, Churchill wanted to keep all the men over there and said "We want to invade Burma, now this is more important than Australia. If Australia goes we will get it back later". They were his actual words, so John Curtin had a good think about this and he said "No, you won't.

26:30 I want my boys back here to defend Australia". Thank god he bought them back. He did let the 8th division go to Malaya, which he shouldn't have, they were probably too far gone, I believe, the 6th, 7th and 9th Battalions back, just got back in time. Because we were gone, we were done, and you probably heard about the Brisbane Line, how they had this line there that was all true, they were going to sacrifice it,

27:00 they had no hope of ever getting anywhere. Another thing the Japanese would have kept all the civilians. Bull dust, there is a thing and I have a copy of it, that the general was allotted to take over Australia and the order was to kill everybody, I have an iron file out there, "Kill everyone".

What were you told about the Japanese when you joined the Contessa and you were sailing through New Guinea waters?

We weren't told much about them at all we only

27:30 knew was what we read and about what they had done, and what they did in Malaya and I found out what they actually did in Malaya to a lot of our fellows, they burned them alive, I have the book in here to prove it, one of them survived, they didn't know he was alive and he survived. And the people they didn't trust were Javanese, Indians, Indonesians, do you know what they did? The Perth was sunk and the survivors were coming off

28:00 the ship and going onto the beach, the Indonesians were just coming along and cutting their heads off. We just know they are animals, horrible things that they do, I don't trust the Indonesians and any of them up there. Because the Dutch people unfortunately didn't do the white race any good, the way that they treated the Indonesians, I think the Australians of all the white races have the greatest respect from the dark people.

Why do you think that is Ron?

28:30 Because of the way that they have treated the dark people, they haven't run them into the ground and never used them and the Australians are not like that, most Australians would give a fair go. That was the way that I saw it, the way I am. In the early days when the Aboriginal people got hurt by certain religions how they were used up, can't say much

29:00 about that because I don't know much about it. That wouldn't have been very nice, but they are trying to get rid of that. I used to know a certain gentleman who used to be chairman of the Aboriginal Housing Commission and they just treated the Aboriginals so badly, it was just unbelievable, and the word was that they wanted to get rid of all of them and there was only about 20 thousand of them left I think, that was a fact.

It is not a very nice part of Australia?

29:30 No, that was the government attitude you see, from the early days, a very wrong attitude and the poor woman, what a hopeless life they had. They were just raped left, right and centre; no wonder we have so many half castes and yet the Aboriginals had a battalion of their own and Aboriginal battalion and they did well.

30:00 **Did you ever meet them Ron?**

No I didn't, no I didn't actually no, I just read about them.

That they have a good reputation.

I read a book about them and the photographs and things and one of them won a VC actually. They done well. This is what I don't like: "These footballers black Cs and B Bs you idiots", you are not even fit to be able to say that, they reckon it is a game, they mean it,

30:30 when they talk like that, they mean it.

No it's not right is it?

When I was up in the (UNCLEAR) last year I did the Anzac parade I was pretty stuffed and I was buggered and so was everybody else, walking with the drum back down hill two Aboriginal women come alongside of me and wanted to know where we were playing and I said "We have already done it, I'm sorry I can't talk because I'm stuffed but if you want we will see you in the RSL", but I did give them the courtesy of talking to them, even though

31:00 I was stuffed because I respect them. If I see one sitting on the side of the road I will go talk to him. You often see them in Camberwell there is one fellow who is sitting around sort of begging a bit, so you throw a bit of money to him, I will have a talk to him and you learn a lot, about history, is like that.

31:30 During the depression I never saw any, I don't know why, never saw any at all. That is about all I can think off in that section. Now what is the next section?

Ron I was going to ask you looking back over your naval career?

Yes.

The merchant navy and then in the RAN, what was the hardest part of the

32:00 **naval service, do you think? What was the most challenging bit of it for you? Was it the hard work, was it the older crews, was it being away from home?**

Hard work mainly because you were flat out most of the time, you were working all the time

32:30 you were on duty, once you step aboard that ship you are working all the time whether on watch or off watch, you are still on duty, that was hard. That was really the hardest part, the rest was really enjoyment to me, and when I look back on it and I will probably think about it later, that's not right I should have said that, that's what was revealed to me.

33:00 **What were the highlights for you, what were the best bits?**

Playing in the navy band and playing with the navy boys, it was great and that has continued on. I played with the navy band up until the reserve band was in existence and we used to play with the navy band on Anzac day and I can go and play for them now and if they were short of a drummer they can call on me I know. I would just rather have a march on the Anzac parade and the one this year will be my last

33:30 because over the next 4 years we will have our own band in various places around Australia in the capital cities playing in our own band.. I am in the process at the moment, our band has just got these peak caps and white shirts, black tie and black pants, and it is just a practice band and I am trying to get things organized getting a full uniform: white cap, red stripe

34:00 down the pants and the jacket, I can't show you, will show you later, I have one in there that belongs to Lloyd's dad and we are using it as a profile and I will get them, don't worry and I am sure that a place will donate money from the association for things like this and that is what I want to, but I want to keep it quiet. I only want our secretary to know, I've got all my life and I am going to organize it.

Playing in

34:30 **the band was the best bit?**

The best bit.

Were there any people that you stayed in touch, that you got particularly close too?

Yes one or two, Ron and join up (UNCLEAR) and speak to him now and again. One or two of the others have died but mainly people after the war that I have grown up with and played

35:00 in the band, particularly when I went back into the reserve that I still keep in touch with them. I'm the only one who is really working still, because I enjoy it, to me; I just love band music, it is relaxation for me. I went back to school at Melbourne University High and I did a course in music, never ever done it before and I was fortunate enough to get a C in it and they wanted me to continue and I said "No,

35:30 I haven't got the time" and I said "Is there a university degree for this sort of thing?", and they said "No", but I will tell you what, you should go and get onto the university and try and create a university degree because there is going to be a lot of people around who want band music and they can relax, and they are all high up. Do you know what: they have a university degree now, because I emphasised that point to them, to me music is everything, because when I get home here I just want to grab

36:00 a glass of wine and go out the back and listen to music and I can't stand TV crap, I can't stand radio crap. I just want peace and quiet, I can't hack it, I can't stand people shouting at me, I have had it. That is the aftermath of being in the service.

People shouting at you?

Yes, I have had it. I can't stand people who can't control themselves, I just walk away.

36:30 **Were there people who used to shout at you a lot?**

Later on when I came out of the service, yes, and they still do, I hope you read the message.

Ron, you spoke a little bit about a couple of men who had harassed you and given you a pretty uncomfortable time onboard?

Yes.

37:00 **But you also said that there were a couple of men who looked out for you?**

Oh yes, they were nice fellows, the ships carpenter on the Contessa, not the Contessa the Reynella and the fellow from down below, I think was Angus the engineer and a couple of others and I just can't recall their names. That continued on into the navy with the petty officers. They were really gentle and kind and you could tell they would really look after you, they would help if you were in difficulties

37:30 we used to have to climb up the ropes and they would help you, "Come on, you can do it" and for swimming, I thought I was a strong swimmer but the things they would put you through, you would be doing one thing then the next you would be swimming, then up the ropes then running, stuff, but they were good like that, they had done it themselves, I have got photographs of them and you can see it in their faces, what type of person they are.

38:00 **They would really look out for you?**

Yes they would, and I keep saying this today to the girls and the boys in the navy "You do the right thing and the officer will look after you today", because there are different officers than what they used to be in my day, pigs real pigs.

In what way were they pigs?

Almost to the point of abusing you, look down at you as scum, that's the way they were

- 38:30 they were English trained, now they are Australian trained, totally different officers now, and I found out this from a couple of officers who were trained by the English, we had to take whatever they dished out on us, that was just the way that we were trained and if we didn't like it we had to take it. A lot of it came back to Australia with these fellows and that was the way to react and it wasn't, because guess what? They got the raspberries for the ranks, some of the blokes would tell them off. You used to go past them
- 39:00 and stick there or this The Australian soldiers in the First World War, any officer won the salute.
- So they didn't win your respect?**
- No, not some of them. I only found two I think but a lot of blokes couldn't hack it at all, they just couldn't hack it; they were always in trouble because they abused the officers
- 39:30 because they didn't like it, they were abusing and treating them like dirt, you don't treat men like that.
- Was there ever corporal punishment, physical punishment?**
- Yes, quite a few got what they call Junkers and if they went further they were put in the clink and they got put on hard rations and they used to separate this hemp and stuff and a lot would go away without leave and would come back,
- 40:00 we have one of the rose bud lines and I could see he was a whacker straight away he would always be in trouble.
- What's Junkers?**
- That's punishment, you might have to go around with a rifle on your shoulders and running with a full pack and things like that, Junkers, that's punishment. I only had Junkers once, when I was just walking across from the block and over to the mess hall to have a meal and this warrant officer, I have forgotten his name now, somebody pinched
- 40:30 his bike later on so he had to walk everywhere. Any rate he said "What are you doing dawdling across the road? Junkers for you!" I had to report down to the leading seaman in the morning which I did, and I had to go and work on the golf course digging up weeds, that was my punishment just for dawdling across the road to have a meal.

Tape 8

- 00:31 **Why did you leave the Warramunga? You got posted to the Warramunga?**
- Yes, didn't do much there at all just took my place with the guns crew, which was a waste of time at any rate because they weren't going to fire at anyone, general duties when the rest of the crew left the ship I had to virtually take over all the guns and clean them out
- 01:00 because in the course of time up in, just before they joined the ship one of the guns blew up and they had to replace the whole lot, it was down aft A B C D gun. I was on A gun up in the foc'sle, but they are hard to lean now. Very hard. We used to have to put the thing in
- 01:30 at the top and pull it down with a long piece of rope, like a special type of rope and pull it down, you used to have to torque the barrels.
- What would you use to clean them?**
- They had a special sort of a wired gorse thing and you did that to get all the rubbish out and then you had a special soft type of thing like a cylinder type of thing and it used to come down because the barrels were like that
- 02:00 and that was how we used to clean them out. Apart from that you still had to put covers on them. When the [USS] Missouri and the [USS] New Jersey came in, in the big parade in 1988 I happened to be out there playing in the reserve band and I managed to get on board, I think the Missouri was the first one, and I actually got down into the
- 02:30 cockpit and no one is normally allowed but because I had the uniform, and my ex-navy stuff, they let me get down there, well I got the biggest shock of my life. The great big breeches they have got. The bloke up in the breech used to have to stand on a bit of a grid, like a slant like that and it was about that wide and there was the bulk head like that and the tarup [?] which was three foot thick by the way
- 03:00 and they were on this the grid and it was all serrated but it was all slippery I don't know why, but they must have had special shoes because how do you open this and they said "We have to". I have photographs of it to prove it, and while I was there one of the boys gave me some spent shells. I managed to get my bag onboard, "All right Ron, put them in there".

03:30 **Where did you meet Carolyn?**

In Sydney, at the Trocadero, lovely girl, I have photographs of her. I was nearly going to try and find her and see if she was still in Sydney, I might even go and do it this time, someone might know her.

Where was Warramunga docked at?

Garden Island. When you come back into the port like and you had to unload the ammunition off board

04:00 and that was what we called a tender and a tender would take it down into the ammunition depot which was further down at Cockatoo Island.

How would you get from the Island to Sydney Harbour?

No, we were tied up in Garden Island which is just a name, Garden Island, that's the dock there in Sydney around from Wollomoolloo, where the Opera House is,

04:30 there in the next, very historic place. I was on the Warramunga and I always kept these two golf clubs everywhere I was playing golf around in the Government House, just hitting a ball around, no one would pick me up.

Did you meet Carolyn at a dance?

Yes, Trocadero. Lovely memories with Carolyn.

You were still in the navy then?

Yes, we didn't shack

05:00 up or anything like that, it was great, a great person, but stupid me.

You didn't take her onboard?

Yes, yes we did actually; entertained her onboard down aft and she loved that, lovely girl. I keep thinking about what a bloody fool I was.

Why do you think that Ron?

I would rather not say here.

05:30 **Why did you let her go?**

I can't say.

Why did you let her go?

She knew I was going, had to sail, wanted to go and was leaving the navy. When you think back on the things you do in life and you made a mistake when you have something really good and you have lost it, and I blew it. It was certain people I met later on, you wouldn't want to live with them honestly.

You left the Warramunga?

Yes.

06:00 **In Sydney?**

I came home, no I didn't, it wasn't the last, the Tamworth was the last, they put me on the Tamworth, so I had a little ride back to Melbourne, back at sea again, that was close at getting sea sick again, because the little corvette, and I always made sure I was up at the galley, that was the safest part of the ship, that's where I saw a hell of a lot of sharks, because they used to throw all of the offal over

06:30 and the sharks would just come along everywhere. That was before we got to Gabo Island I think it was.

That was your last trip?

Not quite, got down to Williamstown and the RAAF crash boat was there, the crash boat and went over to Lonsdale and dumped all my gear there and then went home.

You discharged yourself did you?

07:00 No, it took a month to be discharged from the navy and they gave me a month's leave. So I came home and they gave me some pay and all that rubbish, I spent a lot of my time up at the Commonwealth Building in the end and they had a recreation there and I played billiards or snooker all day one day and then I went ice skating.

How was it to be home?

Great. I had never done that in my life before

07:30 went around and met a few friends. I came down with Ken McDonald, he and I and two other fellows all came down together, and we went out, and we used to play golf after that a lot and I lost sight of Ken, I

don't know whatever happened to him, he lived not far from there and I got married 1950.

Did it take you awhile to settle back into civilian life?

08:00 Yes it did. I took on a job of being an apprentice carpenter/brick layer and everything and I was doing my apprenticeship under an architect builder. Went to night school and did carpentry and I became what they call an improver, and I was working on the job all time and that was how I got to know all about the building.

When you say

08:30 **that it took awhile to adjust, can you elaborate on that, what do you mean?**

I was missing something. I think I was missing my companions, a different type of people, that was it. Then I took up golf, I joined the Forest Hills Golf Club and when I went to the Golf Club I met a lot of young fellows my own age, and I got to know a lot of people and that helped the situation.

It was missing the companionship?

09:00 Yes.

Was it an odd feeling being your own boss again, not having orders?

No, I didn't think about that, no it wasn't, it was just hard work again. Back to the grind, it was a little bit different from being at sea, you were really out there earning the money you were laying bricks and mixing up what they call mud, sand and cement, unloading bricks and unloading bricks

09:30 up on the roof and doing everything.

You moved back into your mums place?

I was back into my old bed in the sleep out, attached to the house it was, my brother it was still there of course.

How did you feel about that?

Good, it was great being home but my stepfather was there and he didn't seem to want me there I don't know. I think he wanted to get rid of us all, my brother was still there and my sister, he didn't get on with my sister

10:00 at all. I think that created a lot of problems, a lot of problems. He always used to call me, when I was playing golf, he called me a "Playboy". I said "Thank you very much" and it didn't go down too well but I took it. I worked and I got my bike mechanic business, I learnt how to repair bikes and that kept me occupied and I got my own little car, a little Vauxhall, then I met the girl around the corner

10:30 called Val, and we eventually got married. That was good.

How long were you together Ron?

For a long time I'm sure, for at least 23 years and then I started my own building business and that went

11:00 and certain people started to butt in and my sister started being in the marriage and certain things happened and I got, if I love someone I love them forever. When I got cheesed off about something that I didn't like, and I didn't like that and she knows she made a mistake that was the end of it. I still love her and everything.

11:30 **Do you miss the navy?**

Yes in lots of ways and I often feel I should have stayed in but if you get married that was the criteria, because that was my one and only chance that I had, blew that! With Carolyn she understood about the service because her father was in the service and she understood everything and you could talk to her.

12:00 When I got married, half of my uniforms were thrown out, didn't want them they were jealous of the uniform. After I did my time in the building I became a telephone technician that was good.

Could you talk to your wife about your time in the services?

Didn't really want to know. I think she was sort of

12:30 jealous of it, threw my uniforms out.

Did you have any children with her?

Yes, we had Graham and Robert; we had four children all together eventually.

Did you talk to them about your time in the navy?

Not really, not much it, sort of wasn't encouraged you know.

- 13:00 Because I never used to go to Anzac day and used to never advertise it and everything was sort of nothing in those days. Only when I went to start to do the Anzac parade that I sort of, didn't even look at my medals or nothing. I sent Robert to Melbourne Grammar for a couple of years and he didn't do too well, then that was when he came up against problems with, they were men like men, and drugs,
- 13:30 he was in Bob Hawke's sons class, his hockey team. Bob Hawke's son got put out of Melbourne Grammar with five other boys for trafficking in drugs and all that sort of thing and Robert wasn't very happy then and got him out of school and put him through Mount Waverly High, he wasn't very happy. I was looking at his report the other day and he wasn't very happy there, and that cost me a lot of money. Tried to put Robyn through Corowa,

14:00 she only lasted two terms, she didn't like it.

Looking back how do you think the service life changed you?

A different outlook on life, and that is why I have survived today, because it made me be independent and be me, without upsetting anybody else, I try not to do that.

14:30 That was great. I would recommend the service life to anybody that wants to hack it.

Any regrets about it?

No, no I don't, the only regret I have got was the mistake of leaving it, but I was able to get back into it later on. That particular time I should have stayed on another two or three years.

15:00 **Much later in life you took up acting?**

Yes I did.

What prompted that?

I was working at the insurance company at the time, I was an insurance inspector at Colonial Mutual, I met this fellow, when you do the life insurance proposal you have to find out what their recreations are and all that, and he told me he was an actor. I said "That was interesting and what do you do theatre?" "Yes".

15:30 I always had a funny feeling about acting with the theatre work. I wouldn't mind having a go. He said, "I can get you into that if you like and if you want to be an actor and I can put you onto my agent". I did and lo and behold the next time I was doing ads. The next thing there was a theatre group and they had a thing called a lady orderly secret going, and I thought I would go and have a look. It was a nice country one with an old church,

16:00 so I got up there, doing my lines, six weeks, I couldn't remember my lines, so I was going to give it away. "No, you will be right" and I persevered with it and I managed to get through it until the first night we got on stage and I was like this, that is the front of the thing and I am standing, the girls over there and we were reading lines and they have all this fog around and this mist and we were out in the country somewhere.

16:30 Her name was Vez, I said "Is that you Feebs?" She said "Yes", and I forget my next lines, no one could tell for awhile, and they just stood there and no one said anything, everyone started clapping and they were laughing and they thought it was great. "Is that you Feebs?" No answer. From then on I progressed into another theatre group and went and did The Student Prince, it was great. Fellow Like Her,

17:00 Rancho Grando, then I started to do a lot of ads. I worked with Malley's Refrigeration. What was his name? He was a millionaire now and the first one I did the Malley Washing Machine, that's at St Georges Road, Fitzroy and the next one I did with him was they flew me up to Broken Hill, we did the one on the refrigeration, little fridge,

17:30 we flew up in a twin engine Cessna then we came back to Brighton and did the rest of that. Then I did a lot of others but I have forgotten them. I was in Homicide a lot, Division Four, Bellbird, Sullivan's, I was in that a bit with John Barningham, John was one of the directors and I got to know him through insurance

18:00 and that was how I managed to get a few parts.

Did you ever play a serviceman?

Did I ever play a serviceman? No, I don't think I did, there wasn't any call for it. Yes, yes, I did guess what it was Norman Yemm. Do you know Norman down at St Kilda Barracks? I was sergeant you know with all my pistol on and everything, all the battle gear on

18:30 and I was standing there like a sergeant, standing outside the Victoria barracks and he is in an officer's uniform. I don't say anything, I didn't say anything and he was walking up to me and I was giving him a salute and he gives me a salute, and he says "GF". No he was joking, that's Norman, he was trying to stir me up and he doesn't know how to keep a straight face, I got him later on though I fixed him.

19:00 **How did you do that?**

I got him when he was unaware or something and I said to him "Some of these blokes when they are in an officer's uniform, they don't even know how to talk to an ordinary sergeant", and he laughed his head off, he was a good bloke Norm. That was part of the Sullivan's, then I did the one down at the shoe shop down in Chapel Street, Morant,

19:30 with young Andrew. Then another one I did out at Cambellwell, just around from the house down there. I was only just, I forget what I was in that. Then in the Bellbird I had a few speaking parts. What else? That was when I met Rose Sturges and Jill Perryman and they were great and they use to always help me through my lines and things that I had to learn.

Ron, have you seen

20:00 **any of the movies about the navy?**

Yes I have. Yes, quite a lot and I have them here too. I've got one called Always Another Dawn with Bud Tingwell in it and a well known actress and she died about two years ago.

Ruth Cracknell?

No, similar to Ruth, I will think of it in a minute.

Liz ?

No, very laid back actor,

20:30 slow speaking and a real lady.

Not June Salter?

No, you're getting closer. No, she was a very lovely person, but she was, I will think of it, it will come to me in a minute, she was good. I picked up one, these are all old things I got from the national archives.

Do you think the films come close to what it was really like?

Very, spot on, much so, right on the button they are,

21:00 yes. The American ones too are pretty good, because that was the way that the Americans were, they are on the actual ships where they are done which is good, anything that Cary Grant is in or any of those old time actors, and Robert Cummings was a lieutenant commander in the navy, and there was another one who was a lieutenant commander, what was his name, Lou something and he was also in the navy, so they did the parts,

21:30 knew how to act them. Who else was there, anyway the Australian ones, there weren't that many Australian films ever were made. Always Another Dawn was done in 1946 that was done here in Cerberus. Then they made, they were recruiting for navy and they made one called The Navy which I happen to have, the people that do the videos and that

22:00 you know, the Government, you have to pay for them of course. I happened to get hold of that and I have that here. Some of the, that one I was telling you about the Calcutta Light Horsemen, that's a real good film. The one I was thinking of the Grass Bay, the Submarine Pictures they were all good and In Which We Serve that was about the corvette

22:30 during the war.

Ron, looking back, I want to ask is there anything that you would like to say about your naval experience or about war, is there anything we have left out that you would like to say now?

I can't think of anything at the moment. All I can say is that it was the greatest experience I have ever had and only wish that

23:00 the future generations would take up on it also, because there is no other way you are going to learn about life, you know really, really in the war as it is so, because people if you don't get on, you will never get on. It is good training, particularly being Australians, very, very lucky. That is the greatest feeling that I am Australian

23:30 and the Australians that I served with. I worked with the other nationalities to, like the Yanks and I got on really well with them too but they are different people, they were brought up differently to us. I have no regrets, the only regret I have is probably that I should have stayed on with the navy a bit longer, and I would have probably ended up marrying Carolyn.

24:00 You can't go crying over spilt milk.

You can't wind the clock back?

No.

Ron thank you very much and it has been fascinating.

I am glad you enjoyed it.

