

Australians at War Film Archive

Alwyn Thomas (Tom) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1485>

Tape 1

- 00:30 **Mr Thomas thank you very much for being involved in the archive project. The first thing I'm going to ask you if you could give us a very brief summary of your life from when you were born until now?**
- I was born in South Wales and
- 01:00 my father went to World War I and when he came back the miners in Wales had worked very hard for the war effort. And when they got back the people who were there had so much coal they called it and they lowered their wages so they went on strike and it was something like eighteen months to a two year strike. My father decided
- 01:30 to migrate to Australia, paid his ten pound and my mother came out here with three children. My brother was born in April 1919, my sister was born May 1920 and I was born in July 1921. My mother had to come out on a migrant ship with three babies virtually,
- 02:00 in a huge big cabin with sixteen other ladies with children, the men weren't allowed in, they had to sleep out on the decks or in the lifeboats and God knows what, so it was hardship. They arrived in Melbourne and because my father was a coalminer, they sent him down to Wonthaggi in Victoria to work in the coalmines, he was a rope splicer and a blacksmith in the coalmines. They gave them a
- 02:30 block of land and the Welsh people, together they helped one another. The people who had been here before, they helped one another to build something on it. My father virtually built a shed on it for the family to live in. Then he started to build a house in the front part
- 03:00 of the land. I can still remember the house, it still didn't have any lining on it when we left it, it was just the outside of it. He put a little shop front in the front and my mother used to sell soft drink and lollies [candy] and our bedroom became a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK [chicken] pen. My father collected some money
- 03:30 by doing that and working and we moved up to Melbourne and he bought into a business. And in Melbourne they were called a hay and corn store and that sold horse food, WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK food and that sort of thing. He had bought a house for twelve hundred pound, which was a lot of money in those days; he paid a six hundred pound deposit.
- 04:00 When the Depression hit he went broke and they sold up our house and we got nothing out of it and we were virtually destitute. By that time I had a younger brother and some people took him down to Coolac in Victoria, to live on a farm, he was down there for about eight or nine months and my father got us into a boarding house. My mother was very, very sick for months and months she had ulcers and so forth.
- 04:30 I went to West Brunswick School; I can't image how poor we were. My brother and I sold newspapers along the main road. My father, for months and months he walked all over Melbourne looking for a job and he'd do anything. He'd get a one day job,
- 05:00 and then he applied for a job with a Church of England mission and they had a lot of homes and they had homes for orphans, destitute children and for kids that had been up before the courts. He went in there as a maintenance man and he used to work of the daytime and then spent some time of the night down the library
- 05:30 learning plumbing, learning how to build septic tanks, he was a great man and he could do anything. Then a part of the system was we had to move into the archdeacon's house and we had to pay, what was in those days a fearful rent for that, of twenty seven shillings instead of the fifteen shillings a week we had been paying for the other places. I don't know how many times
- 06:00 we moved but we'd get behind in the rent and they'd kick us out and we moved to somewhere else. We

battled along, and here we were in East Kew and it was considered to be an upper class suburb and we lived in this old house with a lot of new houses around us. We did everything, the three boys, we sold papers,

06:30 I delivered meat for the butcher on a Saturday morning. I used to get up every morning at five o'clock and deliver two hundred and eleven papers which I used to get six shillings a week and I used to sell papers of a night and get a penny, ha'penny for every dozen we sold. By everybody working and sticking together my father

07:00 sometimes didn't have any work and he used to have to walk anything up to eight or nine miles to work.

Can you give me the main points from when you joined the war and briefly bring me up to date to where you are now?

I went to Melbourne Technical College which is now RMIT [Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology]. In 1935 that was called Working Men's College and I did

07:30 two years there. I got a certificate, it wasn't an Intermediate Certificate it was a Technical Certificate and then I couldn't get a job. But then I got an apprentice in a foundry. I worked in the foundry until about May 1940, the war had broken out in 1939 and I wanted to go to the war.

08:00 It was just only an adventure we weren't patriotic or anything, none of us that joined up. All we wanted to do was to have a chance for a trip overseas somewhere we didn't care about anything else. The foundry industry was a protected industry and when they were conscripting people they couldn't take people from foundries

08:30 and we weren't supposed to go. What I did was, I left home in 1940 so I was nineteen. I came to Sydney and got a job in different factories so I could join up. I put down to join the air force in June 1940.

09:00 You had to go to school so I went to school at Randwick Racecourse that the air force used to conduct; you weren't in the air force. Then I went into the air force in December 1941 and I went down to Somers and did our basic training and then there was a hiccup in the Empire Scheme [The Empire Air Training Scheme]

09:30 where they had too many people and they kept us down there for a few extra months, which was like being in a concentration camp. I went to Tasmania and went to the flying school down there. I had sixty hours up with about thirty hours solo and I just didn't pass.

10:00 I haven't got an ear for music, which is rather odd being Welsh, and I couldn't pick up Morse code, I couldn't pass Morse code. When we were flying Tiger Moths and took us up for training and when they closed the hood that they closed over the top of you, if they did that to me I got disoriented.

10:30 I was labelled as not likely to become a pilot, so I asked for a discharge and I joined the navy two weeks later, after I got out. I went down to Flinders Naval Depot and in the depot there they were putting people through for gunnery courses.

11:00 But with the way the war was going at the time they shipped us out onto ships as soon as they could. I came up to Sydney and joined the HMAS Warramunga, which had just been built, which was a destroyer. When I was on that we did sea trials and then we went up all around New Guinea,

11:30 Bougainville, and I was on that up until July 1942 and I started to suffer with boils. I had huge big ones come on my knees and they couldn't get rid of them. They put me ashore in Townsville,

12:00 not in the sick bay but I was doing duty, sweeping up things and doing this and that. Then I applied to go on the defensively equipped merchant ships [DEMS] so I came down to Melbourne and did a gunnery course in Melbourne and finished that in November.

12:30 Then at the end of December I went on a merchant ship, which was the Ormiston which they converted into a troopship. As soon as she was finished we went up as far as Brisbane and took some troops on and up to New Guinea and from there on we ran backwards and forwards from different places in New Guinea like Port Moresby and Lae.

13:00 We'd bring troops up and back. The crew was usually on there for six months

13:30 and when the six months was up the crew finished and we went back to our home ports so we came back to Sydney. In Sydney I got transferred to another ship called the Sibigo and that was a Dutch merchant ship. She was a small cargo ship

14:00 about two thousand six hundred tons and we went up to the island of Wewak, the Americans landed up there a few weeks before. We got lost in the convoy because we could only do six knots and virtually travelled unescorted for the last week or so and we arrived up there. They were getting a lot of bombing raids from the Japanese at that

14:30 stage and because we were carrying ammunition they stood us out from a point which made us very vulnerable but we were lucky that we survived all of them. Then we came back to Sydney after about

four or five months and we loaded again and we went in and out of Sydney because Wewak had been taken.

- 15:00 The refugee people that they pulled out of there, they decided to send a lot of men back, and normally we would of only had about thirty five people on the small ship but this time we had eighty five because we had these extra people on. We went into Townsville and loaded up with some more cargo there and we had all these people on and we headed up...
- 15:30 I know for a fact because there were two Australian wireless operators on and we used to share the meal room with them and the captain asked permission not to go out into the Coral Sea because of the impending cyclone, but he was refused permission. The next day we left Cairns
- 16:00 and went into the full force of the cyclone and we lasted for three days in it and the steering gave way at one stage, the Indonesians wouldn't do anything. It was a coal burner and we had to keep a gang down there firing it and when they came up there was an air lock and one of us all the time had to stand in the
- 16:30 air lock with a submachine gun to keep the crew down below and they never came up, they just went to sleep down there and kept it going. While they were doing that and we got the steering going and we could only steer the ship from the stern from there on. After three days it was obvious around about two o'clock in the afternoon we weren't going to make it and they sent out an SOS [distress signal, Save Our Souls, or Save Our Ships].
- 17:00 We didn't get any answer for about one and half hours. The first message was we should get off the radio because we were clogging it up and they had received our message and they were doing something about it but I don't know what they were doing about it. The ship started to list.
- 17:30 Two of the gunners went onto one side of the ship and the other three went this side and the other two got into a lifeboat. And I wouldn't get into a lifeboat I said, "No I'm getting onto a raft." I didn't think the lifeboats would survive. Then one of the Indonesians cut the rope on the lifeboat and they all tumbled into the water. The thing I remember mostly about this, and you might think this is odd,
- 18:00 was my mate, he went down and I was standing there, you never believe that you are going to die and I was trying to work out what I was going to tell his mother, that I let him get into a boat and he drowned. With that his head popped out of the water and he was holding onto the side of the ship and I dragged him back onboard. I then tried to get onto a life raft that was up on top
- 18:30 and the Indonesians, there would have been about ten or fifteen of them, and they wouldn't let me on it and they punched and kicked me and I lost my balance and I fell down on my back on a big locker and I must of laid there for about ten minutes and I couldn't get up.

19:00 **I will get you to tell me briefly what happened after the war?**

I came back to Sydney and I went on a ship to India and back to Sydney again and the war was over and being single I didn't have enough points to get out and they put me on another ship to go to New Guinea.

- 19:30 The Indonesians and the Dutch were fighting one another up in Dutch New Guinea and they had a big uprising on the ship. What a nightmare and I woke up and I had a flashback and I thought the ship was sinking and I ran out
- 20:00 and I was trying to get into a lifeboat before somebody stopped me. They stopped the ship then at Bowen because they had to get rid of some of the people off it. And they had to get some army people to come and arrest some guys and they sent me ashore to Townsville.

What jobs did you do after the war?

- 20:30 I had to finish my apprenticeship and I had to work six months and I finished my apprenticeship and I told my boss I wasn't going to stay in the foundry industry. He persuaded me to stay and go to school because nobody else was interested in it and he felt that I was a good tradesman. I formed the opinion it was better for me to come to Sydney and go to Sydney Tech [Technical College] because I
- 21:00 had no real faith in Melbourne Tech. I came up here and went to tech as a rehabilitation student at night-time; I was working in a foundry and went to rehabilitation at night. The wage then for a male was seven pound fifteen a week and there was no overtime but they had overtime bans because they couldn't get rises
- 21:30 so that was all you could earn. I was only in the class six months and a foundry over in North Sydney, in St Leonards, wanted somebody and the teacher recommended me for the job and I went over there. I got the job and all I was interested in was how much a week I was getting, I didn't listen to anything else. I eventually asked him and he said, I was getting seven pound fifteen and I... then he said I would get thirteen pound ten a week.
- 22:00 I must of looked startled and he said, "I was going to give you that for three months to see how you would go and then put you onto the fifteen but I will give you fifteen to start, and there is a bonus that goes with it". I went from seven pound fifteen a week to seventeen pound ten a week and in those days

it was huge. From then on I stayed in that job for about eighteen months and then I went into

- 22:30 another foundry and I became a foreman there and the wages were good there. One of the people in there decided to start his own foundry and asked me to come in as a partner with him. I said, "I will do it for six months but I won't put any money into it." But I did stay there for nine years running the whole place.
- 23:00 Then I changed to another foundry, I was chasing money all the time because in 1951 I got married. I went and ran another foundry, Dex and Sons [?] and from there I stayed there but I was just chasing money all the time. I just keep going up if I could get another five pound a week that's where I went. Then I just kept jumping into jobs like that
- 23:30 from 1948 when I started and that went on until 1963. In 1961 I had a job in an automotive foundry and they wanted me to take over the foundry in Melbourne and my wife said it would be too far for me to come home every night. Then I worked as a manager
- 24:00 at ACI Foundry in engineering. I stayed there for thirteen years and then I brought my own foundry in 1970. I bought the foundry while I was still working at ACI and I worked there for another five years but I put a man into there to run it. In 1976 I went over and ran my own foundry right up
- 24:30 until July 1990 and left there. In the meantime I set up a consulting business and I was employed by Associated Minerals. They had lost the zircon sand business in the foundry industry worldwide because the then minister, Connor [Rex Connor, Minister for Minerals and Energy] had decided to put the things up to world competitive price.
- 25:00 And they had eighty thousand ton of zircon that they couldn't get rid of so they employed me to get rid of it. I travelled the world and gave lectures and wrote papers and they got published in magazines. The American Foundry Society only ever offered, and this still goes to this day, and it gives Australia a chance to present a paper
- 25:30 to the American Foundry Society. The first one was my brother Hedley who was chief metallurgist at Green and the second one was me, so I did alright.

I'm going to take you back to your childhood now and we are going to explore that in detail. I want to chat with you about your memories about being a young boy during the Depression and what life was like for you?

- 26:00 Life was terrible; they used to ask kids to bring food to school for the kids that didn't have any. I wouldn't eat anybody else's sandwiches; I wouldn't admit that I didn't have any lunch. My sister, she made friends with a very nice girl and they used to look after her food, that family,
- 26:30 but we just battled on, I don't know. My mother used to do anything to get a job, you wouldn't believe this but my mother had been a nurse when she was young and she set herself up. In the olden days when somebody died and they died at home, they used to have a lady that went and laid them out, washed the body and laid it out
- 27:00 and my mother used to charge a pound to do that. I think back and I think to myself, "God, we must of stuck together to put up with that." because we couldn't do what they do now. My mother used to get eight shillings for the dole and she always used to walk two miles
- 27:30 to another shopping centre so that nobody would see her spending the money on groceries because we ran up bills with everybody. Us kids all sold papers and we'd caddie on a Saturday and a Sunday, we didn't play sport like other kids on a Saturday, like kids do now. We went around the golf course caddying, getting
- 28:00 pence and shillings and so forth. I kept going and we kept doing that for years, selling papers. I fell off a tram once and nearly got killed by a car. My youngest brother was delivering papers one morning and a dog savaged him, we were always in trouble, we were never out of trouble.
- 28:30 It was only by just clinging together, my father worked hard and he'd do anything and us boys, my younger brother was five years younger than me we used to go out with my father on a Saturday, might get a job laying a concrete path. We used to have to shovel the work and we were only kids, nine and ten years old.
- 29:00 My God we worked hard, we really did. But we made it, and nobody in those days went to university unless you had plenty of money and my brother went to high school and got a job in Myers [department store] and joined the army, what we used to call the "weekend warriors" [citizens' militia], and he went straightaway to the war. He was a 39er [enlisted in 1939] and he went away in 1939.
- 29:30 Right up until that time we were still grinding away because the archdeacon left the house. I think he thought when he got up there St Peter wouldn't let him in because he overcharged the rent. He left it to my father,
- 30:00 and we had to have fifty pound deposit and we could buy it for four hundred and fifty pound. That

doesn't sound like much money but to people like us that had nothing is was a lot. We had old chairs, my father made a seat for us to sit at the table, my brother slept out on the veranda with a curtain hanging down on the side.

- 30:30 I think about my mother and I just don't know how she survived. She obviously came from a family that was fairly well off but once she came out to Australia there was no way in the world they were going to help her because she wrote them and asked for money to buy the house. I have got to admit I used to cheat a little bit with the money, I used to save money
- 31:00 and I wouldn't hand in all the caddie money. If I got six shillings I'd say I got four shillings and I'd put all that under the house. When it was D Day they had to have the fifty pound deposit and I said, "I've got some money," and I thought I'd be a hero but I think my father was going to knock my head off.
- 31:30 He counted it and you wouldn't believe it, I had forty pound and eighteen shillings; I was two shillings off the fifty pound. Then we had to pay it off in interest and we were only starting to work. I used to buy dancing pumps for shoes because you could buy a pair of dancing pumps for six shillings but wearing them around and wearing them to work they used to only last you about four weeks. If you just keep them for Saturday night dancing
- 32:00 you could spin them out for twelve months but I had to wear them to go to work. That was the sort of life right up until you started to get decent money. In the foundry I got fifteen shillings a week for the first year you worked, twenty one shillings the second year, thirty shillings the third year and then you went up to around about two pound fifteen in your fourth year
- 32:30 and the fifth year was three pound. I got a couple of three pound and I headed off to Sydney and I got a job in a factory and I wasn't getting enough money so I went back and got a job in a foundry. I changed my union card and said that I was a full member. I worked for about four or five months in the foundry
- 33:00 getting a bit of money and I had to duck out because I looked like I was getting called up and I couldn't because I was a foundry worker. That was the only thing that turned my life around; I think we just struggled to survive. The people now that think they are struggling with the money they get, I can't believe it. We had a very, very poor upbringing and it wasn't my mother's fault
- 33:30 and it wasn't my father's fault. My father worked and he did everything, if he could get a job cutting a tree down on a Sunday we'd be all there helping him. Keeping four kids and trying to dress them to go to school, we couldn't get in the football team because we couldn't afford a pair of football boots. My brother couldn't get into the football team because we couldn't afford it and we all chipped in one
- 34:00 time, we brought him a second hand jumper from one kid who said he was getting a new jumper. The three of us, my brother and my sister we gave the kid four shillings between us to buy him a second hand jumper so that he could play football for school. You can't image that can you? You think I'm exaggerating but I'm not it's true.

Can you describe the shopfront

- 34:30 **you said your father established?**

All it was, was just one window, a small window about three foot off the ground and a door that you went in that was all. It was actually my mother and father's bedroom

- 35:00 to start off with and they decided to take the side window out and put it in the front. My father built a counter and she sold soft drinks and so forth. We as kids we used to scavenge around to get a penny deposit on a soft drink bottle in those days. In Melbourne in those days the soft drink bottles had a wooden cork that you screwed in. Coming home from school or anything like that and we saw a soft drink bottle,
- 35:30 we'd cart them back and that would be sixpence that my mother would get when the drink bloke came around. The real sad thing about it that my mother and father died, my brother was chief metallurgist at Greens and he was a world wide authority
- 36:00 on gas cylinders and he used to go all over the world, and done standards association. I went all over the world selling zircon sand and putting papers in things. My younger brother went all over the world for Sony. If Sony brought out a new radio he used to go to every state in Australia, and they all have
- 36:30 a different electrical code and he used to go all around, we all made it. We all lived a good life and my father died a few years ago and my oldest brother. He had about three hundred and ninety acres; he had two farms at Coonabarabran.
- 37:00 He's a guy that you should interview, but he died, he was in the first push right up to Tobruk and back, he was left in Greece and my mother got a telegram to say that he had been killed in action in Greece. Then she got a letter from him from Crete and then she got a letter to say that he had been missing in action in Crete and that he had stolen a boat
- 37:30 and he was picked up fourteen days later in the middle of the Mediterranean, him and about five other guys. He came back here and had eight days leave and then went straight back up to New Guinea, so he

had one of those horrific war records and he joined right up at the beginning of it.

Did your father talk about his involvement in World War I?

- 38:00 My father was bald-headed, he had a plate put in his head; he was wounded in the Battle of Jutland, a cruiser that got hit. He went back to sea and I was home when the aircraft carrier [HMS] Glorious got sunk.
- 38:30 He sat there talking to me about it with tears rolling down his cheeks.

Tape 2

- 00:30 The men who went to World War I, when they came back they were treated terribly, they were treated absolutely terrible. The Repatriation Department, I worked with a man and he had been on the battlefield in France for so many weeks
- 01:00 and there were one hundred and seventy men who went up and forty two were coming back. They were wet and when they were marching back they came on another Australian group that was going up and the officer in charge of that decided they should go back up into a different part.
- 01:30 The other guys that were going up had gas masks, they didn't have gas masks and they had a gas attack and he suffered from that all his life and in fact it killed him in the end. The Repatriation Department, they didn't have a record of that happening, it didn't happen according to them. He was a smoker and that was what did it, he used to start to cough and I used to worry that he was going to die on me and his lips would go blue.
- 02:00 He used to say, "Whatever you do, if there is a war, don't go. How terrible they treat you." he said. "The blokes that are there now, their grandfathers were doing the same with the Boer War and their fathers were doing the same to me and they will do the same to you." He said they were the most hated people there was, the most hated people there was, was the Repatriation Department.
- 02:30 People came back from the war and my father said it was exactly the same in England, they came back from the war and there was no food and they came back and there was no work for them because the whole thing was on strike. From the time my father, he went away to the war, he was doing all right and he came back and because of the war my father really never got on top.
- 03:00 Towards the end, in the 1950s, after the war, he had work all through the war years because they were short but he never really got on top. He did eventually get the place paid off; he wanted to improve it because it was an old house. There was tin on the outside and tin on the inside
- 03:30 and it was stuffed with sawdust, He was just getting on and he pulled it all down and done all that but he just never got on top. He said, if he hadn't of gone to World War I he wouldn't have been in that position. He just would not have been in that position.

Did he encourage or discourage his sons from joining the army?

- 04:00 He didn't want us to join because he said when you come back they will do the same to you. In the days, in the 1920s and early 1930s, the Repatriation people used to have spies walking around the streets. If your husband got killed during the war and you might have had two kids
- 04:30 and you got a bit of a war pension. If you had a partner like they have today, that was a forbidden thing in those days, and they moved in with you, these guys used to be spying to see that you didn't and people used to dob people in [inform on them]. "She's getting a war widows' pension and she's living with a bloke." There was a little girl who used to live down the
- 05:00 street and she was crying one night with my sister and my sister came home and told us this story where these guys were peeping through her mother's window. My father went down and I felt proud of him, he belted the hell out of the two of them, and really belted the hell out of them. He got arrested and it was front page in the newspaper but they hushed it up.

How did he know they were spies?

- 05:30 They were peeking through the lady's window and the girl said, "They only come down when my uncle comes down." Her mother's brother used to come down and stay a couple of days and do some work in Melbourne and then go back. They had rung the police and the police had come down and the police said that there was nobody there when they got there so the guys had obviously told the police who they were.
- 06:00 They drove up in the car and the little girl said, "That's the car them came up in."

Can you describe the house you lived in at that time?

A two bedroom house, a little tiny two bedroom place in Brunswick in Melbourne. My mother and father

had a tiny

06:30 bedroom and the three boys had the other bedroom and my sister slept out in a little room off the kitchen, with a sofa and she slept out there. We lived in about five or six of them, we used to move

07:00 around, we'd get thrown out. I can never forget the day when I came home from school and walked around the corner and there was a big, red, auction flag out the front with all my mother's furniture sitting out in the front street. That was the place that my father bought and he couldn't pay for and they put it up for auction and they tipped them out.

What would you do then?

07:30 **How would you find a new place to live?**

That's when my brother was taken down to a farm near Coolac and my father got us into a boarding house. He did all the work around the place and did this and did that. We used to sit down and there used to be four men boarding there and us kids and all three of us kids and my father used to all share the one bedroom. We had four single beds in the

08:00 room. Because my brother was away there were three of us. My father and the landlady used to come out and put dishes down in rows and my father used to say, "You grab the potatoes, you grab the peas."

When things were really tough what would you eat for dinner?

Anything they put in front of me, absolutely anything they put in front of me, because I was hungry.

08:30 If a kid was eating an apple at school I'd go up and say, "Can I have the core?" The kids would give you the core of the apple and you'd eat that.

Can you remember kids at school that weren't struggling?

Yes there were. When we lived out at East Kew we were living in a place like the Vaucluse area [i.e. wealthy]

09:00 and the poor kids used to go to the Kew School, we lived right near the school and my mother was insisting that we go there.

Can you describe whereabouts that was in East Kew?

It was on a corner

09:30 and Braidwood Avenue went down that way, I can't think of the street this way and there was a Catholic church built opposite because the kids from the Catholic school used to go to the public school until they built the church and built a church hall. I used

10:00 to earn three shillings a week for wheeling a boy, he had polio and he laid in a basket and it had four wheels and I used to wheel him to school everyday and then wheel him home and his mother used to give me three shillings for doing that. It was a big school; it was a classy school,

10:30 it had three stories and it had the primary school that was separated off. They had a caretaker who lived right next door or opposite it, and he looked after it on the weekends and they didn't get any of this wrecking of the schools that happen at the schools now, he used to have a couple of big dogs.

11:00 You weren't allowed to play in the playground although you could get there. After five o'clock nobody was allowed in the playground and you weren't allowed to be on the playground on the weekends, it was patrolled all the time.

What did you do in the playground at lunch time?

Kids used to kick the football during football season,

11:30 played cricket, playing chasing games, you'd marked out a part on the ground and if you caught somebody you put them there and he had to stay there. They practiced football and practiced cricket.

Did you have a football team that you followed?

12:00 In Melbourne, but only after I left school because I couldn't afford to do it, I used to follow Fitzroy and they are up in Brisbane now.

What type of subjects were you taught at school?

English, maths, geography, history, hygiene.

What were you taught in hygiene?

12:30 Wash your hands and do this and do that. People used to laugh when the teacher said you should have a bath every day, you couldn't afford the water. They taught you all that and you used

13:00 to get embarrassed because you had to take your shoes and socks off and my socks always had holes in them and my mother used to darn them. We never ever had anything new.

How many pairs of shoes did you have?

One, and when they wore out you were gone, just one pair of shoes.

13:30 **Where did your mother get your clothes from?**

The councils every now and again gave away flannel and she used to go up there and make flannel singlets because it was cold in the wintertime. I really do think she used to sometimes go to

14:00 some of those church things.

Was your family a religious family?

We had to go to Sunday school, but my father never went to church but he was a great one for quoting the Bible to you.

14:30 We never got into trouble but there were a hell of a lot of kids that were in trouble, for stealing, like it is now.

What were the kids stealing?

They'd steal anything, you'd put things down and they'd steal it. We used to steal fruit, people had fruit trees

15:00 and we used to climb up on their fences and pinch their peaches and quinces. It wasn't an offence but if they chased you and caught you they'd clip you over the ear.

Was that the only crime that you can remember in the area?

Yes. When we lived in Brunswick we lived there

15:30 until 1929 and that was a pretty crime oriented area, Brunswick, Carlton and Fitzroy and those types of places and kids would break into people's places. A lot of them used to steal food

16:00 and the people would say that they had only just done their shopping. They used to steal milk, people used to put their billys [tin pots] out in those days and take a drop of milk, that came in later, I don't think that came into Melbourne until about 1932 or 1933, bottled milk. Everybody would put their billy out and the milkman would come along and put a pint into it.

16:30 The milkman used to demand that you put the money out and the milkman would come knocking on the door at three o'clock in the morning because the people used to pinch the money underneath the billy.

How did the milkman distribute the milk?

By horse and cart, some of them had something like a Roman chariot so that he could jump off the back. Some of them had the big hood over it

17:00 and they'd have big cans of milk and you drove in the country and put the milk out. He'd put it into a smaller thing about that big and he'd race around and put a pint or half a pint. Hygiene wasn't really

17:30 good there because at one stage I helped the milkman and he used to get the horse out and put the horses harness on and do this and do that and I didn't see him wash his hands and people would drink his milk. He would ask if I wanted a drink of milk but there was no way in the world that I would drink his milk. He had no idea of hygiene.

18:00 **Where did it come from?**

From the country, there were farms not far from Melbourne. Do you know where Rosebery [Rowsley?] is now? Rosebery [Rowsley?] there where all the factories are built there now there was a milk farm there and a racecourse further along.

18:30 They used to milk cows there and sell it to the milkman and the government decided to put it all through one channel. But they didn't do that down in Melbourne for a long while.

You mentioned hygiene, how would you wash at home, what sort of bathroom did you have?

The bath had a chip bath heater in it, with small bits of wood.

19:00 **Can you explain to me what the chip heater was?**

It was a straight up heater and the cold water came in and out from the top when you turned the tap on and it had a little area in there and you'd put a bit of newspaper in and get thin bits of wood and light the fire in there, and some people had gas bath heaters.

19:30 In the olden days there were a terrible lot of people, how many people died in their bathrooms. If the

gas went out and the gas came in and if you were wet, the Germans worked that out during World War II with the people they used to put in the gas chambers. They used to walk them through showers so they'd be wet and that would save gas, you die quicker when the gas absorbs you, when your body is wet.

20:00 I bet you didn't know that did you? That's a reality of life. Prior to getting the chip heater we used to boil up the copper [sink] in the laundry, which was outside, and carry the hot water in buckets into the bathroom. The bathroom had a wooden bench with a

20:30 sink in it.

Where was the bathroom situated in the house?

You'd walk from one side of the kitchen into the bathroom. You weren't allowed to come to the tea [dinner] table until you walked into the bathroom and then out into the kitchen. The towel was outside so that Mum knew that your hands were wet when you came out, she was very strict.

21:00 **What about the toilet?**

All the toilets were outside. I came and lived at Sans Souci over here and I built a house in 1951 and they didn't have a sewer in San Souci in 1951. The houses along Kogarah Bay they didn't have sewers until 1960, all those houses down there. In Melbourne the sewage business,

21:30 the infrastructure was a lot better than it was in Sydney.

What was the sewage system then?

Exactly the same thing, there weren't any fancy bathrooms, it was just a wooden seat and a system up on the top, nobody painted the inside of the bathroom. Usually it was outside,

22:00 there was no lining in them, I don't remember going into anybody's place and them having lining in their bathroom. Bits of paper hanging on a string and holding it for toilet paper. If you had an old telephone directory it was like winning the lottery. You just hung that up

22:30 and that's what you would use. I can remember a lady asking me to do some messages for her one time and I had to go to the ham and beef shop we called it in Melbourne, and I had to buy her some cheese and a toilet roll. I didn't know what a toilet roll was and I was nine years old.

Can you describe what the ham and beef shop was?

It was like a

23:00 delicatessen, exactly the same thing. My father wouldn't let us eat devon [processed meat], eating meat in the skin was no good for anybody. It is exactly the same but they just called it different in Melbourne.

How far away was it from your house?

About a ten minute walk, it took ten minutes to walk up to the tram stop and that's where it was,

23:30 where the main road went through. There was a shopping centre and it had about thirty or forty shops in it.

What other shops were in the shopping centre?

We always had at least two butchers in the place and a couple of cake shops. The cake shops in those days used to make all their own cakes and bread.

24:00 There were clothes shops, sold kids clothing, there were a lot of grocery shops. I used to go into the grocery shop and my main ambition in life was to get a tin of jam, it had all the different types of flavours

24:30 on the label and my mother used to make all our own jam. We had a blue plum tree in the back and we had plum sauce and plum chutney. She'd grow onions and have pickled onions. One thing about the place was it was a big area and my father used to grow every vegetable there was.

25:00 **Was it a detached house?**

Yes. It was a good house actually and it had a big main bedroom and then another bedroom, my sister's room was there. My mother and father in this bedroom and my younger brother and I in that one and my eldest brother had to climb out the window and get into his bed

25:30 which was on the veranda. We had canvas hanging down that my father nailed down so he could have his bed there. When the bad wind and rain came he used to go out and put some on the bottom of the bed because

26:00 the bed would get wet, and he slept in that for years.

Melbourne can be pretty cold in winter, so how did you keep warm?

We used to have a fire burning in the kitchen, we didn't have gas or electric stoves and we used to keep that going. We used to be able to buy what they called 'briquettes'

26:30 in Melbourne and that kept you warm. That was one of the sources, there was a railway station not far and the train used to go through that part of Kew and branch off there was a bit of a yard down there where the trains pulled in.

27:00 That was a job that we had to do every now and again was to go down there and pick up bits of coal, briquettes that had fallen off the train. Sometimes you'd get down there and the guy would be loading his truck up and he'd throw you a few briquettes.

What were the briquettes made of?

Made from coke

27:30 from open cut mines down there, exactly the same as the things you have now for barbeques. They would burn very slowly and if you left one briquette there overnight you could get up in the morning, you'd put a couple of bits of wood on that and get a flame and then put a couple of briquettes on. We always

28:00 had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and we had a paddock next door, it didn't belong to us but we put a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK wire fence across the front of it so that we could let our WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s out and they used to scratch around and eat out there so we didn't have to feed them that much.

You must have had a big yard?

We did, we had a hell of a big yard. I've never

28:30 had a yard that big in any of the houses I've lived in. The house was there and the front of it was in this street and it went down another thirty feet that way, it went there and then it went right across this way. It was one hundred and eighty foot long the block. The side that we grew the vegetables in

29:00 was almost as wide as this room, from there across there. When we went there they had trees, apple and pear tree, plums. My mother never brought tomato sauce she always made her own tomato sauce, she made her own plum sauce, grew our own vegetables. Grew onions and pickled them

29:30 and that was the only thing that kept us alive, that bloody garden, that was everything. There was none of this you didn't like carrots or peas, you ate anything.

Did she come from a farming background?

No, just grew vegetables, my father was the

30:00 type of a bloke that if wanted to do something he found out how to do it, he did it. He would buy a packet of seeds and put them out, so we had vegetables all the time.

Were there many pubs in the area?

There was a hotel up at East Kew, at Kew there were three or four pubs but that was about two miles away.

What did the pub look like?

It was an

30:30 old hotel, it was probably built in the early 1900s, it was on a corner and it had a horse trough on the side so that horse could drink. The milkman had a horse and they delivered stuff with horses. They used to have on the street corners a horse trough so the horses could

31:00 drink out of it. Life was probably pretty simple in those days.

When you were living in Kew, how many people living in your suburb or area that had cars?

The only people who had cars were public servants, if you were a policeman,

31:30 tram driver or conductor you had a car, nobody else had one. I think there were only three cars in the street we were living in and they never used to come out, only ever on a Saturday or Sunday. People never drove their cars to work. Everybody in Melbourne, and I couldn't believe it when I went to live in Sydney, but everybody in Melbourne used to ride a pushbike to work,

32:00 just miles and miles of pushbikes. It was like Beijing, have you ever been to Beijing with those pushbikes, just like that and when I went to Beijing I thought, "Christ, it's like I'm back in Melbourne!" Everybody rode a pushbike.

Did you have a pushbike?

Yes. I got one when a chap gave me an old pushbike and I had to redo it, I painted it and

32:30 got bits and pieces for it. When my father first had the hay and corn store we were a little bit wealthy then, and he brought my eldest brother and I a bike, they were little ones like that. He actually had a car in those days, we had about

33:00 eighteen months of good living.

Was that in Wonthaggi?

No, that was when we came up to Melbourne. I forgot about that, we did have about eighteen months of good living, and that was when he brought the house. He overstepped the mark, the poor old bugger.

Was that common for lots of families to get into that sort of financial trouble?

Yes.

33:30 In Sydney old Jack Lang [NSW Premier Jack Lang] he brought out what they called the Moratorium Act, if you owned this place here and you couldn't pay for it, they couldn't kick you out of it. They could charge you interest the banks, the building societies and places like that were heard of in those days but you borrowed of banks. The banks weren't allowed to take it off you

34:00 but if you moved out they were allowed to rent it and they had to pay that rent off it and the interest off it. If you stayed in they used to bill you up for the rent, virtually forced you out of living in it. But they didn't have that in Melbourne,

34:30 they used to sell your house and put your furniture out on the street and that was it, good bye.

Did anybody have a radio in the area?

No, we got a radio about 1937,

35:00 we got a second-hand one, somebody didn't want it so we brought it and paid it off.

How much do you think the radio might of cost?

Probably five or six pound, I don't know I don't have a clue but I know we had to pay it off. In life I have never paid anything off in my life since I've come out of the navy.

35:30 I can't teach my daughters or grandkids that. If I couldn't afford to pay for this place when I came here I wouldn't of bought it. I started going when I came back to Sydney, the reason I came back to Sydney was not only for Sydney Tech. I matched up with a lady up here, and her husband and I were in the air force together and he got killed

36:00 and she had a little baby. I came up here in 1946 and we never got married until 1951, until I had built the house, and paid for it. Then the government came nine years later and said they wanted it to build the Captain Cook Bridge over there and they didn't really,

36:30 I fought them for seventeen months. They used to come and terrify my wife and tell her that they were going to bulldoze the place down and God knows what else. I just kept fighting them and I finished up getting seventeen hundred pounds more than they offered me in the first place. What they did was knock it down and gave it to a sailing club that they had to move from where the bridge was and gave it to the sailing club for a car park.

37:00 Then I moved up to one up in Dennis Street in Sans Souci and I was sort of beat there because the prices of land had gone up and what I got to buy a block of land in a decent spot. I was working at a place and I had a guy who was working with me for years and he was

37:30 my penciller and he used to do all the working out of the wages. He said, "What's wrong boss?" And I said, "I think they beat me and I don't think I can go ahead with this." He said, "Something will turn up." The next day I walked into work and he said "I brought you this in." and he gave me a big envelope and I said, "What's this?" He said, "This is the deeds to my house."

38:00 Can you think of anybody who would give you the deeds to their house, I've never met anybody that I could of? He said, "That's the deeds to my house and get a loan on that." And I said, "John, you know my system." and he said "Look, there is no interest there's no nothing." He said, "Just pay the bank whatever interest they want." Then I took out a war service loan

38:30 and paid that off until I moved over here, I was paying twenty one dollars a week. That's the only thing that I've ever brought that I haven't paid cash for.

What did the family listen to on the radio?

I don't know, anything that was on. I know my sister used to like music. My mother and father were Welsh

39:00 so they had beautiful singing voices, none of us kids did, none of us had a voice at all. I wasn't all that interested in it but they used to listen to what was the biggest thing in Australia back in the pre war

years was to listen to

39:30 a play on a Sunday night, an hour play, it was one of those things.

Tape 3

00:30 **I wanted to ask you what kind of jobs your father did during the Depression, to get by?**

Absolutely anything, he would cut down trees, cement paths, he'd clean motorcars,

01:00 people who wanted their car engines cleaned. Any job that would pay money, loading trucks. They had a lot of companies in Melbourne who used to send stuff out by trucks; we never had all those big semi-trailers we have got now in those days.

01:30 There might be fifty guys that would turn up for the job and they might put ten on and let them work for four hours for two shillings an hour. I think the basic wage in those days was around three pound and in those days you worked a forty eight hour a week

02:00 so it wasn't much per hour. They'd give them that as casual work, but he'd do anything. Dig holes, if he saw a building going up he'd go down and ask did they have a job, they might give him a job for a couple of hours digging foundations. He virtually did anything,

02:30 shoed horses, any job that there was he'd do.

Your mother?

My mother used to do sewing and she had that business on the side where she used to lay people out and she became quite famous for it in the district, so anybody that died in the district, it's one of those things.

03:00 She used to do a lot of sewing for dressmakers; they'd give her sewing to do. She used to do that fancy work, tablecloths, but she used to spend hours doing that and they'd pay her virtually nothing for it. By the time she bought

03:30 some more cloth or silk she'd only be about five shillings in front. But she used to say, "It's five shillings, brought tea [dinner] for tonight." Or something like that.

How many schools did you go to?

I went to West Brunswick, East Kew, it became Melbourne

04:00 Technical Junior School, they are the only three that I went too.

When you were at Melbourne Tech, what did you do after you left school?

What I did mostly was ride around miles and miles and miles looking for a job. I did plumbing when I went to

04:30 tech, I did a course, you could go engineering, woodwork or plumbing so I did plumbing but I couldn't get an apprentice as a plumber. They reckoned I was too small they reckoned I could get a job as a jockey; I was too small to dig up holes in the road and all that sort of thing, so I couldn't get a job. I was a bit of a wheeler and dealer by that time and I used to do anything, I was like my father I used to do any job there was.

05:00 If somebody wanted something sold or distributed I would do it. I used to just get enough money to keep going. I used to caddie for a very wealthy lady and a young lady at the time, and she looked after me pretty well. She brought me my first good bike that I

05:30 had because she won the Australian championships.

How old were you when you left school?

I was about fifteen.

What year was that?

That was at the end of 1936, it was November 1936. I finished up getting a job in the foundry in the last week in December 1936

06:00 and I stopped work in 1999, so I worked for sixty-three years.

Whereabouts was that foundry?

The foundry was in Richmond.

Can you tell me a bit about the work you did then in 1936?

Just usual foundry work, making castings in sand moulds,

06:30 do you know what castings are? Every good part on your motor car is casting, every important part on your car is a casting. Like the engine, pistons, gears, people don't know that.

What kind of machinery did you used then?

07:00 Made pulley wheels, gears the whole of the industry relied on castings and it still does today.

What kind of machinery did you used to make the castings?

We didn't have machinery in those days, we had a pattern. If you

07:30 wanted to make that you had a wooden pattern and you put it down there on a board and put a box around it and you ran sand around it. You turned that box over and put another box on top and you ran sand around that and cut runners to get the metal in it, tube down here and cut the metal and run the metal in and it fills that up to make a casting. There is a lot of skill in it; you can't just fill that up with

08:00 cast iron and expect it to be solid. It shrinks this way and this way and it also got liquid shrinkage so it would have a hole in it so you had to know where to put excess metal. You might put a piece of metal up here that is that high, what they called a head on it. I've got a book out there and I can show you some castings.

08:30 We made anything and everything. I took on my own foundry and all those big cranes that you see swing over Sydney, we made all the castings for that, all the pulley wheels, all the gears, all the rope drums, they are all castings. People don't realise

09:00 how important the casting industry is.

Did you do an apprenticeship at that first foundry you went to?

Yes.

How much were you paid?

Fifteen shillings a week the first year, one pound the second year, thirty shillings the third year, fourth year was two pound five

09:30 or something and then I just got onto the three pound. We were actually being paid three pound as a fifth year apprentice and we were getting as much as a labourer got because a basic wage in those days was three pound. A guy with three kids basic wage and he was getting three pound and I was getting three pound. The war had started and we were

10:00 working a hell of a lot of overtime.

What were the conditions like for you working in the foundry at that time?

Almost unbelievable.

Can you tell me about them?

We used to make what you used to call land moulds and used to go out in the street and collect horse manure to put into the sand to make it.

10:30 When the metal went into it the gas had to get away, chaff used to do nothing and I said to the foreman when I first started work, "I came here to learn to be a moulder and all I do is go out in the streets for the first half an hour in the morning collecting horse manure!" The old guys used to sit around worrying about the lack of horses

11:00 on the street. If you tell this to modern day apprentices they don't believe you. I said, "There is a girl down the road and she always waves to me." I said, "I don't look at her because I'm ashamed because I'm walking around." He said, "Tell her you are a second hand chaff dealer." We used to mix that up and mix clay up

11:30 and then we had to mix coal dust with the sand and we used to finish up at the end of the day like coalminers, black. When I first started they didn't have hot showers and everybody used to have, you probably don't know what a kerosene tin is but it's a square tin and it held about four gallons of petrol. The tin was about that square and about that high

12:00 and everybody used to have one of them cut off. If you casted that day you'd run in with your tin of water and put it on top of the hot castings or anything that was hot and you'd stand there and have a wash and wash yourself all over and then tip the thing over the top of you.

12:30 There were no lockers and you had to hang all your clothes, they had a bit of wood along there and you had a peg so you took your clothes off and put your working clothes on and they would be all hanging

along the wall like that. You couldn't leave any money out there because there was always thieves. It doesn't matter where you've worked or where you've been there is always a thief.

13:00 It was really rugged, and trying to scrub your hands and getting your nails clean to go to a dance, you couldn't believe what it was like, medieval it was. It was like that for years, I think they got hot showers twelve months before I left.

13:30 **What did the foundry actually look like if you walked through the door?**

Black sand everywhere, big steel boxes, and castings.

The building itself?

They were all old buildings they were all old shaggy looking buildings, mostly galvanized iron

14:00 roofing and down the side, the dirtiest places in the world. On the social scale if you told people that you worked in the foundry as an apprentice, and a lot of people didn't know what a foundry was, you were right down, probably the same run as a thirteen year old girl started working in a third class brothel in Aden.

14:30 **You talked about cleaning your fingernails for dances can you tell me what kind of social life you had during that time?**

Social life was a lot better than it is now, there was always a lot of dances. You could always go to a dance on a Saturday night for a shilling.

Where were the dances held?

In the Town Hall, Sydney had them when I came here. Marrickville Town Hall,

15:00 Petersham Town Hall, there were town halls everywhere. Dances were a big thing, some guy would have a little three-piece orchestra and you'd go there, the Trocadero, and Trocadero was a great dance place. It was a lot better than it is today because kids go out now on the street and they go out nine or ten o'clock at night and just go to pubs and hang around to try and meet people.

15:30 You used to always meet tons of people at the dances and you used to get a bit of a name for yourself if you were a good dancer or if you weren't so good. If you couldn't dance you'd know it, if I had a dance with you and you were a pretty crappy dancer and the guy would say, "How was she?" Someone would say, "No, give her a miss." That sort of thing went on but people went to dances all the time. It was a lot better than going to the pictures. When I look at some

16:00 of the things on Foxtel [cable TV broadcaster], because they put it into the building, but when I look at some of those old movies I think, "Christ, they must have been easy pleased in those days." some of the crap they used to show. I don't think there wasn't a Saturday night that went by that you didn't go to a dance.

Tell me about the Trocadero, did you go there, what was that like as a building?

Yes and it was a magnificent building and they had a real good orchestra down there.

16:30 **What did the building look like?**

You know that terrible area of where George Street is now where the theatres are, it was a building and it was only a single storey I'm pretty sure. It was a real big building inside and if you went to a ball, like Myers would have their ball and

17:00 football clubs used to have a ball. Everybody had a ball once a year that was the real big thing and you had something to eat. If it was a Friday night ball you couldn't take a Catholic girl because she couldn't eat meat after twelve o'clock, you had to be careful of those they were the rules. Whenever you walked in there

17:30 you felt good, you'd look around and see all the dancing and the number of people that would know you from this dance and that dance. It was something, it was really something. I can't believe that it's not going now, even the church halls they used to have dances for the kids,

18:00 the young kids that went to their church and it was considered a good thing to keep them in the one thing. The girls from around the district went to the dances, if you ask a lot of people in my age group ninety nine percent of us met our wives at dance halls.

What kind of dances did you do?

Foxtrots, slow foxtrots, I didn't go in for the tangos,

18:30 but they used to have fifty-fifty for old time. Modern you did jazz, waltz, fifty-fifty, barn dance and something else and they'd move it around and they had good orchestras too, they were really good orchestras.

19:00 Every now and again you'd have a bird [woman] that could get up and sing or a guy who could sing. Ice

skating in Melbourne was a big deal we used to go ice-skating a hell of a lot, they were quite nice things.

Was there a system for asking a girl to dance?

You'd just walk up to her

19:30 or I might sit you down and take you back to your seat and I would ask, "Can I have the next dance with you?" And you'd say, "Yes." And I'd walked back and talk to the boys and say, "She's not bad." somebody would say, "Well I'll try her out." Sometimes the girls

20:00 would say to you, "You are not a really good dancer." then you'd say, "Well, teach me." If a girl said to you, "I'm not a good dancer." then you'd say, "Neither am I but come and I'll show you what to do." There was always a happy atmosphere, you never had brawls in those days in dance halls, and you never had anything like that. The dances were always well run, they always had somebody there who

20:30 ran it properly. The football dance they might have a couple of the footballers to make sure that nothing goes wrong. Dancing was the thing; you can't get it going now it has just died.

At this time while you were working at the foundry why did you

21:00 **decide to go to Sydney?**

The reason I came up here was to join up, I wanted to get away. I don't know how many blokes have told you this but they'd say for the glory of it but ninety percent of us went away because we worked in a job every morning and come home every night and go out Saturday night.

21:30 We didn't have enough money to go out two or three nights a week. But to join up you were going to go overseas. I remember when I signed up for the air force at Randwick and there were three guys in the boarding house with me, there were five of us together and they joined the army that was the 8th Division they were forming then. I was three months in this and it didn't look like I was going to get called up

22:00 and they said, "You will never go away with that mob, come and join the army." I almost did but none of them came back they all got killed in Malaysia [he means Malaya], it's just one of those things I suppose. I came up here so that I could get away from the foundry and get a job in a factory. When I went to join up you would say, "You a factory worker?"

22:30 **Was working in the foundry was that a protected industry?**

Yes that was protected. One of the things was they found out they didn't have enough foundries to keep it going in those days, now they have hardly any at all. People don't realise about the foundry industry,

23:00 have you ever been in a foundry, you've never seen a foundry. You have no idea what a foundry did?

I know what they do.

Made castings that's all.

While you were still working at the foundry can you remember the day that war broke out?

That was at night time and I was at the theatre downtown, and I came out at half time and walked, I go down for the Melbourne Cup every year

23:30 and I walk down Collins Street and there is a theatre there, came out and they were selling papers singing out, "War has broken out!" That was September 1939, yes I can remember that very well.

Had you been following in the news the

24:00 **build up towards the war?**

Yes everybody did, about eight thirty and nine that was the time that everybody listened to the news on the radio. I can't ever remember sitting down listening to the radio news, I don't think they used to have the hourly radio news like they do today, the war started that.

24:30 I can't remember things coming over the radio news, you read in the newspaper and that was how it happened and that was it. People were listening to that and we used to get a lot of things about Hitler and what was happening up there. They'd play his speech for about ten minutes but none of us could understand his speech.

25:00 I think that they just thought that they'd just walk over the top of him, they never realised. The fighter planes the British had at that time and the Australian outfit over here, the average airliner could fly as fast as them, not that we had many airlines

25:30 we had the old DC2s or DC3s flying around. They could fly as fast as the fighter planes we had here and we had nothing.

What did you know at that age about what was happening overseas before war broke out?

Only what you read in the newspaper. It did look like they were going to have a war.

26:00 [English Prime Minister] Chamberlain went over there and supposedly tied the thing up with the Czechs but he gave Germany the right to walk over Czechoslovakia. I always remember I gave a job to some new Australians [migrants] down in Alexandria and one of them had to paint a wall for me. When he started to paint it he put a heart up on the wall,

26:30 he was an artist that was why I got him to paint it. With an umbrella stuck through it, Chamberlain with his umbrella, it was the heart of Europe and they reckoned that Chamberlain had sold them out to the Germans. I suppose we were conscious of it, I knew guys who were joining and we used to call them the

27:00 'weekend warriors' were joining that and a lot of guys were joining the navy reserves. There were quite a few apprentices when the war broke out went away straight away with the navy reserve, but they dragged them all back out of the navy and put them back into the foundries, but they couldn't trace me.

Can you take us back to the night when you heard the news,

27:30 **do you remember what you were seeing at the theatre?**

I can't tell you the picture, I wouldn't have a clue. I really did think about that at the last Melbourne Cup, I stood in front of that theatre and there used to be a really smart milk bar along side of it, I was never really a drinker so milk bars were my thing.

28:00 I did stand in front of that and I did think to myself, "I wonder what that picture was?" but it's one of those things. One time they used to show two pictures [movies], you'd get two pictures in one night. But then they started putting the news on the picture then one picture, they always had a half time

28:30 in the pictures when they showed two movies, like a short one then half time and then the second one. But I can't tell you the picture I was watching at the time.

Were you with friends that night?

Yes we used to go out; there were a group of us who used to go to a gymnasium on a Friday night straight from work

29:00 and then go ice skating, dancing or the pictures on a Friday night. I can remember the two guys that were with me, Jack Skipper, and he was a prisoner of war with the Japs

29:30 and he died early after that, and Jeff Lucas, and he died a few years ago, there were three of us. But it was just one of those things nobody talked about joining up we weren't that sort of way inclined. There was none of this red, white and blue and, "We have got to go and fight for the country." it was,

30:00 "This is a chance for us to go overseas." that's what it really was you have got to be truthful about it. It taught you a lot, it taught me self discipline, you didn't discipline yourself they did, that was a lot worse than what you did, and so you had to discipline yourself. You met a lot of good guys there.

30:30 The guy that you stood next too was your friend when you first went in and he was normally your friend. You started talking to him or the bloke on the other side and you teamed up with them and you tried to go along with it. Jeff Lucas who was with me when war broke out and he and I finished up on the same ship together.

31:00 Everybody that I knew that came back did alright; I can't remember any guys that I knew that were no hoppers. Jeff Lucas finished up the superintendent of police in Victoria, the whole of one area of Victoria. Robby who died a couple of years ago he had a

31:30 business and he did very well, he had a house at Torquay and a house in Melbourne, and they did all right. I think seeing other people die does something to you, when you look at a bloke dying

32:00 or see a bloke taken by a shark all that sort of thing that does something to you. Then you get the idea and you wonder. When you are sitting on a raft it's like that and a huge big wave comes over the top of it, you've heard about the guys in the boat race

32:30 a couple of years ago, they were cutting holes in it to try and stop it. A piece of wood if you try and do this you sink, a piece of wood if you put it under the water it doesn't float up like that, it spins on its side and floats up. Every time there you lose it, if you haven't got a good grip on it, you've only got another bloke to hang on to and you lose it.

33:00 He kept turning over in the night, times I was straight onto it, three times I lost it and I don't know how I found it. Then I found a bit of rope and I tied that around my ankle and the next time I came up the raft came down and hit me on the head and nearly knocked me out. The guys you hear blowing their whistle to try and tell you to come and help him and all you're doing is hanging onto

33:30 that raft. There is no heroes if you have got to stop and think, the only heroes are people who do something on the spur of the moment. People who rush in and grab somebody out of a fire, if somebody

can give to your brain a half a second message and say, "If you go in there you could finish up burnt to death." You'd stop.

- 34:00 You never believe you are going to die until you are dying but you'd do anything to help. When people got back on that raft people were punching and kicking and trying to get a spot on it and you don't know who they are in the dark. That gives you a totally different outlook on life you think to yourself, "Why did I survive?" That's probably why I have
- 34:30 donated thirty odd years to charity, I've raised hundreds and thousands of dollars for charity, just because I think I've got another chance. I don't know it's just one of those things. I say we all joined up because it was a chance to get away
- 35:00 and do something and to get overseas. The chances of the average guy going overseas in those days was nil. My granddaughter is twenty three and she's been around the world a couple of times. It's one of those things, we just couldn't get in there quick enough to go and see what it was all about.
- 35:30 I must confess when I was in the air force and I was struggling to keep going I used to listen to the things and they'd say, "Ten of our aircraft are missing." and I'd think, "Ten Lancasters with fourteen guys on it, that's one hundred and forty guys, I wonder how many are prisoners of war and how many have blown up and how many
- 36:00 are floating around in the ocean?" That was the only time that I ever thought about that, that anything could happen to you. We just went there and did what we had to do and we came home. I think it's straightened a lot of us out.
- 36:30 I still think if I was in charge I'd put everybody in the army, I think conscription. I had a young German guy out here on a Rotary scholarship who lived with us for a while and he was finishing his Leaving Certificate. He had to go to university or do his two years army training
- 37:00 and he said, "What will I do?" And I said, "Do your two years in the army." He said, "My father told me that." And I said, "Well why did you ask me for if you weren't going to take my advice?" Then he went to university and then four months later he wrote to me and said that he got into the army. Now he's a veterinary surgeon and he said doing the two years in
- 37:30 the army really made something of him, rather than just going to university. He has a totally different aspect on life and you mix with a lot of people. You have got to virtually sleep with some people all sleeping in the one room together, you are relying on those guys for
- 38:00 friendship. If you are a little bit down you are relying on those guys to help you out. So you have a totally different view of life if you have been in something like that. It carries you a long way, you don't have to ask a guy if he has been to war when you start talking to him, you know that he has,
- 38:30 its just something about him. I've said to guys, "What were you in during the war?" And I've said, "I was in the navy, but what made you think that I was in the war?" I'd say, "Just by talking to you, just your attitude to life." We've got people here who are fighting over the marina, we've got people who are millionaires and they are fighting because they have got to pay one thousand dollars
- 39:00 to fix up their own marina. We have a couple downstairs and they dress themselves up in the Salvation Army uniform every Sunday and away they go banging the drum. He owns a big caravan park and convention centre down at Wollongong. He
- 39:30 in New South Wales owns Video Ezy and all those people are franchised to him. The time the thing down here got knocked about a bit and they had to pay eighteen thousand dollars to fix it up and they won't pay it because they wanted thirty four people to pay it instead of sixteen of them. That week after that he won't be paying it. I would say he went and spent between
- 40:00 five hundred and six hundred thousand dollars on two new cars for him and his wife.

Can I take you back to the time when you were at the foundry and war broke out, what made you decide to leave Melbourne and go to Sydney, at what time did you decide to go and enlist, at what stage in the war?

I think the war was going about

- 40:30 twelve months I think, it could have been I'm not sure. I thought, "Oh I've got to give this away." It takes a lot of doing, you've got to organise things and arrange things, jockey yourself into a position so you can do that. I told Mum and Dad that I was going to go to Sydney and live and my mother said, "They murder people in the streets up there!"
- 41:00 **What was your family's reaction to you wanting to join up?**
- My brother was away and my brother-in-law had been conscripted. I think my father thought it was something that he had done and he was a little bit proud
- 41:30 of you that you were doing it.

Tape 4

00:30 **Can I ask you how quickly your brother joined up after war broke out?**

He was in it straightaway, actually they called him up in April because his birthday is on Anzac Day, and they called him up the day after Anzac Day

01:00 because he was in the weekend warriors and he was a dispatch rider, he was in signals. He left his job, he was in the army fulltime and was running all around Melbourne and that was dispatches and going up to Broadmeadows which was the army base then and they were starting to build Puckapunyal down in Melbourne.

01:30 Although he was only in the reserves as soon as they said they were going to send a lot overseas he was in it. His number was NX1622, he was in the first two thousand and he was a 39er that they called them and he went away.

02:00 They ran the QE2 and the Aquitania and picked them up and took them over to the Middle East and he was in straightaway.

You mentioned that he was doing dispatches, what did that mean?

He was a dispatch rider instead of sending things over phones, being a dispatch rider you'd write something and he might run from here into Parliament House

02:30 or something like that, he was a dispatch rider. He was in the army for years before he joined up, he was 1919 he was in the army when he was eighteen. He used to, at the Melbourne Show; ride around with the army, trick riding motorbike riders.

You knew then that he was always going to go?

03:00 Yes, I always knew no doubt about it. I don't think my father tried to talk him out of it, he didn't. Actually when he came back from being overseas for so long and he only got eight days leave and he had to go back up to New Guinea and he said that he wasn't going to go. My father said, "You are not living

03:30 here if you are going AWL." [Absent Without Leave].

Can you elaborate what that meant?

My father believed that you had to do the right thing; he thought anybody that would go away without leave was no good.

Why?

If you were in the army that was it, they were the rules.

04:00 I wouldn't of thought ever doing that, not turning up when your ship was sailing. We would often have three or four blokes away without leave, I couldn't do that. It's just an inbuilt thing in you, you are responsible. My brother went away, he just looked at my father and laughed because he knew he was going to go, we knew that he wasn't going to stay.

04:30 My father just put the word on because that was the wrong thing to do.

How soon was your brother told when and where he was going?

I have no idea. When they came back from the Middle East they were told that they had eight days leave and they were to report back in eight days time and then they went up to New Guinea.

05:00 They were on the end of the Kokoda Trail business; they were the backup people for the Kokoda people. It was only the militia fighting up in New Guinea.

Can you remember when your brother left Melbourne?

On that occasion?

To go to the Middle East?

Yes I can remember and I will tell you why, like I said he was a dispatch rider

05:30 and it was Christmas 1939 and we were downtown and I was getting on a bus and he rode past on his bike and I yelled out to him and he stopped and came over. He said, "I won't be home tonight," he said, "I've been

06:00 home and I've got all my gear together." He said, "My bike, I have got to leave it down at St Kilda at the

army base." It was his bike that he was riding, they were paying so much for his bike per mile and he said, "Would you pick it up and can you sell it for me?" I said, "Yes, all right." I shook hands with him and away he went. I didn't see him anymore until he came back and that was it.

06:30 There was none of this great big family farewell or anything like that. We were very practical in those days if you had to do something that was it. My father was a stickler for doing the right thing, he really was and he was very strict on us.

07:00 **There was no farewell at the dock?**

No, you didn't do that sort of thing, that came later on. When I was on the Ormiston and that was a troopship and they had a band there, 'Now is the hour and we must say goodbye', I thought, "God, I can't believe that this is happening!"

Were there any other men in the neighbourhood or friends of yours who

07:30 **were a part of that first 6th Division?**

No my brother was the only one around that district. I think the Thomas family was the only family in the whole of that area that went away to the war, anybody else that was there had been conscripted. It was the Vacluse area, but were sort of looked on as being 'cowboys', the Thomas kids

08:00 sold the papers and did this and did that.

Why were you looked on as cowboys?

We were poor, it's the truth and people look down on people that are poor. What's that saying, 'money is not everything, it's the only thing', if you haven't got any money you haven't got any friends and you'd soon lose them all,

08:30 you can't bum on anybody. It's a practical thing about life, if you think about it, think of people that you have known. If you don't have a job, I know there has been a lot of people out of work but there has been a lot of people that didn't want work. In the bad times we have had guys

09:00 stand in front of the foundry saying, "The CES [Commonwealth Employment Service] has sent me down here." And they will look in and say, "Oh no, I'm not going to work there." They will stand there and tell you. "I get so much a week pension or I get so much on the dole and I do this and do that and I will be coming here to work for about ten dollars a week I might as well be on the dole."

09:30 We didn't adopt that attitude we wanted to survive, we wanted to stick together.

I've heard that a lot of those men who first sailed to the Middle East in that 6th Division, what made them special, they were men who had suffered during the Depression? What sort of soldiers did that make them?

In the navy the old timers,

10:00 my brother said that they had them in the army, they used to say to them and we used to say to them, "We joined up to do a job and not to get one." Guys who were in the permanent army they were the ones that got the jobs behind the desk and the guys that joined up were the guys that went away. Really count back and think about the people you are interviewing you will find out that that is the big majority

10:30 and that's what they did. It was the people who felt that they could do a job or they wanted to get away. I never thought I was doing a job I only thought of it as a chance of getting away, no good kidding myself or kidding you. To me it was going to be an adventure.

Where did you want to go?

Anywhere, just anywhere.

11:00 I used to read everything that I could about what happened overseas, all the countries and how great it would be to be there. I always wanted to travel.

What sort of a place did you think Germany might have been like from what you heard in the news?

We didn't look kindly on Germany because they were all marching around

11:30 and doing the goose stepping and all sorts of things like that. My sister was a very, very good swimmer and in the 1936 Olympic Games in Germany, if we had any money she could have had a coach, she didn't have a coach, she was just a good swimmer.

12:00 She would have gone away and would have been a very young Olympian in those days. There are a lot of young Olympians nowadays but if you take a look back in the 1950s and 1960s there weren't many very young kids that went away. I used to worry that she was going to get picked to go on the team to go

12:30 over there and what might happen to her, that rotten Germany.

When you were following the Olympics at that time were people thinking that something was up here?

Yes I think they were, it was one of those things, Hitler was cranky on getting beat there, the athletes

13:00 getting beat and he was cranky on the good American runner Jessie Owens. Hitler couldn't believe that they were breeding this white race of people that was so good

13:30 and nobody could beat them. He wanted to have the race re-run and he reckoned they had cheated and all that sort of thing. He couldn't live with that fact; nobody looked too well on Germany.

Can you recall any Germans or Italians who lived around you in Melbourne at the time?

14:00 There was a German girl who came to school when I was in Year 8 and she just blended in; she was good and a nice kid. We used to all go swimming in the Yarra River down at Kew, she was a good sport

14:30 and we never took any notice of them.

Did you think she received any ill treatment at the time?

No, nothing. I used to caddie for a couple of Japanese guys and they were more generous than the Australians were actually. I remember and that was the last year

15:00 that I went to school, there was a big clap of thunder at school and we were up on the third floor, you when there is a big clap of thunder and it's really big, it doesn't shake it but I think it's just the boom, crash. I think I was a bit of a lark at school and said, "Gee the Japs are here!" oh God, the teacher pulled

15:30 me out and gave me a great lecture about, "If you want to speak about the Japanese people let the Japanese know about the Japanese." And I just looked straight at him and said, "I call us just Aussies." that was one of those things. That was probably the only

16:00 thing I ever heard about racism in those days. I can't remember racism coming into it until after the war.

Could you remind me when it was exactly when you left Melbourne and came to Sydney?

Just so I could join up.

When was that?

In 1940.

What did you pack to bring up with you?

16:30 Just my clothes, we didn't have many clothes in those days.

How did you travel up to Sydney?

On the train. I was that homesick when I got here I couldn't find a place to live and if I had of had my fare home I would of gone home that night. My father was a great one for telling you how to live and how to get on.

17:00 He used to say, "If you are ever lost or ever in trouble go to a church, it doesn't matter what church it is they will look after you." I remember standing there at Central Station and thinking, "What am I going to do?" I rang up a few places that advertised for boarders and the fare back to Melbourne was two pound ten and I only had two pound

17:30 and a few pence for the telephone. I looked over and I saw a church near Central Station and I thought I would go over there.

Which church was that?

The church is still there but I don't know if it is Baptist or Church of England, when you come out of the country side of the station and you look there is a church there

18:00 so I thought that I would do what the old man said. I went over and the minister saw me and I told him I came up from Melbourne and he said, "Well, we will look after you." They had a money tin and he was going to take some money out and I said, "No I don't want money," I said, "If I had money I would go home." He said, "Do you really want to go home?" I said, "Well I did but if I can find somewhere to live

18:30 I won't go home." He said, "I can fix that up for you." and looked in the phone book and rang up a young guy and had a bit of a chat to him and then said, "Just go over and get your bag and come over here." I can't remember the kid's name now, "He will come and pick you up at four o'clock." I had been in Sydney all day because the train used to get in at nine o'clock in the morning and I had been to the union and got my union ticket.

19:00 I did that because I thought if they had to trace me, if my mother wanted to get in touch with me she

might be able to do it through that because I had no intention of going to work in a foundry. I took a walk down and looked at the Harbour Bridge and I started ringing up places trying to get board but I couldn't do it.

19:30 **What impressions did you have of Sydney that first day?**

It was great, if you had of told me I was in Hollywood I would of still believed you, it was something different, it was terrible different from Melbourne.

Your mother had said that they killed people up there?

Yes, they would murder you on the streets. That young guy took me to the boarding house where he lived, he must of rang his

20:00 landlady and she said, "Yes bring him in." so that's why I stayed.

Can you describe the boarding house for me, where it was?

It was in Silver Street Randwick, it's up where Alice Road goes up from the racecourse. Silver Street was one street along from there, just behind the

20:30 only hamburger place in Sydney at the time, on the corner of the street. There was a funeral director on the other corner.

How many rooms did the boarding house have?

For boarders it had one room with three boys in it and another one which an older guy had on his own and another one out the back for

21:00 two guys. They didn't eat there, it was like a sleep-out, that was what we used to call them in Melbourne. Like a hut in the back of the yard and they used to sleep out there, a Polish guy used to sleep in the other and the three of us. It worked out alright and then I started going to dances and met up with some other young guys from Cessnock

21:30 and I moved out and moved in with them.

Where did you get money from?

I started to work, I got a job straightaway, you could get a job straightaway in those days, but they were short of people. I worked at Marrickville Margarine, Astor Radio, Hygienic Containers, I worked anywhere that I could, I did have two jobs at one time. I started one job at seven o'clock in the morning and knock off at five and then

22:00 started at seven o'clock at night at another job and knocked off at twelve o'clock and went home to sleep for a few hours and I was getting a few bucks together.

What were your plans for enlisting?

As soon as I could get a bit of a record up or get some money behind me

22:30 I then went down and did the enlisting. By then we were into 1941 and they got you to go to a Morse school down in York Street to learn Morse code.

Why did you need money to enlist?

No I just wanted money, I had no money, I had two pound when I arrived here

23:00 and that was all the money that I had, I just wanted more money. The landlady did ask me for money in advance, that was twenty five shillings a week, and I gave her the twenty five shillings and I only had five pound left. So I had to get a job close to the place and the other young fellow who was there he worked at

23:30 Astor Radio. He doubled me to work down the hill and around and down Lockland Street Waterloo down that area and Astor was down there. Once I started to get a bit of money together and I told everybody that I was twenty-one so I got full wages.

24:00 While the foundry was dirty and not an entertaining one in those days it was better than working in a factory.

Why?

Everybody was, they are still doing it today, they don't train people properly in those places, you go and sit next to Joe and he shows

24:30 you the job, he shows you all his bad points, all the things he does to skip over, not to do the job properly. When I became a lecturer for productivity I used to nail that down and I used to go out to companies and I would say, "Why did you put her up as a supervisor?" And they'd say, "She was good." And you'd go and talk to her and ask her, "How did you learn your job?" she learnt it sitting next to Nellie or somebody.

25:00 **Where did you go on the day you enlisted?**

I will never forget that down at Woolloomooloo, down on the corner, it became a Mercedes Benz place. We went in there and they showed us the top of the building, we had to all walk around the top and it was a stinking hot day.

Was it busy?

Yes they had a lot of guys there and they put you through a bit of a test, they'd ask you a few questions,

25:30 "How would I pick up a case?" "How would I work the way to this case out?" And you'd tell them and they'd draw a circle and asked you, "If they put a square in it how much of the square would the circle take?" And you'd say, "Eleven fourteenths."

26:00 How do you work out something else, although here were a lot of blokes that failed. They marched us from there and we all had our cases with us. I had a case but most of them were from Sydney and they were living in Sydney. I was moving out and I had my tools from working in the foundry

26:30 that I had brought up that I hadn't used much. I did work a few weeks in one foundry. They marched us down to Central Railway Station, down through the middle of town, up to Oxford Street and along Oxford Street and down to the railway. All the servicemen that you passed would say, "You will be sorry, you will be sorry."

27:00 They marched us down there and put us on a train and we arrived in Melbourne the next day and put us on another train down to Somers. It was raining, a real bloody Melbourne storm. We had tents and they were built on a hill and the bloody water was running down through your tent, I couldn't believe anything.

27:30 You have got no idea, when you come out of the services, although I knew the navy and you get back into industry you think to yourself, "Christ, I wonder how we won that war!" no organisation in anything.

What seemed disorganised about it?

They had a group of people

28:00 come into that camp that day, there were sixty two of us I think, and they had us in tents and we were on the side of the hill, teeming down with rain and the water was running through the tents. They gave us a straw palliasse and a blanket and you'd put the straw palliasse down on the ground the water was going to run through it. You'd try and tell somebody, a corporal

28:30 would walk past and you'd yell out to him. They'd just rant on, nothing was organised, nothing, they had absolutely no organisation at all. It's the same when you left there and they took all your clothes back and what you had to give back and you had to get your new stuff, they had no idea.

Was there a sense then amongst the blokes of,

29:00 **"Hang on a minute, what's going on?"**

Yes, it was always the same. You know how they go on about this bastardry in the services, that was a standard thing and the officers used to think it was great. Like a new lot of guys would come in and you got stuck up there. I actually

29:30 got a bit of timber from somewhere and I actually sat up in the tent all night and I was wringing wet in the morning and I was freezing cold and there were three of us in it and we were all in the same boat. We were down and they were screaming at us to go down on parade, and the parade ground was way down somewhere. The corporal was screaming at us

30:00 and telling us to stand in line and stand to attention. I said to him, "Hey, we are all wringing wet, is there any chance of us getting to some showers or do something?" He said, "This is parade." and I said, "I don't know how we are going to stand here, it's not raining now but is going to rain in a few minutes."

30:30 he said, "No, it won't rain anymore today." About ten minutes later it started to rain and we were standing there in the rain. All the guys that were in uniform who had been there before us they all marched off and we were left standing in the rain. Then a warrant [warrant officer] came down and said, "Hasn't anybody come down and done anything with you people?" And we said, "No, we were up there in the wet bloody tents!" and he said, "You have got to go and get your gear." I said, "Well, where are we going to put it? On the wet floor

31:00 in the tent?" He said, "You have got too much to say," and I said to a bloke standing next to me, "Well, you tell him will you?" and that sort of thing. There were three empty huts, three bloody empty huts that could fit forty blokes in twenty each side, nobody had done anything about getting us in, cross my heart, that happened.

- 31:30 Everywhere you went was the same thing, when we went down to Tasmania you had to sleep on a wooden floor, no palliasses, no nothing, a blanket. They'd say, "We haven't got them in." They couldn't give you the dirty ones that the blokes had had before; they chucked all them out so for three nights we slept on the floor,
- 32:00 nothing was organised.
- This first camp that you went to in Melbourne where was it exactly?**
- Down at Somers, down on the bottom end of Port Phillip Bay.
- Was it part of a military compound?**
- It was the air force camp, the navy was over here and the air force was over here. When I went and joined the navy they gave you everything at the front gate and put you down under cover.
- 32:30 They didn't have any of that in the air force, they couldn't have organised a penny toilet, if they had to have given change they would have been pushed.
- Had you elected to join the air force?**
- Yes, I had ambitions to fly.
- Where were you taken after that first camp in Somers?**
- Then we went down to Tasmania
- 33:00 to Launceston, an airfield outside there, that was virtually the same, nothing was organised down there, absolutely nothing. You went out and there was a guy there and he said, "I'll take two of you, you two come with me." And he was your pilot and he took the first bloke up and then he took you up and jiggled it around a bit and tried to make you sick and all that sort of thing.
- 33:30 **Can you recall the first time you went up in the plane?**
- Yes. Sergeant Height, I will never forget him, I don't know where he finished up but I know where I hoped he would. He did everything, loop the loop, did this did that, rolled it over, did everything and
- 34:00 we came down about half an hour later.
- Had you been in a plane before?**
- Yes once. I survived it, but that's what they did. What I was going to tell you about the huts and bastardry. We got into the hut and it was standard practice that when a new lot
- 34:30 got in what happened that the blokes who were in the time before they waited until you were all settled down and had your dinner and everything else. We'd all be in bed and the lights were out. What they did was they'd come and run through the place and they would turn every bed upside down with you in it and you couldn't switch the lights back on because they were switched off.
- 35:00 A guy was talking to me who had been there for a while and he was telling me this ritual. When we got in there I got a few blokes together and said, "Listen, what's going to happen is we are going to be laying here and they are going to come in and do this and do that." Someone said, "Well, what are you going to do? We can't do anything about it." I said, "What if we sort of organise ourselves?" And
- 35:30 one bloke said to me, "How do we organise ourselves?" I said, "The first thing we do is lock that door down the bottom there, put a couple of lockers up against it so they can't run through once they get in." I said, "They will come through the door in the front and we will watch out for them and they will come through and there would be about eight of us that would stand behind that door and let about ten of them in and then slam the door and those people, we will
- 36:00 hold that door closed so nobody else can come in and we will belt the hell out of them." It was a bit frightening in the pitch black with about ten or twelve and we all got stuck into them. After a while a bloke said, "Don't hit me anymore, it's only a joke, it's only a joke!" so we let them out. It became a story down there,
- 36:30 from then on it was only about one other lot that tried it and that was the end of it, they stopped it. I thought to myself, "Why am I going to lay in my bed and wait for some guy to come and kick me out of it?" It did go on once the next lot that came in somebody had a go at them and one
- 37:00 guy, you know those iron beds he must of hung onto his bed like that and the legs came up and I think he lost three fingers on one hand and two on the other. That's when they decided to stop it, but that was never to go on again, people were lectured on it. As I say that was what happened, I think that is what is happening today,
- 37:30 it's part of the system and they think, "We have got to toughen them up and this is what we have to do." And people will tell you what they do and all that sort of things.

Can you describe the other men who you were training with at that time?

There were a lot of good guys in amongst those guys. We had two very religious guys who used to come in after tea every night and knelt down by their bed and said their prayers and we'd all

- 38:00 move up the other end of the place while they did their thing, they were very religious. We had a terrible lot of guys who had joined the air force, a buzz went around that if you put yourself down as a grazier, if you were automatically passed out as a flyer you become an officer, that was the thing, so there were a lot of graziers.
- 38:30 I never met anybody who worked in a foundry, there was a young kid along side of me, Jack Evans, and he was a boot maker, but he didn't put down that he was a boot maker he put down something else. There were a lot of really nice people who would help you out if you were
- 39:00 in trouble with your studies, they would help you. There were a hell of a lot of them that tried to help me get through Morse but I just couldn't pick it up. I can pick it to a point and when they were testing you they'd send a word backwards. Say we are talking about 'the quick
- 39:30 brown fox jumped over the lazy dog', they'd get to fox and the next word would be back to front so I would be lost, I'd just be lost. There were a lot of really nice guys. When I counted up after the war there were sixty two of us that went in and there were forty two that went down to
- 40:00 Tasmania and only two of them came back. Young Jack Evans, the bloke I spoke about before, the boot maker and he was a prisoner of war, him and Bert Goldie, they got shot down on their first raid and they were prisoners of war for three years in Germany. Out of all that there were only four people who had survived. There was myself and two other guys
- 40:30 they got dropped out the same as me they couldn't hack it to become a flyer and they didn't want to keep going as gunners or navigators so they did some job and became drill instructors and they probably survived. But all those other guys they have all gone.

Tape 5

00:30 Can I ask you to explain where you used to go for Morse code training?

In Sydney? It was in a building at York Street in Sydney, I wouldn't know what building it was. There was a lady up there who used to run it for the air force

- 01:00 and you could go in there any day, they had mostly girls teaching you. One of the girls down there said to me, "Can you sing?" And I said, "No." and she said, "Try and sing a song for me." And I said, "Why?" And she said, "I don't think you have an ear for music." And I said, "No, I could of told you that, I joined the school band." and I said, "I could read the music
- 01:30 but I didn't know when I played a bad note." She said, "With a name like Alwyn Thomas you should be able to sing." I said, "Yes I know, I've heard that before." And she said, "You will have a terrible time trying to learn this." S-I and H are the ones that kill you, but one has two dots, one has got three and ones got four and
- 02:00 if they spelt 'this' out to you there was no way in the world that I would pick that up. 'This is something' I'd lose it and probably say it was 'is', all of those sort of things. There were certain letters but they were the worst three that I just couldn't pick up.

You did that Morse code

02:30 training before you enlisted?

For the air force I was trying to do it, I spent hours down there. I did tell them that, that I was no good at it but they said, "We will teach you when you get in." But it wasn't to be. There was a nice guy down there, a corporal that was one of the teachers in it

- 03:00 and he spent quite a few extra hours with me trying to teach me. It's terribly frustrating when you can't do something, I could send it but I couldn't receive it and it's just one of those things.

In Sydney what did the room and the equipment look like

03:30 where you did Morse code?

It was a big room and she had a lot of Masonite tables around, and you just went in and picked up the earphones and put them on. And you could fiddle around if you wanted to send something but you usually had to wait until we got somebody. They were all volunteered people that they got to do it. There might have been say a girl or a bloke

- 04:00 that might of worked in the office next door and they'd come in or some of the guys from the post office

would come up in an hour of their lunchtime and try and teach people. There weren't many in the daytime but after five o'clock at night, they used to go until seven o'clock or Saturday and Sundays, there always seemed to be plenty of people there to teach it.

04:30 **When did you go to learn because you were working in factories at this time?**

I'd go of a night, afternoon, Saturday or a Sunday; it was just one of those things I just tried to fit in days. I'd take a day off work and go down there and I'd make arrangements with one of the girls and they'd say that they were off all day tomorrow and I'd say, "I'll come down." and I'd ring in and say that I was sick.

05:00 It was just one of those things that I never got on top of.

Could you describe the equipment that you used to send Morse code?

It's just exactly the same they had in the post office; you'd press the button down, a dit for a dit

05:30 or a bit longer for a dash. You'd have a set of earphones to listen to what you were sending, or to listen to what somebody was sending you. You'd have a pen and pencil that was all that was there on the desk.

What kind of training did you receive at Somers?

For Morse, just in a big classroom and they used to

06:00 put this group on a machine tape and put a group of you sending all these stories. A guy might pick a thing out from the newspaper and he'd send that to you and then he'd ask you to send it back to him.

06:30 You'd send the fourth line back to me, what you've got. Everybody used to help one another and I used to copy off the bloke next to me half the time and try and get it right. Then it goes right in when you get down there to Somers, there's no way in the world that you could get away

07:00 with that, you just had to own up that you couldn't do it.

What other training did you do at Somers?

As well as flying, you had what they called a Link trainer, a little airplane and you'd get in it and it had a cockpit that has got things and you'd fly it and you'd try and keep it and a instructor might come along and wiggle a wing and that would put you into a spin and you had to get out of it.

07:30 When they put that thing over the top of me, it was bad enough with that but I had a problem. It was even worse when they put it over me when I was flying, a canvas thing and they'd pull it over the top. You couldn't see anything you had to do everything by compass, I just couldn't handle it.

What was the feeling that you had?

Like you were going to suffocate,

08:00 claustrophobic. That's the only time I ever had it; it's the only time I never ever had it anywhere else. When lifts have been full or trains that have been full I never got claustrophobic but only in that thing. I don't know whether it might have been some built-in fear in the back of your mind and you thought that you might crash if you kept going like that, I don't know.

08:30 I used to try and overcome it but if you don't watch yourself you freeze on it. That was a bit of bad luck.

What kind of planes were you learning to fly?

Tiger Moths, it was a biplane, it used to have a top speed of about

09:00 one hundred mile an hour or something like that, it had a stalling speed of about forty five. They were good planes to fly and I actually used to have a lot of fun. I used to go up and fly around and do loops, rolls, I could do all them on my own when I went out on solo trips. They used to say to go and do ten circuits and bumps

09:30 where you'd have to take off, go around and come back in and land and they'd give you marks on your landing. Sometimes you'd land it too high up in the air and it would crash down. Every now again you'd see a poor old Tiger Moth with wings down like that where somebody had bumped it down. I didn't have any trouble with that but it was just one of those things.

How long were you in Launceston for?

10:00 I'd say three months.

What kind of training did you do there?

That was just flying, doing Morse and doing navigation. They used to put a lot of navigational things up on the board and you used to have to say how long it would take you to fly from here to Hobart and across to there and do this

- 10:30 and what would the course be and so forth. If you got such and such a wind how would you do this and do that, all that navigation. I was good at geometry at school so I was really good at navigating. I was good at pulling guns to pieces and putting them back together again. It was quite good actually.
- 11:00 **What was the attitude of your superiors to people who did suffer from claustrophobic or other complaints?**
- Couldn't believe it, they used to scream and yell at you, they couldn't put up with anybody that couldn't learn, they really couldn't. They were doing their job and there was no good sending
- 11:30 me to Canada and finding out I couldn't do something over there, that's where all the guys went from there to Canada. They were doing their job, I was never bitter about them. I still don't think any of them ever did a good job managing anything, they were hopeless, bloody hopeless they were.
- 12:00 I hadn't done management in those days I had only worked in foundries. They seemed to be so disorganised, nothing was run properly, absolutely nothing. Food, meals, nothing was done properly, but that was my opinion but everybody used to complain about the same thing, it wasn't only me. Have you struck this before?
- I've struck all sorts of opinions**
- 12:30 **on various things.**
- They were all the old timers who had been in and the guy who was in charge down at Somers he was a World War I pilot. He wasn't doing any flying and he was only seeing that we did drill and did this and did that,
- 13:00 march up and down and all that sort of thing. I still think it's run the same because you only have to pick up the paper and read what's going on. One of Pat's son-in-laws, he's out of it now, but he was a major in the permanent army up at Holsworthy.
- 13:30 He can do things like he can tile his bathroom floor, something that I wouldn't tackle but never does it properly, all those sort of things. Christ, he's a typical bloody serviceman; he'd look at it and think it's great, and his wife.
- What happened when you realised**
- 14:00 **that you suffered from claustrophobia and the officers were, as you said, yelling at you, what was the process then of leaving?**
- I was stuck there, they just said, "He won't make a pilot." that's it.
- Where did you go then?**
- I just went back to Melbourne and the day after I got to Melbourne I went down and joined the navy and two weeks later
- 14:30 I was in the navy, it was just that easy.
- Where did you go the first time you were in the navy?**
- To join up you went down to Port Melbourne that was the navy office down there where you joined up and they gave you an exam and so forth and sent you down to Flinders. When you went into the navy,
- 15:00 let's say this was your mess you ate in it, you slept in it and everybody had a hammock. You were issued with a hammock and you put it up and they showed you how to tie it up and get into it, and a few blokes fell out and broke their legs or something but most of us survived. In the morning some of the guys went over
- 15:30 and got breakfast for the rest of us and you all went out and had a shower. It was really properly handled, the whole thing went on like a Hornby train set. That was down at the depot down there but when you got onto the ships
- 16:00 they had all these old ideas.
- Can you tell me about the training you did at the depot at Flinders?**
- Marching up and down, up down, up and down, day in and day out, march this way, march that way, shoulder arms and do all that business. Then after about four weeks of that
- 16:30 you went down to the gunnery school and did gunnery drill, no shells, just loading guns with dummies. Then they had planes that used to fly over and we had to shoot them down with cameras
- 17:00 and all that type of thing.
- What was the equipment that you were using for the mock shooting down of planes?**
- It was actually a machine gun, it was set-up the way it was. Actually it was a machine gun or a Bofors

gun and you put your harness on and you fired at them supposedly.

- 17:30 You had a camera set up in it and if you didn't hit it you were out. At rifle drill we had to spend hours and hours and hours shooting at targets like target practice with riles and revolver. I don't think we had revolvers in the navy, I don't know if the captain had one or not.
- 18:00 We had to learn how to load and unload one and fire it. I went to be a diver, I thought that I would like to be a diver and we used to go down to the swimming pool and walk around with these big huge diving gear and I was going alright and then came the final exam. We were at an old ship that was called the Serovis[?]
- 18:30 and it was at the depot. You had a chain going down and you had to lower yourself down and they were pumping air to you. I don't know what happened but I slipped and I went too far down the chain and when I got a lot further down there was mussel shells and God knows what and I nearly ripped my hands
- 19:00 to pieces, because you didn't have anything over your hands. I let go of the chain and I seemed to be dropping like a stone. There was a little gadget up the top and you turned it and that lowers the air supply down so that you don't drop so quick.
- 19:30 But I turned it too far and it filled the suit up and I floated to the top like this, and I got scrubbed on being a diver. I can get the idea that I wasn't the smartest guy in the world, I couldn't fly and I couldn't dive.

The two extremes?

Yes. I tried everything.

What was the outfit that you were wearing for that diving?

Just like

- 20:00 you see the divers with the rubber suit and you get overalls with a thing and they put the hood on and screw it around and you've got the little glass face piece. A funny thing was I didn't get claustrophobic in there, isn't that funny? But that's one of those things. I met a guy after the war that was in that diving class and he spent most of his time in the Suez Canal.
- 20:30 He was trying to light a cigarette and I've never seen a guy that shakes like that and he was only twenty five, he had the terrible shakes. The planes used to come over at night and drop acoustic mines in the Suez Canal and these guys had to
- 21:00 go out in the morning and delouse the mines. They had to take the lid off and put their hand in and twist it around. He was telling me lots of times you sort of panic and you think that you are taking too long and you tried to pull your hand out and you forget to put your hand in and pull your hand out before. He said, "It attacks your nerves." And that was why he was like that. I just wonder how he ever got on,
- 21:30 I don't know what Repat [Repatriation Department] had done for him.

Moving on from Flinders, did you go out on ships at this stage?

No, not until you got onto a ship. I came onto the [HMAS] Warramunga and she hadn't been long launched, she didn't have a full crew on her and we had to clean her up and everything.

- 22:00 Then we got her ready we were doing sea trials for about three weeks and we'd go out every morning off Sydney and do this and do that. Drop depth charges and fired torpedoes and then go after them and salvage them, then away to sea.

Can you explain the ship for me, what did she look like?

Just a destroyer.

- 22:30 The destroyer is probably the sharpest looking ship, cruisers and battleships are big but a destroyer is trim, corvettes were short version of a destroyer but they were thick, the destroyer is a good looking ship.

What was it like onboard, what was the layout of the ship?

You had what

- 23:00 they called mess decks and let's say I was on B deck. The people who were on a certain watch stayed on that side of the ship, this was open and they had the other watch on that side of the ship. You had lockers along the bulkhead and that's where you put all your clothes down
- 23:30 in the bottom of these lockers and the tables were there for your meals. You got all your own meals, you got up for breakfast and you went down and you nominated two people, everybody used to take it in turns. They'd bring up the food that you were going to have for breakfast and then you'd eat it. Then you'd have two other guys who would clean it up and take all the stuff back. You sort of lived in that area

- 24:00 and in the night time you had the hammocks swung down. Dust disease, I often think why I never got dust disease, asbestos that was sticking up, I think it was because I never smoked I didn't get dust disease or cancer. A lot of guys got dust on their lungs working in foundries, but they were the guys who used to be standing there sucking
- 24:30 on their cigarettes. You slept and ate in the same area all the time, you had to keep it clean and tidy all the time. The meals were cooked for you but you had to sort of get them ready. If you wanted carrots today you had to go down to the store and get two tins of carrots, and just open the
- 25:00 lids of them and put them on the hot stove and they'd get warmed up on the stove and put them on a plate, it's pretty rugged, it was really rugged actually.

What was in the storeroom?

Everything, just food, tins of this, tins of that, everything was tinned.

25:30 You joined the ship in Sydney; did you come up by train to join the ship?

Yes. In those days the train used to stop at Albury and you had to change trains and everyone sat up in the train, it was a rough old deal. Sometimes you'd have a cattle truck,

- 26:00 you'd be filed into a cattle truck, they'd do anything to you. They used to say once you joined the navy they could do anything to you accept make you have a baby. Then they reckoned after you had been in for twelve months they used to say the only thing they can't make you do is love the baby. It was just one of those things
- 26:30 and you had to do what you were told, do everything that was right and do it their way. The water used to come down the ammunition hoist and it would get all rusty and me being a practical guy I cleaned all the rust off it one day and put a bit of grease on it, it's no wonder I wasn't killed, it was such a sin to do that.
- 27:00 That's why I say that had no organisation, no nothing.

How long were you in Sydney on the ship before it set sail?

About four weeks doing the trials, in and out. Actually we were just about finished the trials, I think it was called the Iron Baron [possibly means the Iron Knight which was sunk off Eden on February 7 1943, the Iron Baron did exist but survived the war] that got sunk,

- 27:30 torpedoed down just up from Eden and we went down there and we couldn't find anybody. The next day a ship called the [SS] Starr King got torpedoed; she was an American liberty ship about one hundred and fifty mile off shore. We went out and we tried to get that in tow but we couldn't.
- 28:00 That was the only two sort of active things that we did, other than go out and fire the guns and do shoots. Then we went up in the war zone and picked up a convoy coming out of Townsville and take them up to Port Moresby and into Lae.

Can you tell me about that first convoy trip, the first time you went up into the war zone?

28:30 Starting with the journey out to sea, what it was like to be onboard that ship?

It was good sailing on that ship. The only thing wrong was they decided how many watches they'd have, they'd have one, two or three watches, they have got to have at least two watches. If they have only got two watches

- 29:00 and say you start off today and you were on watch you've got from eight to twelve on watch so that's four hours. Then you come off and the other guys that relieve you they have had their lunch then you have your lunch and clean up. You've got a little bit of spare time there but the captain might
- 29:30 decide to have an exercise of action stations, submarine sighted or something, so they'd chip an hour out of you there, then you had to go on watch at four o'clock. You virtually had your four hours in the morning and you had the meal and bits and pieces and cleaning up the ship after the guys had their lunch.
- 30:00 Then at four o'clock you have got to go on the first dog watch and that goes from four until six. You come and have your dinner and by the time you've had dinner and get cleaned up you have got to go to the guys who have been on the second dog watch who had relieved you and they come down. So you go on at eight o'clock until twelve o'clock.
- 30:30 You've done four hours there, two hours there so that's six hours, then by twelve o'clock that night you did another four hours so that's ten hours you've done. Then you were supposed to be allowed to go to sleep at twelve o'clock and sleep until four o'clock but it depends where you are. If you were up around New Guinea and dawn is
- 31:00 coming around about half past two, three o'clock on the clock then you have to go up for dawn action stations, and you could be up there an hour and a half. If you got into your hammock at twelve o'clock,

you wouldn't get in at twelve but let's say go in at twelve thirty you were up again at three thirty, so you've had three hours sleep. Then you've got this dawn action business, so then

- 31:30 you have got to get up at six o'clock so that you can get your breakfast and then at eight o'clock you go on another watch. You'd do sixteen hours one day and eighteen hours the next day, and that was going on all the time while you were at sea. You get to the stage where we had eighty one days out of ninety constantly at sea one time.
- 32:00 If I walked past you and touched your foot like that you'd get up and want to fight me. You can't live with all those guys living together like that with no relief, being that bloody tired and then they'd expect you to be on watch looking out for submarines or God knows what. You were battling to keep your eyes open; it was one of those things. There again it was just absolutely
- 32:30 poor management, absolutely stupid poor management. They wanted you on that first and second dog watch because that was the way that they did it while bloody [Admiral Horatio] Nelson was still alive. He decided to do that instead of trying to work it out and saying, "Hey you guys, we will do it this, this and this way." No you have got to do it the way they say. When I used to lecture on productivity I used to say,
- 33:00 "The first thing you have got to learn is you don't do that because that's the way that it has always been done, you look for a better way."

When you left Sydney were you told what your first job would be being in a convoy?

No we just went out and picked up what you did.

What did you pick up at Townsville?

If there were ships going in a convoy

- 33:30 the captain decided where you were going to be in the convoy or the convoy captain would decide if he wanted the destroyers out wide, here, there or somewhere else. On the navy ships you live on buzzers, "What's the buzz today?" "The buzz today is you will be back
- 34:00 in Sydney next week." If you wanted to make everybody happy you'd say that. I was the coxswain's mate so I used to spend my time on the wheel or going around doing the messages, hyping the guys on to watch to stations, you'd blow your whistle, where everybody hates you.
- 34:30 Wake the guys up who had to take pills. Then they'd know you'd be up to bitch so they'd say, "What's the buzz?" If you wanted to make everybody happy you'd say, "Sydney next week."

We talked about the tension on the boat if you were out at sea for a long time, what kinds of things used to happen when that tension built,

35:00 how did people react?

I'll give you a practical experience. I'm sitting here one morning and I'd just come off watch and I was eating two cold eggs and a bit of cold toast and sitting there eating and thinking how terrible it was and two guys started arguing. I was at the end of the table and they were standing

- 35:30 there and I said, "Oh shut up." One of them said, "Don't tell me to shut up!" They always had crockery plates in the navy, none of those tin plates and he said, "Don't tell me to shut up or I will hit you with the plate!" I said to him, "You're not game." And with that, crash, down came the plate on my head. So I got up and got stuck into him and I could feel the blood
- 36:00 running down my face so I got up and hit him and I was bashing his head against the ammunition hoist and they had separated us, that sort of tension. I was taken down to the sick bay and the doctor was putting the stitches in my head and they brought the other bloke in and when they brought the other bloke in I started punching him again and the doctor was pulling me back from him. That's the sort of tension
- 36:30 and that can happen at any tick of the clock.

Were there many fights onboard?

Scraps like that yes, just over silly things. A guy would decide that he wanted to do something and he'd get up and he might knock something over of another bloke's and they'd start fighting over it. By the end of the day you'd be all talking to one another again.

- 37:00 The guy that was getting stitched after me, that afternoon, he was sitting down and we were talking and he said, "How many did you get?" And I said, "I got nine or something." It was one of those things that happen, tensions do grow.

What did you do to

37:30 pass the time in terms of when you weren't on duty, what did you do?

While the ship was at sea there was little or no time to do anything, honestly. You might have got half an

hour or an hour; sometimes a guy would sit down with you and say, "Quick, have a game of cards."

38:00 But there was little or no time to do anything, you were always that damn tired. My wife now says, "I don't know how you go to sleep so quick." And I say, "I learnt that in the navy." One, two go to sleep. At sea on a destroyer there is little or no time to do anything, really and truly. Now they get off and they have drinking parties

38:30 and blokes fall overboard and they don't know where they are, I can't believe what goes on.

What did you eat for each meal at sea, what kind of food did you eat?

You could have porridge or corn flakes or something for breakfast, sometimes you could have a

39:00 couple of eggs. Lunch was just usually just a sandwich, a bit of bread and butter and something. Dinner, we had a butcher shop on the Warramunga and sometimes the guys would go and draw meat and they'd take it down to the cooks and tell them to cook it for us.

39:30 It was crappy. At Flinders Depot beautiful food, navy depot is really top class food but not on ships. You didn't get too many guys that were really fat, I can't remember,

40:00 I can't even remember having a good meal. If you went into port and you had some money in your mess kitty and you hadn't drawn that much, one or two guys were allowed to go to the store and buy stuff, but ninety percent of the time they'd come back with bloody cakes, scones. You know, nobody can cook scones like your mother,

40:30 the cake shops can't cook scones can they? Have you ever had a good scone from a cake shop? Never. So you just survived.

How did that work the mess kitty, was this a budget that the mess had?

Yes you were allowed so much food a day what you drew from the store and if you hadn't drawn it all at the end of the month you might have

41:00 three pound in your kitty.

Who was in charge of that money and going to the stores and getting the food?

We didn't have money they just built it up and the coxswain used to take charge of that. He'd say,

41:30 "A mess has got so much and B mess has got so much." Nobody ever questioned them I don't think. We never ever seemed to strike on a good couple of shoppers, some blokes would come back with all fruit and some blokes would come back with all vegetables. They didn't like tinned vegetables and the cooks didn't have any pots to cook the fresh vegetables in so they just used to put them on top of the stove.

Tape 6

00:30 **I would like to ask you about the way of the Warramunga in Taskforce 74?**

How do you know that it was Taskforce 74?

I think we touched on it earlier.

I don't think I did, you must of got it from someone else.

01:00 **What was the first action that the ship saw?**

I'm not quite sure whether it was up in Lae, but Taskforce 74 was the first thing and it had the [HMAS] Australia, [HMAS] Hobart, and the American cruiser the [USS] Phoenix, and the Warramunga.

01:30 The Hobart got torpedoed at Bougainville, we left the Hobart and the Australian there and the Hobart got torpedoed I think the next day. We did some islands up there and covered some landings for some

02:00 of those small islands off New Britain and we went into Lae and went through Lae and up as far as Madang I'm not too sure if we went that far. A few air raids but no naval action, no firing at other ships. We did have

02:30 a run at a few submarines outside Moresby one time and we were coming back and they picked up on the thing that was a submarine but we dropped a lot of depth charges but we didn't get anything. Taskforce 74 you must of picked it up from somewhere because I don't

03:00 think I told you about that today.

You might have told the person on the telephone [Archive researcher].

That might have had something to do about it.

Can you explain to me what actually happens when you used a depth charge thrower, what does it involve?

03:30 They either roll them off the back or fire them with compressed air out the side. Did I mention something about a depth charger, I might have told that to him?

No, you just mentioned then that you used depth charge thrower in Taskforce 74.

If you have a submarine in line or you think there is one

04:00 you drop the rear of the destroyer and they have got them on the side where they fire them out so that covers a fair area. One night when we were escorting some American landing crafts up to some island up there,

04:30 I will look them up for you after. One of the depth charges on the side must have had a rusted thing on it, because a depth charge fell over the side. We were only doing about six or eight knots because we were going backwards and forwards in front of the landing mob. We had American destroyer and cruiser and we had extra destroyers with us.

05:00 We had the [HMAS] Arunta and the Warramunga and I think there were two American destroyers, the Phoenix, Hobart and the Australian. This depth charge virtually went, because it goes down very quick and it wasn't fired, it went right down on the side of the ship, and it drops to a certain depth then the pressure of the water

05:30 it sends it off. It actually went off under the stern of the ship and it lifted the stern of the ship up. The first lieutenant was in charge of the watch and he yelled out down through the microphone to the captain, "We have been torpedoed!" And there was a big panic and there were guys, runners here, there and everywhere.

06:00 **This was the one that fell off the side?**

Yes. A depth charge is about that big and a round thing and it's got dynamite or whatever is in them, so explosive in it that goes off. That's why they used to had them on the side, so with the compressed air they shot them off like that and they went down and you were dropping these ones at the back and they would throw a big pattern

06:30 over a big area. If you were just dropping them off the back they would be going like and if the submarine is out of that area, so if you've got it there and you are lobbing it over there and put a big pattern.

How do you detect if there is a submarine nearby?

You have what they call ASDIC [Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee - sonar]. A guy sits there with a sounding thing on and he's listening for any movement, or other ship movement

07:00 other than our own movement. You have people onboard who looked after it and they were always hooked up to the ASDIC to see if there were any submarines around.

Where would they be located on the ship?

Right in the centre of the ship underneath the bridge, down below. They have got a sonar thing that goes down through

07:30 the bottom of the ASDIC, that's what it is it's a sonar to detect. It goes down through the bottom of the ship and picks up any noise around.

How was it possible that that depth charger fell off the side of the ship?

The depth charge has a round

08:00 steel drum like this and there is a drum attached to the depth charge that fits down into that drum and if they fire them it's compressed air because they have a compressor. That shoots it out that way and throws it a certain distance away from the ship. What happened was it has two wires that cross over and hold it, because they are

08:30 sticking out over the side like that you don't see that thing and nobody had checked them, a bit of bad management again. They didn't like putting the grease on them like I told them, for rust. One of them must of rusted away and as the ship has rolled it's got the full weight because the ship rolls a fair bit. Especially when you are going slow and backwards and forwards in front of the convoy.

09:00 It must of just rolled off because the wire broke. It went straight down instead of being thrown say one hundred yards away, so it went straight down and went underneath the stern of the ship.

You mentioned that someone hadn't supplied grease to it, what sort of day-to-day maintenance did they require?

They were supposed to look at things like that,

09:30 that's what I said, the ammunition hoist, when they went rusty, I cleaned them up. You had to clean it everyday and if it's got a bit of rust in it, clean it off and make it nice and shiny. These little small bolts on the wire that was holding it, that's what happened with one of them it's just rusted away. The maintenance should have been better than that,

10:00 somebody would of gotten into a hell of a blue [trouble] over it. I think the torpedo man who was in charge of it, he probably got some punishment over the fact that it went overboard. The rest of the equipment was there so it was the wire that broke or the nut and bolt that was holding the wire.

What is the role of the ammunition hoister?

10:30 It is heavy and it lifts the thing up and puts it down on the thing. The ammunition for the guns they are right underneath the guns where the magazine is. Say we go into action now,

11:00 the guys go down into the ammunition store, or room, a magazine they call it. They go down in a ladder and the guys up on top put a lid on it and screw it down. They can't get out because if the ship catches fire the first thing they do is to flood the magazine so that it won't blow up.

11:30 So they reckon it's better to drown three or four guys down there than for the ship to blow up and kill everybody. The guys down there they never won the lottery as far as positions on the ship, they were in the worst position in the world. That's when the [HMS] Hood got sunk and she got one shell and it went straight down into the magazine, one lucky shot from the German Bismarck.

12:00 It blew the whole ship up and there were eight hundred and something men on that and I think there was only one survivor. Those guys that are down they have got an ammunition hoist which they put a shell on it and it comes up to the guns. The guy up the top works it, once the shell comes up he cuts the hoist off and they load another one on and he puts that in the gun

12:30 and they fire it and then another one comes up like that.

Can you explain then what the role of your ship was in those landings in New Guinea and New Britain?

Covering the landing. The chaps that went ashore, you might have seen on the films like D Day and they are singing out and yelling out.

13:00 They are telling you that the enemy is four hundred yards from my position; or from such and such a position. It might be 'south south east at such and such a degree', you can see in the war pictures where the guy has got a telephone and he's telling the artillery where to fire and the artillery fires in front of him.

13:30 Every now and again the artillery makes a mistake and lobs one on their own guys if the guys are unlucky. The warships that were out there like the destroyers and the cruisers were bombarding the place. There was a very famous one on the island of Tarawa I think it is, where the Americans bombarded it,

14:00 gave it a hell of a blasting. What the Japs had done was they built foxholes and they cut every coconut tree on the island down and they had them all laid out on top of these concrete pillars, the shells were hitting them and blowing them to pieces but they weren't going through them. They don't have them like they do now, they weren't going through into the

14:30 bunkers where they were. The destroyers virtually keep the things going. I wasn't on it when they went ashore from New Britain. Some of the American tanks that were amphibious that went off the thing, they didn't get enough backup quick enough and they were getting beaten by the Japanese because the artillery

15:00 or the guns weren't firing too far instead of dropping down and they headed back out to sea. They turned around and came back out. Some of the destroyers picked up guys off them and sunk the tanks but I wasn't in that one. Everything has a certain

15:30 role in those things. The smaller guns if they come right in shore like the Oerlikons and the Bofors they can do some damage to the enemy but not like the ships guns can. The Warramunga had four point seven [inch guns] which are quite large guns with a quite high explosive shell. My action station on the Warramunga was sight setter,

16:00 the radar would come up with a sight and I would set it. I had a lot of gadgets and I'd set the gun on that area, although I couldn't see. They don't come up on video things now like they do today. They used to come up on numbers and I had to work the number around, like a clock.

16:30 It went around to eight seven so I'd have to get it around to eighty seven, move this one that way and all that.

How would you know that it was eighty seven?

That is what comes down from the bridge they'd yell it to you, like, "Up four hundred." or, "Down so and so." "Eighty seven degrees west." Or something like that. They would be yelling that to you and you'd have two lots of things

17:00 moving the guns this way or that way. The gun layer and the trainer they can move the gun around and they can move it up and down but you don't want them to push it right up, you wind it and that stops it at that angle. You don't want the guy to come right around this side, you had this one and that one and

17:30 that stops it at that angle. Check, check, check point.

At what point in the history of the Warramunga where you were performing that role?

We didn't go into action that much on the Warramunga but they did get a lot of action later. On the Trobriand Islands we went in there and covered them there

18:00 but it turned out that there were little or no Japanese on the island, they just took them over. That was supposedly a jumping point. If you read some of the things from the Japanese, their versions of the war, the really good general that went right down through China and cleaned up everything all the way down to Singapore.

18:30 There were three hundred thousand troops in and around that area and he wanted to come down to Australia. He wasn't a class general, he was a lower class guy and the big generals said that he wouldn't know what he was doing. If they had of done that they would have been all over us like ants.

19:00 With all of those guys up there they had no real artillery firing at them and they had the two big British warships that went around there to do that job that got sunk by the Japanese Air Force, nobody could believe that the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse got sunk.

19:30 Can you recall getting the news about the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse?

Yes I was down at Flinders Naval Depot when that happened and I said that I heard it on the radio and the PO [Petty Officer] that was in charge of it, we used to call him Harry. Harry said I was a bloody fool and that couldn't happen.

20:00 He must have been listening to the wrong radio, he must have been listening to Tokyo Rose [Japanese propaganda radio broadcaster], "That couldn't happen."

Why do you think he said that it couldn't happen?

He didn't believe it; they didn't believe that there were any new things on. The Japanese sent so many aircraft after those two big battleships, everybody believed that battleships

20:30 fought battleships, but they flew hundreds of aircraft at them. When the admiral that was in charge of it said, "How come you didn't do it?" He said, "We never trained our gunners properly." He said, "What do you mean?" And he said, "You have a guy on an Oerlikon gun and he's firing at a Japanese plane and he hits it and a bit of smoke comes out it and instead of him turning around and firing at the next one. What does he do? That plane's going down

21:00 and he's firing at the smoke and he's following it down." That's what happened. I've seen it happen with the Yanks up in Back [?], following the damn things down instead of picking out another one to shoot. But as I say bad training and bad management that's all it was. I knew it was bad arrangements in those days but until I started doing management courses

21:30 and doing productivity lectures I became a lot wiser and thought, that's why the war lasted so long and we were in a hell of a mess. Because nothing ever that I was in ever seemed to be organised. The Ormiston when we went out with that mob and they were going out to Wewak I think it was, fifty-four ships or something went out to

22:00 Madang and Finschhafen and Captain Dee [?] which was the destroyer in charge of the Yanks; there was no Australians in charge of the warships. He came down and he was giving all these orders saying, "The convoy will proceed at twelve knots." Our captain was laughing his head off because we broke a record coming down the coast

22:30 one time on the ship and we actually got up to six knots because we had a big tide running with us. Nobody worked out that, "Hey, you have ships in there that can only do six or eight knots." That was early in the morning and by the afternoon the convoy was on the horizon and some of the slower ships were in between us and the horizon but that is what used to happen.

23:00 Nothing was planned, nothing was really planned. You look at D Day and all the mistakes that they made in that, but it's one of those things.

Can I ask you what sort of Japanese aircraft you did encounter on those trips between Queensland and PNG [Papua New Guinea]?

23:30 They all had names for them because we couldn't say the names. The torpedo bomber was Jack; it was faster than anything that we had. I can't remember. What did they call a Zero? They gave us all names

for them, Jack, John, Charlie; I can remember them all,

24:00 they weren't important to me. When you were up there doing your job on the gunner and you weren't it properly that meant that you weren't going to survive, but as far as knowing the names. They had a lot of bombers, a couple of fighters, the Zero was the best of their fighters and that was

24:30 as good as anything the Yanks had, until the Yanks brought out the Mustangs.

Whereabouts in New Guinea and Papua did you encounter the Japanese aircraft?

25:00 I'm not sure if it was Lae or Moresby, we ran out of Moresby one time in a hell of a hurry.

What was the reason for leaving Moresby in such a hurry?

We brought up a convoy and we were refuelling and we were tied up to a wharf and we got the red signal and that was it you had to get out of there as quick as you could. Down in

25:30 the front of the destroyer there is a storeroom with tools and everything right down in the point. Down there was very stuffy and there were two portholes on the side so they had the portholes opened and when you go to sea and you are going to go into action you close up everything. The lower deck that is all screwed down, the blokes down there are down there and

26:00 they have their jobs down there and the next one up and so forth. The stokers are always down in the front of the thing, but they left those two portholes opened. We tore out and the water came in there and almost flooded the mess deck down on the bottom. People were working on the pumps all night pumping all the water out of the destroyer.

26:30 We just left because they were coming over.

Do you remember the first port you arrived at in New Guinea?

Yes it was Port Moresby; we did a few runs to Port Moresby, in and out of Port Moresby. Mainly taking troopships up there, escorting them.

27:00 Old Tokyo Rose she used to come on every night saying, "We have remnants of the Australian ships hiding up in Princes Bay or somewhere up in Queensland." She could name them, the Phoenix. The Phoenix was the only ship that never got hit at Pearl Harbor, she chuffed out on her own

27:30 to Coffs Harbour. I can't remember just bits and pieces of that sort of thing. I didn't see much action on the Warramunga, only two or three.

I'm interested in what your first impressions were at Port Moresby?

It was just a place, you couldn't describe it,

28:00 it was virtually a jungle with a couple of piers built out with little or nothing there, just stores that the Yanks had built. There was a ship sunk in the harbour there. When we were on the Ormiston up there one time and we went over and they broke

28:30 a spar on the Ormiston on the ship and we just went over for the hell of it. Got the gunners off the ship and got the spar off the ship that was sticking out of the water, the hoist and the cargo we undid all of that. The blokes from out ship came over, it wasn't our job but we did it. It was just a bit of fun, we had a day out,

29:00 but it was a pretty dead sort of a place. You had to go outside, I went right up one time I thought I might get far enough up to see my brother but he wasn't there that time. It had a big airstrip just outside the town; and the bombers used to go out every night bombing. There were

29:30 three or four big American planes waiting to load some Australian troops on it one time and a bomber had taken off and he crashed right in amongst all the troops, and God knows how many guys got killed there. That was just outside of the town of Moresby town itself, it's built on a hill and it goes up. It was just a nothing place,

30:00 and so is Lae. Madang was the same only a few tin sheds I don't know how people used to live and work up there in the gold mines before the war.

Did it look like a war zone?

Yes it did because there were millions of oil drums all over the place everywhere you went, they all had

30:30 copped a battering, they all had bombs dropped on them.

You mentioned your brother, when you were in Port Moresby how did you know where he was?

I didn't know where he was but I knew that he was in New Guinea somewhere, I thought that if I could get up past the strip I could talk to some guys and ask them where the 6th Division sigs [signals] are.

31:00 **Can you describe then for me how you went about trying to find him?**

Just walked onto the road and hitched a ride with a Yankee jeep that was going up towards the strip and hitched a ride somewhere else with a guy. We came to a river that they couldn't cross, me and another guy we crossed it. We found his brother; he was in a hospital up there. Nobody could tell

31:30 you where anything was so we headed back which was a lot harder than going up. Anytime you were there and you were heading up towards the strip it was a good thing to do because the Yanks had everything. They had American sailors' girl cooks,

32:00 they would be cooking doughnuts from daylight until dark. I can't remember having a doughnut ever in my life until I had a Yankee one. We would go up and get ourselves a few doughnuts, it was something different. Sometimes we used to call into the pictures for free, the Yanks had pictures and if you could get off the ship of an evening you could

32:30 go for free and watch the pictures. At Wewak we watched the pictures for free one time and they hadn't long started when we got ashore and there were six guys up in the back of the picture theatre and some Japs came down and cut their throats, four Yanks. Someone suddenly woke up to what was going on because they heard a bit of a stir and

33:00 the lights went on and the picture went off and blokes were running around with machine guns. There were four blokes up there with their throats cut at the back of the pictures. It was open air and they had chairs but they couldn't work out how it happened but it did.

While the picture was rolling?

Yes and they actually came down when it was all darkness and the

33:30 guy showing the picture was down in the middle and I think we were about eight rows from the back. We got there a bit late and we were about eight rows from the back and these blokes were up behind us that got killed. There were all sorts of things that happened up there that people didn't want known that had happened. At Wewak there was a great big cave and the Japs had

34:00 that as a hospital in the cave and they had another cave on the side with a train in it. If you were in fighting they'd be running the train out with their artillery in it blasting away at the ships and then running it back into the cave. It took a while for the Yanks to wake up to blow away the railway lines.

34:30 They should of blown up the railway lines instead of trying to find out where to hit the cave. Some bright Yank must of thought, "I'll have a go at the train line." And the next time the train came out she hit the lines and they rolled over and that was the end of it. The hospital one they sent some Japanese women, you didn't know if they were nurses or geisha

35:00 girls, you didn't know what they were. They came out and when the Yanks ran over they grabbed them. There was a Japanese guy up on the hill with what we used to call a woodpecker machine gun and he shot quite a few Yanks. The Yanks got upset about that so the Yanks backed a Japanese petrol carrier, a tanker up to the cave

35:30 where they had the hospital and put a few holes in it. Ran it into it and then lit it and it blew up inside the cave, they blew the hospital to pieces and everybody in it. It was a fun thing that war, all those things that happened, you think about it sometimes and you think, "God what happened there when that happened." But you were all a part of it

36:00 but you didn't care. As far as I'm concerned I wouldn't forgive the Japanese until I draw my last breath, I think they are the worst people in the world. If you had another war tomorrow they would do exactly the same thing.

Why?

Because that's the way that they are, they killed men, they starved men to death. My late wife's cousin Billy Cook who was a pretty famous guy,

36:30 he had thirteen bayonet wounds in him, they strung him up and used him as bayonet practice and there were six of them.

What evidence did you see of Japanese brutality?

After it was over you saw the guys that came back, the guys that came back and you saw them in Perth, you couldn't believe

37:00 how sick and thin they were. This guy at that stage he had twelve bayonet wounds in him, he was laying on the ground and the guy next to him Graeme [interviewer], a Japanese soldier came back and stood on Billy's back and stabbed the bloke in the back to make him groan. And he

37:30 turned around and stabbed Billy again and it went in the back of his neck and came out underneath his eye. He had thirteen wounds like that. After they left he crawled down into the water and the sea lice was eating the flesh off his wounds. Some priest found him and they got him into a boat and they escaped and he came back here. Nobody could believe how he lived with all those bayonet wounds in

him.

- 38:00 Two years after the war he was working on the railways down at Central Railway Station, was a wheel tapper, they don't have them now but they used to have guys that went along tapping the wheels to see if they had any cracks. He walked backwards into a train and he cut one leg off there and another off here and they sent him down to Sydney Hospital and they had him in casualty. At two o'clock in the morning my father-in-law went down and they hadn't done anything to him and he blew up and
- 38:30 they said, "But he's going to die." But he said, "No he won't, he will survive." The Yanks got interested in him and they sent him to America to a university and they found out the only reason he didn't die was because his nerves didn't react. If your nervous system is shocking it can kill you and me, but his didn't react to shock his nervous system
- 39:00 and that's how he survived. He died about eight years ago, they wrote a lot about him in a book, the Sun newspaper took up a collection for him and they built him a house down here near one of the bays with a ramp to go down to the boat and he'd go out fishing and he used to come over and visit our place.
- 39:30 My wife and him were pretty close when they were kids and she'd make a cup of tea and walk it out to his car. He had a steel thing here and one here and he could walk on crutches, but he lived until he was seventy three or seventy four, after all that. I had a guy that I worked for me who was captured by the Japanese,
- 40:00 him and three English soldiers. This officer and about four Japanese came up on them they had no guns, no ammunition no nothing they were just sitting down and they were exhausted. They came up and they gave them a spade each and told them to dig a grave, they were going to execute them. Because Jimmy had worked in a foundry he knew how to use a shovel and he was in front of the other guys
- 40:30 and he was trying to tell the English guys what to do but he said that they couldn't hear him. The Japanese officer could speak perfect English, he was a young guy and Jimmy decided to take the chance and the three guys were standing there with guns on them and the officer was standing on the side and he got a shovel full of dirt and he threw it at them and charged at them with his shovel.

Tape 7

- 00:30 **You mentioned Tokyo Rose, can you tell me what that was?**

She used to come on every night, Tokyo Rose, she was like that guy in England [Lord Haw-Haw] but they hung him after the war, the English did.

- 01:00 She was on the radio and she was called Tokyo Rose and she used to tell the American troops that they had been beaten here and beaten there. They had an Australian guy that was very lucky to get out of it too, he broadcasted for them up there. She used to come on with this crappy news and they used to play it to the sailors and that sort of thing.
- 01:30 The night she was saying about the remnants of the Australian fleet here we thought that we were hiding up there and they knew where we were all the time, they were getting some information from somewhere.

Did you tune into that radio while you were away?

No, the ship used to tune into it if it was on, if we were stopped not when we were at sea. Say we were tied up somewhere

- 02:00 you could always get it. She used to rant and rave to you, tell them how they were being defeated here and defeated there. The silly songs the Americans had about it.
- 02:30 The one that upset her was Johnny got a Zero.

What was that?

The one song that seemed to upset her more than anything was Johnny got a Zero, a song came out, all the silly songs that come out during the war and they were singing a song about Johnny when he went to school he always got zeroes but today he got a Zero, he shot down a Japanese plane. "Johnny got a Zero, Johnny got a Zero".

- 03:00 I think it was one of the Andrew Sisters songs. It upset poor old Tokyo Rose. If the Americans had it on they used to cut her out and cut across her and they'd play different songs to cut across her. Every now and again while she was talking you'd hear something come across and there would be an American
- 03:30 voice and they'd be playing some song like that.

The Americans tried to interrupt her transmission?

Yes. They used to try and cut across her to just ballyhoo her I think.

What was the pay like on the

04:00 Warramunga?

We used to get the great sum of ten shillings a day if you were an able seaman, you got three pound ten a week. When we were on the merchant ships and the merchant seaman went up to get his fortnightly pay

04:30 and we'd get seven pound and they'd get sixty or seventy pound because they got all these extras. They got more money for every line they cross on the thirty ninth parallel or the thirty three, for every one they cross they got so much extra an hour. When they used ammunition

05:00 on the ship they got much extra an hour and they got this and they got that. Ninety percent of them were Communists; they were all Communist Party people. The Communist Party, when you went into a port and even up in Townsville they used to march up and down the wharf and start a second front,

05:30 poor old Russia was getting a hiding. When you first joined up, my brother's lot and they had one march through the streets of Sydney and people in the streets were screaming out at them and saying, "Five bob a day killers!" They got five shillings a day as a private. That actually went on.

06:00 Who was yelling out?

People on the street the crowds on the street, mostly Communist Party people when they first went to the war. The Communist Party, it doesn't matter what anybody tells you; they had a terrible effect on this country for years.

I understand there is a story that you told our researchers about Lady Astor?

That's rude.

06:30 Can you tell me that story?

On a destroyer and all the light ships they used to get what they called 'hard laying money'. Say if you got ten shillings a day like we were getting on the battleship, the guys on the destroyer might get eleven shillings, an extra shilling a day. An extra shilling for

07:00 what they called 'hard laying money'. There is nothing comfortable on the ships; you didn't have bunks like they had on battleships or cruisers. The story was with Lady Astor and she got into parliament, she was a Yank and she came over to America and married an Englishman

07:30 and then she got into parliament. She was the one that stopped the hard laying money on the destroyers. She demanded that she go on a trip on a destroyer and they took her down the River Thames is the story. She reckoned that it was quite comfortable and they didn't deserve it.

08:00 The story goes she went down in the cabin with the captain and they had a good time and she had a good time. She said, "There is nothing wrong with these ships they are lovely." She played up so she had a good idea. When the ships used to roll of a night and the water used to come down the ammunition hoist, guys used to scream out about Lady Astor and all the rude things they could think of.

08:30 Tall stories that did go around. I think the guys that were on the minesweepers still got hard laying money, I think they got one and ninepence a day. We used to get ninepence a day for our gunnery badge and tuppence [twopence] a day for

09:00 the 'undetected crime badge' they used to call it. [If you were] in the navy for three years and you hadn't been in trouble so you got a 'good conduct badge', and you got tuppence a day for that. You got ninepence a day for your gun layer's badge; you got sixpence a day extra because you were on a merchant ship. When the war finished

09:30 and there was all this deferred pay we were suppose to have they didn't give it to us for something like ten years, it was ten years we had to wait for that. I know because when I got married and that was 1951. The Queen of Holland, Queen Wilhelmina she gave us

10:00 six guilders a day and a guilder was worth two shillings for every day we spend on their ships. I got more off her, spent about eight or nine months on their ships and I got more from her than I did from my deferred pay.

What was your uniform like on the Warramunga?

Just an ordinary sailor's uniform.

Can you describe it?

10:30 Bell bottom pants, a white shirt, they used to have a dress of the day if you were up in the tropics, they might say, "Wear shorts and shirt today." The bosun's mate used to do that when I went around in the morning blowing the whistle saying the dress of the day. Just an ordinary sailor's uniform, but you didn't

wear your

11:00 hat at sea. When you were up close to action you all wore your lifejackets.

Did people get seasick?

Yes, lots of people got seasick. I got seasick, when one of those

11:30 big landing crafts got hit by a torpedo and there were a lot of people in the water and we took some onboard, we had about thirty badly injured fellows onboard. The doctor went around and we used to call him a 'sickbay tiffy'

12:00 and the first aid guy went around with him. The doctor said, "He's one, too." "No just write him off." "Attend to this guy first." Where to put them and all that sort of thing.

12:30 Then some of them died and I was bosun's mate and I was in the bosun's party and we had to sew them up in canvas, and this guy, I put two pennies on his eyes because we couldn't close his eyes. Every time I looked away the guy behind me would take the pennies off. I did about three and the smell was terrible and I got seasick.

13:00 On the destroyers you went into this doorway to go underneath, so they wouldn't let any light out during the night they had big thick curtains one way and this way. They were like hessian but they dipped them in tar to make them thick and even when you went through them it was a terrible smell. Between that

13:30 and the stench of the guys that had died I went through and brought my heart up and I couldn't go back through them. I virtually lived on the deck for seven days until we got to Brisbane. When I was going to sleep I got to one of the mess deck lockers and take all the brooms and mops out and sleep in that.

14:00 I always had a hose out on the deck to wash down, it had to be dark and I used to have a shower under a cold water tap. When I came back on after we had five days off in Brisbane and a guy came in and we were

14:30 talking to some girls outside a newspaper office, there were three of us. One of them knew this farmer guy that came in and she waved to him and he came over to talk to her. He said to us, "What are you guys doing?" And we said, "We have three days leave and we are just wandering around your city." He said, "Look, I'm going back to the farm tonight and it's only about thirty

15:00 mile away, go and get some clothes for yourself, can you do that?" And we said, "Yes." And he drove us down to the wharf and he took us up to the farm for three days. I think that's where I got the bloody boils too because I always loved cream when I was a kid and she made a lot of cream for us and I think I drank that much of that cream. I went back onboard the ship and I didn't

15:30 think I would make it through the thing, but I did but I never got seasick again after that. I got seasick about ten years ago up off Port Macquarie, I was out fishing one day and a bloke had some mullet gut as bait, I got a whiff of that and I got sick. A lot of guys used to get seasick. You would believe this,

16:00 you'd be in Sydney Harbour and as soon as we untied the ship he'd be seasick. He had a thing, up here somewhere.

You mentioned the leave and you went to a farm, whereabouts was the farm?

Marburg, it's a small city outside of Brisbane. It was a German

16:30 city, there were a lot of German people that lived there. It's like Holbrook down in New South Wales from Wagga. That was called 'German Town' and when World War I broke out they changed it to Holbrook. When Lieutenant Holbrook got a VC [Victoria Cross], he was a British submarine commander and he

17:00 got a VC in the Dardanelles and they called the town after him.

Could you tell me about those three days at the farm and what that was like for you?

It was really magnificent. The guy took us all around the farm; they ran a dance for us too on the Friday night. They got all the people from around and the three of us went to a dance, they were

17:30 mostly Italians. You asked me before we knocked off about the Germans and Italians, there was never any problems with the Italians pre war, there was never any of that business. They came and went and most of them owned a fruit shop or something.

18:00 The only thing we used to think that was odd was the girls that would be going to school, at the end of the year and somewhere in the middle of the next year they would tell you that they had been married by proxy and their husband was coming out and they didn't know what he looked like. Some of the poor girls were sixteen or seventeen and they got blokes forty five

18:30 and fifty. That was the only think we used to think about, there was no racism in those days.

Why did you leave the Warramunga in the end?

They put me ashore because I had all these bloody boils, I got them on my knees, on the base of my spine, and it's a form of staph [staphylococcus infection].

19:00 In the foundry industry where everybody has a shower at night going home and you'd be walking through crystals and you'd get tinea and all that sort of thing. But if a guy had a boil we'd quarantine him, so he couldn't go into the shower until the other guys were finished. We used

19:30 to have about eight or ten towels and you got a clean towel everyday, the next one was boiled up the day after so that they wouldn't spread. I know my grandsons when we took them away one time and there were some kids there with boils and they came back and I said the easiest thing in the world to transfer from one person to another.

Where did you go once you got taken off the ship?

Went to Townsville,

20:00 they didn't even put me in the sick bay, they just treated me. I was a guard on the signal station up top, I was only there a couple of months and then I was flown to do the DEMs [Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships] course down there.

What did a guard on the signals do?

The girls up there were navy girls that were all

20:30 trained and they were picking up Japanese signals and they were picking up their codes and working their codes out and picking up their signals. Have you ever been to Townsville and seen that big mountain? That's where they were up the top there. I was just up there on guard duty; they had a guard there twenty four hours a day so that nobody came into the place.

Did you talk to the girls much about what kind of messages they were receiving?

They wouldn't talk to you about that that was secret. I fixed the guard job up for them, a dog followed me on the street and I took him back up there and he became our watch dog, I don't know who owned him

21:30 but when I left he was still there and we called him "Mutt."

Tell me about the DEMs training; tell me what you had to do for that?

You had to learn how to fire a gun, all the gunnery business; it was gunnery practice day in and day out. We used to make mistakes on purpose and the old PO [Petty Officer],

22:00 if you made a mistake he'd make you run a mile and a quarter around the flagpoles and send you for a run. If I dropped a shell he'd send you for a run. Sometimes he'd only have one bloke left with the guns, all the rest would be running around, just for the hell of it, it was to take the monotony out of it. We learnt different guns, we learnt Oerlikon guns,

22:30 all the different ones and we had to learn to pull them to bits and put them together. It was quite a novel course.

How big were the guns, what size are we talking about?

Four inch guns they had down here, a four inch shell is a pretty heavy shell.

23:00 They didn't have any explosives in them they were just dummy shells, but they weighed the same weight as a shell. Sometimes if you did something wrong he'd make you stand there holding a shell for about twenty minutes and the number of blokes that used to drop the shell, we used to try and drop them on his foot if you could get close enough to him. We were dying to

23:30 do that but he was a wakeup to us. They were big shells; you had to learn how to put them in and pull them out do this and do that. The fact that I had been on guns on the Warramunga it didn't matter, you had to learn all over again. How to pull a machine gun to bits, how to pull an Oerlikon gun to bits.

Where was the training?

Down at Flinders Naval Depot.

24:00 Nobody walked anywhere on the Flinders Naval Depot, you had to double everywhere you went.

Why was that?

It was what Nelson used to do, or somebody before him. You never saw anybody walk, and if you walked that was the end of you. So bloody officer a mile away would see you and dob you in. If you wanted to go from here to there you had to stand up

24:30 and double. You got terribly fit down there, you were really fit. The food was always good down there, good meals. Navy life down there was alright and the depots were alright.

What was your first posting as a DEM, where did you go,

25:00 **which ship did you go to after you were trained?**

The Ormiston .

Tell us about that ship.

It was a cargo passenger ship. They had done it up, it had been torpedoed, saved and came back again. Then we were running troops from Townsville, Darwin, and Cairns anywhere the troops were from Brisbane up

25:30 to Port Moresby, Lae, Wewak, Finschhafen, Madang, she was virtually a troopship. We had a group of

26:00 English gunners on there. In the first place some of them only had one gunner or two gunners but when they decided to train them for it. The British sent some people out to man some of the ships and they sent Bofors guns out with them, which was a bigger gun to fire at aircraft. We

26:30 had seven Australians and there were five of them on that and that was for six months.

Was that an Australian ship?

Yes, Australian crew. The crew used to go on strike every now and again.

27:00 **Why was that?**

Because that was what they were, they were all Communist dominated unions, wharf labourers. All that business with the wharf before, your father

27:30 or husband or my father or me we could never of got a job on the wharf, it was all tied up with the groups. If you weren't in the party you didn't get a job, even when the Communist Party dissolved they still hard lined us as far as that was concerned. We had a bit of it in the metal trade, in the foundry industry. I don't know whether I was lucky or I managed

28:00 properly but I never had strike in all the years I was there. The whole of the ACI [factory] used to be out on strike and the foundry used to still work.

On that troopship, can you tell me what it was like to ferry the troops back and forth, what was the journey like?

It was alright, people were happy to come back. They played two-up and gambled on the decks, and

28:30 the ones coming back were loving it the ones going up there weren't happy. They used to make themselves liquor, fermented almonds and apricots and God knows what. The little groups used to have a little still and they used to make themselves pure alcohol and

29:00 it was a challenge to do those things. It was always tense; if there were submarines around and they knew everything we had and did,

29:30 they had a good line down here somewhere, but nobody ever found out the real story after the war. I've bitched about them putting the memorial tags down there at Garden Island, the blokes who came in on the Japanese submarines

30:00 that came into the harbour, they were the enemy.

You say it was tense, can you tell me what you had to do during those trips?

We had to be on watch most of the time up on the gun deck, four hours at a time, all the time every time. You'd have twenty four hours a day and there were five of you in one cabin and you were coming in and wanting to get into bed

30:30 and up on the bow there was no shelter there. If you went down under the gun deck in the middle of the night how would you see a submarine from there? Some of the storms we had in the Coral Sea, you were usually wringing wet. Lots of times I used to just walk in and turn the shower on

31:00 and walk in with my clothes on, you'd get undressed under the shower because you were so bloody cold. The other blokes would go off and there would be one bloke still in there and he'd be going crook because you're making noise. It was like that all the time. I was on watch or doing something but you were kept busy all the time. You had no time to just

31:30 sit around.

When you say that you were on watch for submarines and the enemy, what kind signs are there that there is a submarine around?

You have got to be able to see if his periscope is up, and if his periscope is up and if you are smart enough or quick enough, and you always had glasses. The government

32:00 asked people if they had any field glasses that they used at the races to give them into the government, which they did. You usually had a good pair of field glasses and you just keep your eye around the whole time. It was behaviour to do it properly because if a bloody torpedo hits they have won.

Were there any sounds that you would be looking out for?

32:30 No, unless there was gun fire. The ASDIC people on the escort vessels used to do that, you always had a couple of destroyers in convoys with you.

33:00 We never had a convoy attacked.

After the Ormiston where did you go from there?

Went from there onto the Sibigo, the one that got sunk.

Tell me about that boat, who owned it what the crew was like?

It was a Dutch merchant ship; I've got a little bit of paper in there,

33:30 she was resurrected against the wharf, she was laying against a wharf or something in Indonesia for so long so they used her. It was just an average little cargo ship. When we went over to the dock near Ryde there was this huge big

34:00 tanker over there and we thought that that was what we were going on, but right down the back there was this little ship and it was the Sibigo. We got up there and got her back, there was a lot of damage done to her when we first went up there.

Who was the crew, or where were they from?

34:30 Some were from Indonesia, Bali, Wewak, they were all a mixture. The captain was a Dutchman; the first mate was about a quarter-caste Indonesian,

35:00 the second mate was a Dutchman and the fourth mate was an Indonesian. They weren't bad but there were some bad guys among them, they used to play gambling

35:30 but there were a couple of guys who used to stand over. There was one guy and he used to have a knife and he could throw that and hit anything with it, they told me that he had been in jail all his life and he got out and came down to the ship. When we came back and went up the second time we had a lot more crew

36:00 because they put these extra people off to take back to Wewak.

What was the role of that ship, what was it actually doing at that time?

Taking supplies and ammunition up to the Americans. Taking these guys back who had been living in Australia.

Tape 8

00:30 **I would like to talk in detail about how the shipwreck came about; can you describe what the weather conditions were when you left port and where you left from?**

We left port from Townsville and we sailed up through the opening of the reef

01:00 which is just off Cairns somewhere, we headed up for there. It was very wild weather even going up through the reef. We had two Australian wireless operators onboard, one was a guy of only nineteen and the other one was a senior one. They told

01:30 us straightaway but the captain had asked for permission to standby because we didn't want to go out into the Coral Sea because there was cyclonic winds and there was a cyclone supposedly coming down. He was told, no, he had to go out and that is the absolute truth.

02:00 We sailed out into it and we survived for three days, battling the cyclone before the ship sunk. It started off in the first place that she was a coal burning ship and the seaman didn't want to go down firing

02:30 the boilers because they thought that she would sink. hat we did was there were five gunners on her and the captain asked us, when you come up from down below on a ship like that, they have what they call an air lock up and you go in through a door and shut that door before you open that door to go otherwise all the hot air will come up and it's liable to

- 03:00 kill the guy on the spot. e took an hour about standing down there with a sub machine gun and keeping them down there, we wouldn't let them through. I don't think that I would of shot anybody but the fact that we had our machine guns. We put a lock on the door, we had it locked across. We said that
- 03:30 we would allow some more to go down, if three went down then three could come up but they would have to come up one at a time, we did that for a while. But then nobody would go down and that was on day two, nobody would go back down again. The guys that were down there they were down there for up to twenty four hours the last lot that were down there. The ship was
- 04:00 just horrendous, the size of the waves that were breaking over her. The cooks wouldn't cook any meals; we were boiling eggs and eating boiled eggs. At one stage I went down and they had put a new big refrigerator on the ship and they had
- 04:30 bolted it down to the deck just outside the saloon door. I opened the saloon door, I was going to go in to get some more eggs and the fridge came right along the deck and actually took the door that I had opened, just ripped that off its hinges and went straight over the side of the ship, it was a huge big thing. It was this wide and it would have been as long as this room,
- 05:00 it was really big. We were down to eating Vita Brits [breakfast cereal] with butter on them that was all that there was there to eat. Then the
- 05:30 wireless operator he was trying to keep his equipment dry and he came down and wanted all our blankets out of the cabin that we had. They were navy blankets to put around his gear, in the first place I wouldn't give them to him, then when I looked and saw how bad the waves were, so we did that. On the second day the steering
- 06:00 broke down and they couldn't steer from up forward and the waves were actually breaking right over the top of us, they were huge. They reckoned the wind was blowing at one hundred and sixty mile an hour, I don't know whether it was or not I don't know but that is what the score was in some of the right ups. There were four of us gunners and one was down below keeping the guys
- 06:30 down there. The four of us we got the steering going down aft, they had emergency steering and we got the big chain around it and they had to steer it from the rear from then on. They had two guys steering it because it was a huge big steering wheel, and for them to turn it anyway it was a big job.
- 07:00 We were all down with the wireless operator and it was only a small room that he had. But we were all in there together and I was thinking to myself, "There is no way in the world." Somebody said, "It's not pitching so much now." And I said, "No because it's filling up with water." He was sending out distress signals and he claimed, I know he wasn't telling lies,
- 07:30 but they said that it was impossible later on when I went to a marine enquiry, they said no, that didn't happen. I said, "I was in the room and Robby was there with me, we were all in the room together." He said the guy had told him that he had picked up the signal and to get off the line because there were other people that need it and they'd deal with him as soon as they could. That was going on for something like
- 08:00 three or four hours where they wouldn't even pick him up. When he sent the last one he put on it, "SOS, SOS, we are all abandoning ship." As we were going out of the room a message started to come but he had gone outside and I'm no good at Morse anyhow. That was the
- 08:30 end of it. Then the captain decided to abandon ship. Some of them went on the lifeboats on the port side and some on the starboard side and I was on the starboard side. That's when I told you that I remember seeing the Indonesians cutting the rope and spilling everybody out. Have you seen it on the pictures how they cut the rope and it drops down? I
- 09:00 was standing there wondering what I was going to tell Robby's mother when I got home but he came up. Him and I and another guy, Snow came up then and Robby pulled him in but Snow went down the back to a raft. I went up the ladder first to try and get on the one up top and the Indonesians wouldn't let me up and they were punching and kicking me and I landed down on my back on the deck.
- 09:30 I had to lay there for a while and Robby came back and helped me up and we went down on the raft. The ships, you know how you see the lines going up to the mast on an angle? Well the rafts are hanging on the side of those. We got onto it and the ship virtually laid almost on its side, and the raft didn't move. I realised that it hadn't
- 10:00 been unhooked, I was the only one that had a knife. I had a navy knife which has got a blade on it and a spike. I got down and I was able to get the spike in the ring and I was able to unwind it. While I was underneath it she went right down again and I seemed to be under the water forever. I was thinking to myself, 'It's gone, it's gone!' I pulled my knife out and
- 10:30 we came up momentarily and I grabbed hold of it and I swung up on the side of it and I looked on the side of the ship and the captain and the other two gunners and a third mate were running along the side of the ship to get on our raft. Then a big wave came and it rolled again and it washed us clear. One of the gunners

- 11:00 lobbed over and we were able to grab him but the other one got caught up in the ropes on the side and he was hanging up there, it was tight around his chest and he was waving to us and he was hanging. I tried to tell him to jump but he couldn't, he couldn't undo himself. Then it rolled right down and I thought at that stage we were going to go down the funnel,
- 11:30 and the boilers blew up and that's why I reckon I'm deaf in the ear. They said no, that was an old thing that I had when I was a baby. I had an operation on my ear but my mother had denied that but you can't do anything about it. She just came up like that and slid down backwards and that was the end of it and she was under the water. We had, I'd say,
- 12:00 almost up to twenty people hanging onto that raft, because there were a couple of other rafts drifting around with nobody on them but they were over. There was another raft full of natives on the other side and they said they ended up with about twenty and they finished up with only six of them survived. Then it became dark and the raft kept turning over in the night.
- 12:30 One time I was swimming the wrong way and it came up and hit me in the back of my head. Another time somebody had me around my neck and I was trying to push him off and trying to get rid of him because he just grabbed me around the neck like that and my hand hit the raft. That was number two and number three it just came down and I just started to swim
- 13:00 and I don't know but I swam just swam the right way and a bit came up and hit me front on and I got on it. If you got on it first you were right because you could lay on the thing because it's shaped like that and down. If you got on first you got to lay on the bottom and hang on. If you were on the top you'd wish that it would swing over again and have a better chance of getting a better spot, that's what goes through your mind. Then I
- 13:30 found a bit of loose rope, I was on the side and I couldn't get on, one of the Indonesian guys kept pushing me off and I tied the rope around my ankle and the next time I rolled over she came up, as it came up I got it caught on my ankle and it came down and hit me on the head and I don't know how I survived that. It couldn't of hit me that hard but it seemed like it did
- 14:00 at the time and I was able to get back. That kept happening virtually every time a huge big wave came over and she'd turn up and you'd lose more blokes. The next day we woke up we had four Indonesians, the first mate, one wireless operator and we lost one.
- 14:30 I could hear Shultz singing out and blowing his whistle, he seemed to be two or ten yards away and I kept singing out to him, "Come this way, can't you hear me? Can't you hear me?" And he just kept blowing his whistling and singing out, "Help, help!" Then another big wave came and that was the end of him, I think he finished up on the wrong side of the wave. Then we sat down on the raft and it came light
- 15:00 in the morning and a piece of timber floated up and we grabbed that, that was the piece of timber that went across the top of the raft. Because the rafts were built like on oil drums and they were fitted and they had two compartments in the centre, one had a bit of food, tins of milk and so forth. The other had a canvas tent to go over the top of it. The wharfies [wharf labourers] used to pinch anything
- 15:30 that was any good, so that was gone. The two small pieces of wood was in there and we put them on the end of the raft and put this big piece across and that's how it fitted for the tent so we had that. There was a red flag in there and an oar came past us and got the oar and we used the bit of rope, that I tied around my leg was still there, so we
- 16:00 tied that oar up so that we had a mast and we put the red flag on it so that we could be seen. The first mate said we weren't that far outside the reef and we could get washed up on the reef. We were trying to work this red flag because it was wide and it was about seven or eight foot long and we were trying
- 16:30 to work that as a sail because he said that we would have to sail somewhere else otherwise we'd crash onto the reef and not live. I don't know where he got that information from but he was looking at the stars and we were trusting him because he should of known his way around with the stars. We had a look at what food we had survived with and there were two tins of biscuits.
- 17:00 And obviously the wharf labourers had opened them and they weren't any good and they stuck them back down again, because you could see that they had been opened with a jimmy or something, so they were no good. Not that they would have been because they were just dried biscuits. We had five tins of Ideal milk, little tins like that and there was a beaker with that in that box.
- 17:30 We had a long block of chocolate and it had forty eight bits of chocolate on it.

Were the life rafts equipped with water?

- 18:00 No, they do have water things on them but it was like a thermos and it was attractive so they pinched it. I suppose we should of checked the damn things before we left port, but that wasn't our job and I thought that the ship officers did that but they couldn't of done it.

18:30 What sort of preparations did you have in training for that sort of an emergency?

None, we didn't have any but we should have and that was a bad blue [mistake] on our part that we

never really did check those things, we knew that they pinched stuff. We had the tins of milk and I was the only one that had a knife and I had it around my neck. At one stage two of the Indonesians were talking and the

- 19:00 second mate who was with us he understood what they were saying. He said, "Watch your knife; they are talking about taking your knife off you and taking charge." So I had it around my waist and the other thing we had was five tins of camp pie, about that thick and about that around, those little tins. We said that we'd ration the food out. We
- 19:30 had only just sunk so we wouldn't of needed anything today and we'd see about it tomorrow morning. It would be best to have the milk between us in the morning and afternoon. I don't know whether that was the best idea in the world, so I had the knife and I was in charge of it. We measured out a beaker and everybody had a
- 20:00 drink of milk in the morning and we didn't touch the camp pie because it was only the second day. We had a bottle of one hundred aspros, so we all had an aspro for tea that night, that's true.

Why did you have the aspros?

I don't know,

- 20:30 we just thought that that might be something. In two days you've got no idea of sitting on the water and how sun burnt you get. We hardly had any clothes. You can't swim in a shirt when you get in front of a raft and you had to take your shirt off so the only thing I had on was your shorts.
- 21:00 I only had my shorts on and I did have underpants underneath my shorts, that's all.

When did the waves subside?

The huge big ones subsided at the end of the first day but we still had big waves four or five days after the flying boat had sighted us. Five, six days after, and on day seven he couldn't

- 21:30 land because it was too big and the whole thing was thrown around all the time. The two Indonesian guys who was going to take over with my knife, one of them was a real big bloke, they just chatted away to their mates and their mates just shook their heads. The first officer said,
- 22:00 "They are talking about something and they are talking in a different dialect and I'm only getting bits and pieces of it." He said, "I think we are going to have trouble with them." He spoke to them and told them that we didn't want any trouble and one got up and there were sharks around then, even though it was rough we had sighted a couple of sharks. One of them dived over and his mate dived
- 22:30 after him and they just swam away. I don't know whether they decided to commit suicide or not but they had only gone about ten or fifteen yards and a shark came up and grabbed one of them and I don't know if the other one just drowned but that was it. I forget about the other
- 23:00 bloke, he was really badly burnt and he had been down the bottom when she rolled and he was just laying on the bottom of the raft. I don't know how he survived the night before but he was there all the time and he had very bad burns on him and he died. We didn't know whether he was dead or not and we weren't sure whether we should put him overboard or not.
- 23:30 We were trying to think up some prayers to say for him and we put him over the side and a shark came up and just nosed him around, he wasn't interested in taking him. You could see the smaller fish like the barracuda that were coming in and chewing him up. Then we were left with the two Indonesians, one wireless operator, three gunners and the first mate
- 24:00 and we stayed that way. I said to Jack Murray who was one of the other gunners, "I don't think we are going to get out of this." And he said, "Yes we are, here's the plane coming to get us." And with that this flying boat flew over the top of us, he must of looked up and seen it just as I had said that.
- 24:30 He couldn't land and he just kept circling us and he dropped a marker dye so that he wouldn't lose us, it was a deep green marker dye but we thought that it might have been a shark repellent because there were so many sharks around us. Then they started dropping these boxes to us but they were dropping them behind us and the heavy thing floats faster than a lighter thing and they were dropping back.
- 25:00 Jack Murray decided to try and get in and get one and he dived over the side. He dived over and came up and a box floated past him and he put his hand up like that and he looked up and I've never seen such a horrified face in all my life. This shark was coming for him. You know why sharks kill you don't you? If they grab your arm and they are doing about forty five mile
- 25:30 an hour they just rip it out of you and out comes all your veins and that's why you bleed to death. If they hit your body you are pretty much all right, but if they grab an arm or a leg and they are going fast, that's what I had worked out on this. They sort of grabbed his arm and dragged him and it went down and his body sort of rolled over and then he came back at him again and that was the end of him.
- 26:00 We recommended him for a medal and they gave him a Red Cross Medal because he jumped over to try

and save us. It started getting dark and the plane left us and the next morning I think we were thinking, "That's the end of it, we aren't going to see anymore of anything." And the water had calmed down

- 26:30 by then. I looked up, I sat up. We had been laying all over one another and I saw a ship going across the horizon. Nobody would get up and I was kicking everybody and screaming at them to get up. We saw planes go over us lots of times right up high
- 27:00 and we'd get up and start yelling so that they could hear us, we must have been mad. We kept waving and waving and all of a sudden the ship had turned and it was sailing away from us and then the next thing he turned around and came back. We found out later that one of the Dutch seaman on it had field glasses and he thought that he could see something and he went down to get his glasses and he was sailing away from us and he put the field glasses on and said that we were there
- 27:30 so they came around to pick us up. The sharks never gave up on us, they stayed with us, and they were sort of school sharks, four and five foot long. We were right up against the side of the Dutch ship and they put down two rope ladders and they had a guy that came down and grabbed hold of you and another guy on the other arm
- 28:00 and they took you onto the deck. Me being what I am I thought that nobody needs to help me up so I grabbed onto the rope ladder, I picked it up and I had one foot on the step of the rope ladder and the raft drifted away a bit and a damn shark came up between my legs trying to grab me. I have never forgotten that noise as long as I shall live, his jaw went 'slam'.
- 28:30 My mates afterwards, we all survived after a couple of days, and they were talking and they reckon I ran up the side of the ship without the rope, the shark gave me that much of a fright. We got picked up and they put us in a cabin and I had a water bottle like they used to have on the old trains and I went to grab that and a guy took it off me and he wouldn't let me drink it.
- 29:00 They brought me in milk with brandy in it, I was a non drinker and I never had a drink in my life, and I drank that and I asked them for another one and they brought in another one. I said to him, "Is there any chance?" And they went out and one of the guys said to my mate Robby, "Gee, that mate of yours can drink." He said, "No, he doesn't drink he's a teetotaler." He said, "You wouldn't think so
- 29:30 because he wants his third one." All I wanted to do was drink, drink and drink. We were on that ship for two or three days and we got into harbour and then they started telling lies that we had been picked up before and we had only been out there for five days and the ship sunk on the 16th March. My late wife,
- 30:00 I used to go out and see her, she had a baby because her husband had been killed in England in the air force. And she had a sister who lived next door and when we were going she said, "I will get my children to pray for you." They used to go to Catholic school at Botany, "I will get my children to pray for you." I will always remember saying to Robby, "It's the 17th March, that's St Patrick's Day." And he said,
- 30:30 "Yes and I hope that Nell's kids are putting their heart and soul into those prayers." Those are the little things that you remember that people said. The wireless operator, he started to go a bit funny, he was talking away there and a couple of times he went to walk off and we had to pull him back. Those bloody sharks, they knew they were going to get some of us or one of us,
- 31:00 they just stayed there.

What was your state of mind like during those seven days?

Firstly I believed that we would get picked up for about the first three or four days but then all I thought was, "All we have to do is just hang in there and hope that we do get picked up." To be honest, and I have to tell you the truth,

- 31:30 I used to look around and you always put yourself last and I used to think, 'He's going to die, he's going to die, then him and then him.' The bloke next to me was the large Indonesian guy and he was sitting there and I was looking at his big fat leg and I wondered if everyone died and he was still alive I was wondering if I would be eating his leg. They are the things that go through your mind.
- 32:00 But that didn't happen of course and I don't know whether I would have gone ahead with it, but it did run through my mind, I had a knife. Nobody wants to die, it's not the fear of dying it's the thought that you won't see your mother, father, sister and brother. I won't see them again, that was the main thing that worried me.
- 32:30 My mother got sick at one stage and it was just before I went down to Melbourne, she got septicaemia or something like that. And she said to me, "I was dreaming about you and you were on this raft and the seas were going over the top of you." This was about four or five months before it happened.
- 33:00 I was sitting there thinking, "I can't believe my mother had said that." But she said, "I knew you would be all right." I don't know whether I clung to that or not. I used to think, "He's going to die soon." I said to Robby, a couple of times where Robby said, "I'm just going to lay down there and I'm not going to get up." I said, "Don't you die on me you bastard and leave me here on my own." That is the sort of
- 33:30 thing that you are thinking of, trying to think of someway or trying to look to see if there are airplanes

flying about, trying to keep your eye out for ships. I can remember every minute of it that I was there, I can't tell you what I was doing on the Thursday but I was sitting there. I was getting more and more sunburnt.

- 34:00 You know, if you have your hands in water for a long time and they crinkle up, your skin does that and then the salt from the salt water starts to eat away in there and I was covered in salt water ulcers. My skin cancer, my doctor can't believe that I haven't had skin cancer on my feet and my feet were the worst part of me burnt. Most of the time
- 34:30 they were a bit in the water and a bit out of the water. My face was all peeled but my feet were the sores part of me. Up in the hospital in Cairns I couldn't put my feet over the bed because if I hung them down it felt like all the blood was rushing down there and my feet were going to explode. There were two young
- 35:00 first aid guys in the army, they were medical guys and they came in and sat me up in bed and hung my feet over and I passed out with the pain. They laid me back and Robby went crook at them because he was in the next bed and they said, "No, we have got to do this or he will have to have his feet amputated. We have had cases like this, they shouldn't of left him like this. We have been on a couple of day's leaves
- 35:30 and we didn't realise that you were here." They just kept doing that to me until I came around and I couldn't really walk. They took us out of the hospital and put us on a flying boat to Cairns Harbour. There were only about five of us and about two other people on it and then all of a sudden the boat came out
- 36:00 and it had all this cargo to put in it and all these people. We finished up with forty two people in it; it was unheard of in those days with planes going off with that many people. The Yankee flying boat, there were people everywhere, we were laying all over one another. She took off and we flew to Brisbane and I'd say that he did crash land.
- 36:30 All I was worried about was he had depth charges on the wings in case he sighted a submarine and I thought if his wing goes in, because that did happened to a Catalina up in Townsville and a depth charge blew up and all the guys got killed on it.
- 37:00 He landed it and God you should have seen us, we were all a wreck. A barge came out to pick us up and him and another guy were trying to get us off one at a time. A guy got hold of me and I couldn't stand on my feet they were that sore. I said, "Let me sit down, let me sit down I want to sit down on the edge of the door of the plane."
- 37:30 He said, "You will be right." And they turned me around and one guy dropped me, I landed flat on my back again. I told them up in Brisbane that my back was sore and there was nothing on my papers about that, and they said, "That was because you were sitting up." They had brought a specialist in and he said, "You were sitting in a raft and you had nothing to lean on, it's just a lumbar pain."
- 38:00 I told the same thing to a doctor in Brisbane and told him that they dropped me on my back here and he said, "What did the doctor in Cairns say?" He said, "Did he say that it was a lumbar pain?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "That's what you've got."
- 38:30 We stayed in Brisbane a night. I forgot the main part of the story, in Brisbane they put us on a DC3 or DC2, and it was loaded with cargo and there were the five of us on it again and five other blokes going down and the British Air Force guys. It was an English guy flying it because the English
- 39:00 had an airport down at Nowra where the navy depot is now. There was a huge storm over Sydney and Newcastle and they told him that he wouldn't be able to land at Mascot, and for him to go back to Newcastle and Newcastle told him he couldn't land there. He said he didn't have the fuel to go there. He was telling us all this, one of these real English guys, "I'm sorry chaps, but this is happening chaps."
- 39:30 **So you were nearly in a plane wreck after a shipwreck?**
- Yes. He couldn't land the plane so he put it down in a paddock in Campbelltown and I will never forget it, it wasn't like an airline, it had little round windows like on the Concorde. I can remember peering out this window and we were racing down this paddock and he swung it sideways and it seemed to
- 40:00 stop. I was looking out this window and these trees were racing at us, we were skidding in the mud, I couldn't work out what was going on I thought that I was going off my head. They stopped the plane and I think we all got out the door at the one time.

Tape 9

- 00:30 **I wanted to take you back to when you were on the raft; can you explain what the raft was made of?**

There is a book in there with a raft on it but I can't find it. It's two forty-four gallon oil drums on this side and two along that side and lathes,

- 01:00 just timber lathes about that wide and about that much space in between them. You are sitting not as high as this; you are sitting on the side bits with your feet in the centre on the board which is just lathes in there. That is where they had those two compartments with the stuff in it.
- 01:30 It's just timber with four oil drums, I've got a picture in there of a bloke getting into a raft and I might be able to find that before you go. Then we had that bit of wood that went up and it went across. Sometimes we got a little tiny bit of rain, you know how you get that little bit of rain that comes along? You know when it has rained and you see the fence post
- 02:00 with pieces on the post with all those drips hanging, that is rain. We used to have it marked out so that you would run your tongue along there to that point, and then I'd run my tongue along to that point. I'd put it that way, and the bloke on the other side is trying to get his tongue over to your side. It's the survival of the fittest.
- 02:30 We had this bit of wood on the lathes and you just sat there. You might think this is rude but it's the truth and we all used to do it. We used to try and not have a wee during the daytime and when it got cold at night we'd sit there and wee ourselves to warm ourselves up. We'd do anything, but it was a standard practice, you'd say, "I can't hold on any longer."
- 03:00 You sat there and seeing you were sunburnt and you had saltwater boils and you'd touch the guy next to you and that didn't fill his heart with joy. The two Indonesians, we looked on them suspiciously all the time, thinking that they might try and have an attack on us.
- 03:30 They survived and we survived. The wireless operator he went a bit off his head the poor bugger. He recovered quite quickly when he got to hospital. His father was a big bookmaker in Sydney and he had got a message through to his father.
- 04:00 He knew somebody in Cairns, a bank manager in Cairns, and he got somebody to ring him. He was in a different part of the hospital to us because he was looked on as being an officer because he was a wireless operator and he got in touch with his father. His father told him to tell everybody up there to back his horse tomorrow in Sydney. The guys were to tell us
- 04:30 and my mate was saying, "Don't take any notice of him, it's a bloody joke, he's off his head." The damn horse won at thirty three to one, we were going to kill Robby, but it was true. I would say that his father was good to us, when we came down here we all went out to his place and his father said that his son had told me that we had looked after him.
- 05:00 He wanted to give us one hundred pound each, ten big reds, we had never seen ten big reds in our lives. But his wife said, "No, the boys don't want that, no, the boys don't want that." She said, "Here, give them ten pound each." The three of us and away we went. His mum talked him out of it. I don't know if you can remember all the things,
- 05:30 you try and think back, think what you are going to miss out on and worry about it. The dog that we had, he's getting on in years and I won't see poor old Toss anymore, I won't see my mother and I won't see my father. I really loved my mother and father, I really did and my sister. That was the main worry
- 06:00 that you wouldn't see them again and how they would get on and what they would do. You get the idea that you are the backbone of the family or something like that. My eldest brother told me it was the same when he was in Crete and they left them there. He stole a boat from there and got away and got to Crete and stole another boat in Crete and got away.
- 06:30 It's just what you think, I'm saying again, it's not the fear of dying, it's the fear of not seeing your loved ones again, it really is, it's one of those things. I've got a bad heart now and my heart misses a beat every now and again, I could fall off the chair here
- 07:00 but that doesn't frighten me. All that frightens me is worry about what Pat would do and all those things, you become that way inclined. I think that somebody up there likes me and they touched me on my head. I say
- 07:30 in a couple of week's time I will take all the kids from the oncology ward from Westmead Hospital out onto the harbour. John Winning will lend me his boat, he charges one hundred dollars an hour to rent it out and he will give it to me with crew and take all the kids around the harbour. When we get about twenty minutes from Watson's Bay and I ring young Peter Doyle up
- 08:00 and the kids have got their mothers and fathers and a few of the nurses, and order about seventy five meals, he calls me all the old bastards in the world. I say, "Go down and open the Royal Clear Sailing Club." And we will go down there and we have a clown coming down there to entertain the kids. The clown doesn't charge us, he doesn't charge us for all those meals and John doesn't charge us for the boat.
- 08:30 The RTA lends us a [?] but we have to pay one hundred dollars for workers compensation, we give him a check every year and he tears it up and he collects it off the drivers.

Going back to the raft, could you tell me what it was like at night time on the raft?

It was absolutely freezing cold,

- 09:00 you were like this all the time, you were freezing cold. The water was splashing up on you and even during the day time when you were burning up with the sun, the sun was burning you up and the waves would swoosh over you, the water was always cold. It was freezing cold and I don't think we slept at all, we might of dozed off a bit.
- 09:30 If you laid on the bloke next to you and if he wasn't happy because you were hitting his saltwater ulcers. It was just one of those things that happened to you. They didn't have counsellors in those days. I read about those guys down there at Nowra and the ship that went under. Guys that
- 10:00 didn't even go in the water, guys off the [HMAS] Australia and he got seven hundred and fifty thousand for the trauma that he suffered seeing the ship go underneath him and so forth, we had nothing like that, nothing. Then when I did get sick on the ship and kept going up and they put me in hospital they said that I was suffering from hysteria, I was sick as a dog.
- 10:30 A guy brought me in two mangoes; I hadn't eaten anything because the food was absolutely bloody rotten. You can't believe what food they dish up to people in hospital, it's just slops on a plate, all the vegetables mixed up. I ate the two mangoes and I woke up about half past ten and I wanted to be sick. I got up and walked
- 11:00 out the door and I walked into a bloke who was an air force sergeant and he was drunk and he had just come back from town and he grabbed hold of me and he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "Get out of my way, get out of my way." He wouldn't let me go and with that I vomited all over him. He gave me the biggest hiding that I had ever had in my life. Kicked me in the head, kicked me in the ribs, dragged me across the bloody place with only a pyjama
- 11:30 coat on. Him and another bloke put me into a straight jacket and belted me up again. Somehow or other I got out of the straight jacket and there was a key in the door and I had read all those adventure stories when I was a boy and I knew how to get the key out of the door and get it to fall on outside and I got it out. There was
- 12:00 a piece of three ply in the door and I broke that out and a guy came running down at me and I knocked him over the head with this. The doctors were giving me needles and God knows what. From then on they treated me like I was a lunatic.

When did this happen?

When I came off the last ship the [UNCLEAR], the Indonesians were fighting

- 12:30 and arguing and I had a flashback, I thought I was running up the side and thinking I wanted to get into one of the lifeboats, I thought that the ship was sinking. The captain decided to send me ashore and the navy sent a boat out to get me and they put me in hospital up there. All that happened within two days of me being in the hospital up there.
- 13:00 It's still on your papers, when I got discharged, I said that I wanted to be discharged in Sydney and they tried to shanghai [take by force] me and I wouldn't get in the car and I got out of it. There was a commander there and he told them to leave me alone and I could be discharged in Sydney and he signed it. They sent me down to Goulburn to a psychiatric place and I spent only four or five days there
- 13:30 and a guy there told me that there was nothing wrong with me. I said that I had been trying to tell people that but that didn't work with repat [repatriation - veterans' affairs], all they wanted me to do was go and see a psychiatrist. I used to ring up Melbourne Repat and they'd say my papers are in Sydney and they were coming down next week and the day that I decided to
- 14:00 shift up to Sydney that was after the war that I had decided to come up here. I had built a house down in Melbourne and my fiancé, as she was then, came down and I said, "I don't think you're keen on living down there." And she came from a big family of eleven kids and she said, "No." And I said, "We will sell this and move back to Sydney and I'll go back and work up there."
- 14:30 I went down the day before and they said that no, my papers were still in Sydney. I arrived in Sydney on the Monday morning and I left my baggage down at Central [Station] and I went straight down to Repat and I said, "I'm looking for my papers." And the guy said to me, "No, they are in Melbourne." And I said, "No, they are not.", And he said, "They are, they went down there weeks ago." I said, "I was there yesterday." And he said, "Don't give me
- 15:00 that crap." So I pulled out my train ticket and said, "There, there's my train ticket I only came up to Sydney this morning to get them." He said, "Argh don't give me that." And he went to talk to another bloke and I now know why they have those wide counters down that place but I got over it and grabbed him by the tie and threw a couple of punches at him, I was a bit of a wild bloke in my day.
- 15:30 The boss bloke came out and another couple of blokes came out and they all gabbed me and the boss asked and I said, "He treated me like a ratbag." And I said, "I was in Melbourne two or three days ago

and they said that my papers were in Sydney and he's telling me they are in Melbourne and he won't even go and look for them." He said to the bloke and said, "Go and get his papers." The bloke said, "They are not here." And he said, "I don't care whether they are here or not you go down and look for them."

- 16:00 He sent another bloke down after him and sure enough they came up with my papers. Then all they wanted me to do was see psychiatrists, "You come in and do this and do that." I had a stomach problem upset, I went to see about it at Prince of Wales [Hospital] a couple of times and there was an old doctor out there and I think he was the first doctor they had in Australia he was that old.
- 16:30 He was older than I am now and he said, "You have a dormant appendix, I will take them out next week." "I won't let you operate on me mate." When I went in the next week I was going to tell him that I wasn't going to let him operate on me but he had died in between time. I decided that I wouldn't go there anymore and they wrote and told me that they would give me a
- 17:00 twenty percent pension, which was ten shillings a fortnight in those days. I never went near them and then they told me that they reduced it to five shillings and I couldn't of cared less. But then the RSL took it, the RSL used to go through anybody that they cut down. They asked me about three times to come in but I wouldn't go in and eventually I went in
- 17:30 because they were so persistent. They got us back to ten shillings but I had to go and see this bloke. He was an out and out queer [slang for homosexual], all he wanted to do was sit down and rub your leg and do this and do that. I said to him, "Listen mate, the next time you do that to me you will be wearing this bloody chair around your neck!" I never went back, and I never went back to them but they wrote to me lots of times to go and see a doctor. I wrote back to them and told them that I was seeing a doctor
- 18:00 and he won't have anything to do with you blokes. He won't fill the forms in and he reckoned that you are all crooks and so do I, I used to insult them. I couldn't hate them any more, they just drove me to it until eighty-six and my skin cancer doctor wrote to them and told them that I should pay something because I have spent half of my life down there getting skin cancers off. They sent me out a form to fill in,
- 18:30 have you seen those forms that they send out? They put you through a computer and that works out your lifestyle, how do you cut your lawns? I filled in, 'I cut my lawns by flying my helicopter upside down.' They asked what sport do I play and I said, 'Mountain bike riding.' and all that sort of thing.

You talked about the signalman on the raft

- 19:00 **that he had had effects while he was on the raft. How was he acting or how did it manifest for him?**
- He was talking to himself and talking to his father and talking to somebody else. He had two days of it, but he came good, you can come good. You can have those stretches. On the ship when I had my turn and I went off my head,
- 19:30 when I could hear all these blokes fighting, I admit I had one of those turns, but I've never had one since. I do get flashbacks if I get cold, my wife can tell you, she has seen me. I just start to shiver and there's nothing that I can do, I have got to get into bed or get into a bath to warm myself up, I can't stop shivering. If I get cold, if I really get cold that's it,
- 20:00 if I went to the football I'd start to shiver. My daughter was doing her HSC [Higher School Certificate] and they are having the presentation, where you all sit up. I had a shivering attack in there because I was sitting near a door and I had a shivering attack. One of the kids said
- 20:30 to my daughter the next day, "Your father was drunk last night wasn't he? And my mother said he could hardly walk went he went outside." I had to go outside and get in the car and try and warm myself up, because I had a terrible shivering attack and I still do get them. I had one six months ago but it's just one of those things. If I get frightened sometimes
- 21:00 and I get a bit cold on a train I get off at the next station and walk around and try and get warm, it's one of those things. They treated you as a 'troppo' [mentally unstable] case. One of the guys I went down there to interview and he was talking about medical business and
- 21:30 I said, "Are you a doctor?" And he said, "No," and I said, "How did you get this job?" He said, "I just applied for it." I said, "What university did you go to?" And he said, "I never went to university." I said, "I will tell you something mate, I'm chairman of a sheltered workshop and I've got brighter blokes at that sheltered workshop than you are. Write down what you think that I should be doing." And I said, "Here I am at ninety-eight years old and you are saying that I can work twenty
- 22:00 hours a week, I'm still able and fit to work." That was the only reason that I was selling the foundry because I can't keep going, I just can't keep going.

You landed in Sydney and got off the DC3, what happened then?

We got a train to Melbourne and the navy said they will fly us down and we said that we weren't flying in

- 22:30 anything, so we went and brought three railway tickets. My fiancé as she was at the time, I had become engaged to her when I came back, and her father worked on the railway so he got us three tickets so we went down to Melbourne. They never came near us except a telegram to come back, I think I had eighteen days off.
- 23:00 There was a doctor up in Queensland and I couldn't walk, I can show you the paper but the doctor wrote that I should have seven days on light duties. They treated you like dogs they did, once the war was over that was the end of it. You were a nobody, absolutely nobody. That's the only thing that
- 23:30 I've got against the whole system, I think it's a joke about them, the organisation was terrible, and I wonder how the organisation goes now in the services. I don't care about that, and its proof. I've witnessed the proof myself of how they treated World War I people and I went through the same thing myself in World War II.
- 24:00 I would say if they had of sat down and worked it out and if they had of had any management thing they couldn't of worked out a worse system or a worse way to treat me. It's not an easy thing to go through sitting in a bloody raft waiting to die; it's not an easy thing to go through. Then for people to treat you like you were a bloody mangy dog; and that's how they treat you.
- 24:30 If they could give you a bloody needle to get rid of you they would, but they are not allowed to.
- You said that there was a military enquiry or an enquiry into the incident, when was that?**
- When we came back to Sydney they had a marine enquiry and asked you what happened. When I told them about the fridge
- 25:00 they stopped believing me, they said, "It couldn't happen." I said, "I had seen it happen, the other people will tell you." Robby said that he hadn't seen it happened but he said that the fridge wasn't there anymore. But they said, "It couldn't of come unbolted from the deck." I tried to explain to them that a gallon of water weighs ten pound, when you see a big wave as big as those
- 25:30 it could be a ten or fifteen ton load hit that side and washed it overboard and they wouldn't have it. They covered up everything, they covered up the date the ship sunk, and the air force had told us that that was the first thing the day that they took off was the first inkling that they had that there
- 26:00 was a ship out there and there could be survivors out there. They took off within an hour of being told and they found us two hours later. If they had of told them then maybe the sea would have been rough but he felt that he couldn't land on the sea, at least they would of found us and at least they would of done something about us. Because they don't keep records, you have only got to read
- 26:30 about that girl yesterday and I'm chairman of Sydney Hospital and I keep my eye on things down there, nobody gets away with that sort of crap down there. There was one guy who sued me a while ago, he fell over after he got out of bed or something like that, you can't stop that sort of thing. They don't write down things, they don't do things, if they think it's going to cost money
- 27:00 they will swear that it didn't happen. The government is a big company you can't beat them.
- You went back on ships after this incident?**
- Yes.
- Where did you go?**
- Went to India.
- What was that for?**
- On the Reynella, she was a captured Italian ship and she was alongside the wharf in Perth when the Italians came into the war. They had two ships the Rommelo [?] and the Reynella
- 27:30 and they were headed out of Brisbane chased by the Australian Navy and they scuttled the ship but the Reynella was captured there. When we went out to sea, when we used to go out past an island there, all the crew was over there as prisoners of war and we used to wave to them and they used to wave to us.
- What role were you doing at that stage?**
- I was a gunner on there. We went to Bombay
- 28:00 and into Karachi, then we were going to be part of the fleet that was going to invade Malaysia and Lord Louis Mountbatten was building up a pile over there then, William Slim was the English one in charge of the army in Burma and we were going to be in that landing there.
- 28:30 I've been up to Burma a couple of times with the United Nations and trying to fix up some things up there for them. I talked to an old Burmese guy and I was telling him about that and he said, "Yes." He can remember that, he was just a boy and he was about sixteen and they were saying that they were going to raid here and raid there. And he was saying, "No, they can't do that because the Japanese are

going to beat them.”

29:00 I had a good long talk to him about those sorts of things.

Where were you when the war ended?

When it ended I was in Karachi.

Can you remember that day when you heard?

Yes, that the war was going to finish in day one or day two or something.

29:30 That was the whole finish, the Japanese and everybody that you are talking about.

What do you remember of that day?

Just how bloody happy I was. People can't get me to sign a vote to say that I thought they shouldn't of dropped the atomic bomb because

30:00 as far as I was concerned the war had deteriorated into such a point that I was no longer interested, I knew what sort of treatment I was going to get. They had no thought about you they just stuck you on another bloody ship and sent you off. You can't lull around here for days, fifteen or sixteen days from the time you came back and I still walking

30:30 with bandages on my feet. Nobody cared about you, nobody cared about you. They knew it was going to end and probably if the Reynella had gone in there against the Japs with their aircraft we could have been blown up.

31:00 **What was the outcome of the marine enquiry?**

You didn't hear it because they didn't want you to know, they didn't want your evidence. I think they just took our evidence and tore it up, they didn't want to hear about it, because they didn't believe that it happened and that was all there was. They didn't want to admit that they had made a mistake, that they hadn't done the job properly when they put the thing on there,

31:30 they didn't want to know about that. Fighting the system or the bureaucrats or the government is the hardest job there is, you can't beat them because they are a team.

How many men survived that shipwreck?

Thirteen out of eighty five.

32:00 There were seven of us and six on the other raft, six Indonesians. One of the Indonesians on the other raft told us that there was one guy on the raft that took over and they had so many that had survived the first night and he got rid of about five or six blokes and he just shoved them off and that was it,

32:30 so there were six of them that survived.

You talked about what kind of food you had on the raft, how did you ration it out over those seven days?

I had the knife and I could open a tin, I could open a tin of camp pie and I'd cut it up into separate pieces. The milk we drank

33:00 two tins and then left a day, and drank another tin and left a day, then drank another tin and left a day, just like that. We had one piece of the tiny squares of chocolate and that was all.

What were the names of the men

33:30 **on your raft, if you can tell me who they were?**

There was myself, Doug Robinson, Snowy Stanfield, the guy Williamson, I can't think of his first name now, the first mate, and I couldn't pronounce his first name when I knew him, and the two Indonesians and I didn't know who they were.

34:00 We lost sight of Snowy Stanfield, we hadn't seen him for years and I picked up Robby at the Melbourne Cup one day, I couldn't find him in Melbourne. I've got a good newspaper clipping that has got some good photos. It's just one of those things. I think you should

34:30 put in the archives my dissatisfaction against the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs]. I had to go before a tribunal, with three people there and they were arguing with me that my doctor's secretary had made a mistake with the date on the thing, a typographical error and he wrote up all about that.

35:00 The doctor wrote a letter to them and told them that they had made a typographical error. When I went up before the three people they said. "What about so and so?" And I said, "I got my medical papers through the freedom of information [act] and I've got all the facts that is on there." And they said, "Yes, we've got them." And I said, "You all have got a copy?"

- 35:30 And they said, "Yes." I said, "Well turn over to page three." And I said, "See where I was supposed to be in hospital up in Cairns on the 3rd March or something?" They said, "Yes that's there." I said, "On the same day I was also down in Rushcutters Bay?" and I said, "Airplanes didn't fly that fast in those days."
- 36:00 They said, "Yes, but that's only a typographical error." I said, "What are you guys about? You are talking to me but you can't give it to me because there is a typographical error, and you can't accept typographical errors but you've got one yourself." I just put all my papers in my case and they said, "We are not finished yet." And I said, "No, but I'm finished with you and I will see you in court." Then a fortnight later I got a letter to say that they have granted it to me.

The final

- 36:30 **thing that I'm going to ask you is a question about the war in general. What your thoughts are now with Australians involved in the Second World War, whether it was necessary?**

Yes, it was definitely necessary, if we hadn't of gone, if we hadn't of known and if we didn't have anything those Japs would have been down here that quick it wouldn't of mattered.

- 37:00 I think they would have annihilated the whole country. I've read those books that they have written and they used to discuss back in the seventeen hundreds where the Europeans weren't humans. They couldn't be humans, that was their idea of us. I know the Germans put people in gas chambers and God knows what
- 37:30 that was one bloke that the Japanese people, they were that cruel to people. You can sit and listen to some of the blokes that were there and what they did to them, how they'd just shoot a man for no reason at all because he stood in their way or bumped into them. How they belted them around, and think nothing of it, to think it was a sport
- 38:00 to take guys out and behead them, while the rest of his mates looked on. You've seen the way they have starved them. It was one of those things that happened. Our rotary club got a SOS one time
- 38:30 and a Japanese girl came down one time on a rotary scholarship. She had only been in Canberra a week and the bloke was trying to get into bed with her, she was not quite nineteen. Nobody would take her, she would have had to have gone back but we took her in for three months.

- 39:00 **What was that like for you having experienced the war and seeing a new generation of Japanese?**

I think I told her everything that I believed in and when I went up there about four months later she acted as an interpreter for me. I invented the door lock and she took six back with her and when I got up to Japan they had my bloody door lock

- 39:30 on every bloody hotel door in Hong Kong. You know the door locks that you click across like that; I put that on the market in the first place.

Did you visit Japan?

Yes and I went up there on business. She was very good because she knew what to do; they took me into a room and sat me down. If they give you a little coffee table and you are nobody,

- 40:00 there are all these rules in Japan. She waited until they all sat down and she got stuck into them, she really got suck into them, she screamed and yelled at them. They were all bowing and scrapping to me and women don't usually do that in Japan and I said, "Christ, you were rough on those blokes." And she said, "But that is what you taught me." She said, "You taught me how I should treat Japanese people." She finished her

- 40:30 course that she was doing in Japan and went and lived in Tasmania for years and then she went to America and she has kept in touch with us.

Mr Thomas thank you very much for being involved in the archives.

Thanks for that.

INTERVIEW ENDS