

Australians at War Film Archive

Oriel Ramsay (George or Cubby) - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 12th March 2004

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1548>

Tape 1

00:36 **Where did you grow up in Perth?**

I grew up in Wembley Park, a suburb west of Perth. After my school days over in Jolimont School, Wembley Park never had a school in those days, and Jolimont was an

01:00 adjoining suburb there. And incidentally, they want me to hang around for a little bit longer, because they're 100 years old next year, so get involved in that. So Wembley Park was our family home, and we played and worked and God knows what from there.

How many folk in your family, George?

In our family, there were

01:30 four boys and a girl. My name, Oriel, might sound a little queer: my father was Scotch; he seemed to have a big say in naming people. My eldest brother was Donald Alexander; he missed me; then David, David something or other; Robert Bruce; and Gina

02:00 Margaret Aileen. But my mother must have got the name off her brother, who was killed in World War 1, his name was Oriel, and the George part came from Dad's brother, so that was the only name she got in the book, apparently. So we had a life of play, cycling, city, beach, all those sort of things.

What sort of sports did you like, George?

02:30 Well, I played football mainly. Then, after Jolimont School, I went to Perth Boys School in the '30s there, and after 8th Standard, they were in the Depression days, times were a bit tough there, and somebody said I had to get a job,

03:00 you know, well that was the normal thing. I got a start [at] Kumpstons Engraving, engraving work in 918 Hay Street, Perth. And also in 1937, with my, I had two mates, Doug Herd and Doug Caporn, and Doug Herd decided he would join the naval reserve with me, and the other bloke Doug Caporn,

03:30 didn't like navy ships, apparently, so he joined the army, unfortunately, we lost Doug. Anyway, in those days, I belonged to the Royal Australian Naval Reserve, and for training, the admiralty, or our people, sent over two ships each year, so that we could do training. So in 1938, I did a trip

04:00 as far as Canarvon, under Captain Harry Howden, 14 days ACT, that was annual continuous training. Then in 1939, the war clouds were getting a bit hard there, but I was due to do another trip on the HMAS Yarra. And it turned out that

04:30 I went to get my pay one night, on a Thursday night, and old Mr Kumpston bought out, he didn't go out, but he left, stayed home and his wife come down to run the place. And I went to get my pay on Thursday night, and she said, "What's all this about going to the navy?" And I said, "Oh, you know, I think you know all about it." but she said, "You've never told me personally." So she said, "If you go, you don't come back."

05:00 But as it turned out then, of course, that was perhaps in August 1939, and I then went, sort of full time in the reserve. And HMAS Sydney my first big war ship, anyway, was doing a round trip of Australia

05:30 at the time. And an English Captain, Captain Waller, and they got as far as Darwin, when virtually the war was imminent, and the Sydney got a signal to proceed to Fremantle at post haste, because that then became the Sydney's war station. Because the Sydney at that

06:00 time would have been travelling under a peace time crew, the war then was declared on what the, the 3rd of September 1939, but just prior to that, because they were light on for numbers, there was about 120 naval reserve people from the naval depot here, were inducted over to the Sydney. So

06:30 that was the beginning, and of course the week after that the war started. And so that was my life in HMAS Sydney from the beginning. More?

So, I'm just thinking I could rewind you back a little bit, cause you're going through it really, really quickly. With the Depression, what sort of things did you notice, and how did that affect your family?

Well not only our family,

07:00 it would have affected many, many families. I know my father was a carpenter, and I think then they were lucky to, perhaps get two or three days a week for work. And I think one of his first jobs was putting piles under where the Commonwealth Bank is now. There were great big

07:30 log piles the size of telegraph poles, and they bashed them down and down, because it was all soft surface there.

Gee.

Then I think he, he was sort of sent to different places, probably up the dam somewhere to build those sort of things. But times were tough, times were very tough, and hence we were told to get a job, and I was

08:00 still in school. Harking back a little there, I was still in Perth Boys School there, one day a chap come to the front door, and said, "Anybody want a job to be a plumber?" So I looked around, and "Oh yes, I'll be a plumber." So they said, "All right, proceed around to a plumber called George Barcher in Newcastle Street in East Perth, West Perth, North

08:30 Perth." And he said, "Can you ride a bike?" "Yes, I can ride a bike." "Here, take this parcel and deliver it to Harris Carpet and Sand." they was in Perth, which I did on the bike. And came out of there, and somebody had unfortunately run over the back wheel of the bike. So I put the bike on my shoulder, and trudged back to Barchers, and the bloke said, "You're fired." So, I was back in the classroom before

09:00 the bell went.

Before the day was out.

So that was the short experience of my first job.

Well that sounds like you weren't supposed to be a plumber.

Yes, I finished up almost a plumber in the finish, yes.

What sort of subjects did you like when you were in school?

Well, we had the usual sort of subjects, I don't know that we had

09:30 any great aims or likings to them. We had, one thing led to another, there was a big parade ground there, well there was a parade ground there at Perth Boys School, and one of the science masters, a chap called Tinny McCale, used to get everybody out on the tarmac doing PT [physical training], and no shirts and those

10:00 sort of things, and that was a great sight for the girdle some girls next door, they used to hang over the fence and say, "Oh, yeah, all right!" No, I played football, as I said, riding bikes for the three of us, we used to go, we went to City Beach every weekend without fail, summer, winter, played football in the Temperance League Football

10:30 Team.

What's a Temperance League?

That was run by a Mr Rose, who was like Rudolph, he had a big red nose. But that was a temperance, a non-alcoholic crowd. And that was, I think, where we learnt to drink beer.

That's kind of interesting, interesting, a football association that says no to beer.

Well, we were only young then, we were only 16 or 17, of course. It was a bit before our wilder days.

Can you imagine that happening now, football without beer?

Oh, no, no. I don't know how the young, I'm sure the young colts and that don't start on it, or it's not advised for them.

No, but I mean with, you know, with the audience and the, yeah,

11:30 **doesn't seem to go together these days, so much.**

They go together.

What sort of thing did you get up to on the weekend?

Well, as I said, we used to go mainly to City Beach every day, we'd ride out over the, out through Florrie Park [?] as it is now, but in those days, there was just a

12:00 sleeper road track there, you know, just sleepers all put together.

How hard is that to negotiate?

It was pretty hard, pretty hard, and I always remember we had a detective chap, Alf Sleep, I think his name was. He used to come out with his car, and of course, we'd try to hold him

12:30 up as long as we could, until he charged us and we'd all sort of race off into the sand there. The old switchback road used to be up and down like that, and it was very famous in those days, before they had buses and things.

How did you learn to swim?

Well, just by being in the water, that was all. We mainly,

13:00 bit of swimming, a bit of surfing, mainly, there was no distance swimming or anything like that, but mainly, just enough to stay afloat and surfing. We used to go perhaps to the Sunday night pictures, a silver coin collection at the Empire Theatre in West Leederville.

13:30 And we never had that many opportunities to go too far, we just had push bikes and that. When I started work there, we had, I remember I bought a bike from Bill Kidd in Leederville, West Leederville,

14:00 Northwood Street in West Leederville. And with Doug Caporn we rode backwards and forwards, Doug, when I got a job at Kumpstons, he got a job at the bootmakers, or shoe shop, which was adjacent to it, just below Milligan Street at Perth.

How old are you at this stage, when you got a job at the bootmakers?

Well, we would have been 17.

14:30 **Is this as part of engraving?**

My job, yes, I was learning to operate a pantograph machine, which is the machine that does the engraving on brass plates, doctors plates and that sort of thing. I was also making badges and farm equipment,

15:00 air tanks, we made, I think the first of the number plates that were made in Perth.

Really?

Embossed, you know, with letters, embossed up there for the number plates. But that was quite a wide range of stuff they were doing. And we'd get a bit of relief now and again, when the doctors would come along at London House, they had a frame, and they'd have the doctors' name

15:30 on a brass plate, and I would go down with another man, Les, Les Fogarty, and we'd erect these plates, you know. Also, brass plates that were put on buildings and those sort of thing, that was, you'd get a bit of an outing there. Come back to our dear lady Mrs Kumpston, anyway.

16:00 We had a, a lovely day one day, we went, she had a little Ford car, called, I'll never forget it, 33-304, and she went to the economic store in Hay Street, and she came out in the other door in William Street. And she immediately panicked and said somebody's stolen my motor car, so

16:30 the boys in the shop and a couple of others, we spent the day, sort of, walking around Perth looking for her motor car, until we found it, we knew where it was, but anyway.

You had a bit of a day off.

But, she got her motor car back again. No, just little sidetracks, there.

Well it sounds like a pretty diverse job that you had there at the bootmakers?

It was interesting. I'm not the boot, Doug, Doug was doing the boot making.

17:00 Well not, yes, repair work and shoes and that sort of stuff.

It sounds like a very large operation?

No, they were not large in those days, no, no great manufacturing or anything like that. Kumpstons had a staff of about 12, and Doug's place would only have three, I think. The boss and his

17:30 wife and another chap, and Doug.

How long is it to do an apprenticeship in engraving?

Well it would have taken five years, but unfortunately, as I mentioned, that when I had to do that ACT, and Mrs Kumpston says, "If you go, you don't come back." well then one virtually,

- 18:00 the war followed on, and I didn't ever go back there. But I did come back after the war with a, had the offer of rehabilitation trades and that sort of thing, and I was sent to a place out in West, North Perth, North Perth, it'd be, to Charlie Sheridans. And Charlie
- 18:30 told the officials that, "Oh yes, I've got a pantograph machine and we'll teach the boy." but it never happened, because Charlie also knew that I could do badge work and that sort of stuff, and that was his line. But one of the officials would come along each quarter, I suppose, and get as far as the office, and Charlie would entertain him and say, yes, we're training the boy and away he'd go.

19:00 And it wasn't very successful for me, you know.

When you mentioned the annual continuous training, was it?

Yes?

What does that actually mean, is it some sort of a special course that's a part of your apprenticeship?

Well, navy doesn't have any apprenticeships or anything like that. But as a, as a reservist,

- 19:30 we were required to be classified as efficient. And being classified as efficient meant that you had to do 14 days continuous training.

Oh I see, I got you.

And, as I mentioned the ships would come over and we'd do 14 days there, we'd also do rifle work down at the Sambourne Range, and that gave us a fair amount of

- 20:00 knowledge, we'd do boat work, and gunnery and seamanship, rowing boats and all that sort of stuff.

What sort of things would you learn as part of seamanship?

Well, at sea, you'd be doing watches, normally in a three watch situation; you do four watches, four hours on

- 20:30 and you know, miss two. They had watches, you'd have, if you did the same watch every day, if you only had four on, four off, if you worked that on 24 hours, you'd be back where you started from. So in the navy, they had what they call the dogs, from 4 til 6 was one watch, and from 6 til 8 was the other watch, the second dog. And that would then

- 21:00 throw you a class behind, a watch behind each time. So you'd watches, you'd do seamanship, learning lookouts and that sort of thing. You'd get your turn at helmsman on the wheel, so you'd qualify and get your helmsmen certificate, that was good.

What sort of ships were you on that time?

Well they were called sloops: the [HMAS] Swan and the [HMAS] Yarra; there was

- 21:30 only two of them. And they were about the size of a Corvette, if you know them. But they were called sloop, they had a four-inch gun, one four-inch gun, and we knew gunnery, a couple of chutes, rifle work, balloons or something they'd drop over the stern, and we'd fire at them. But that came in, when we went onto the

- 22:00 Sydney because this Captain Waller that brought the Sydney down to Fremantle, he was an, a Royal Navy bloke, a Royal Navy captain, and he must have thought, "Oh yes these chaps coming out of Leeuwin depot." wasn't, no it was out of the naval depot, before Leeuwin's time, he must have thought that they're about the equivalent of a civilian. But in actual fact, we had

- 22:30 quite a lot of experience that he wasn't aware of. And the first thing that happened when we went aboard, we had ratings of course, you have a, it started off as a cadet. As a cadet, you didn't get paid, but you got a uniform and travel passes and that sort of thing.

I'll just pause you there, we've just got a bit of a curtain dilemma, it's just come unstuck.

All right, can you hold it?

You were

- 23:00 **mentioning Waller, and how he thought that you guys weren't as good as you were.**

Well, we had the different ratings, if you'd be cadet, but they didn't go to sea normally. You have ordinary seamen, able seaman, a leading seaman, petty officer, chief petty officer. I was an able seaman there, rated, and Captain Waller must have thought, as I mentioned, that we were just the equivalent of

- 23:30 civilians. He said, "Alright, I'll drop everybody down a notch." so I went to sea as ordinary seaman. It didn't greatly affect us, but we, we had some senior blokes, some leading seamen and a petty officer, and they weren't very impressed at being dropped a notch. So Waller said, "Right, if you don't want to come with us, you stay behind." so they didn't go on the Sydney.

24:00 **Gee.**

But most of my mates there, we were dropped to ordinary seaman, and I think it took us about six weeks before he must have realised that we knew what we were doing, and we were reinstated. And I think I got 14 shillings in pay.

Did that affect the way you thought about Waller, did you think he was not so crash hot?

24:30 Well, it, oh well, you couldn't form an opinion like that. But he was probably a good captain, we didn't know him that well, we only had a short time, of course. But we sort of weren't impressed, so we probably dug in, you know, and worked in. Anyone want a cup of tea or coffee?

No, we're fine thank you.

We worked, worked

25:00 more to his satisfaction on [HMAS] Australia, and this is what I said, this was good. But anyway, Waller didn't last very long, because Captain John Augustine Collins turned up in November, and he took over the Sydney then.

When you first arrived on the Sydney, how did the other men on board treat you guys?

Well,

25:30 there was certainly no animosity or anything like that, they accepted us and that was good. No, we slotted in very well. I remember the first day the war started was a Sunday, I was duty, and at one stage, later on,

26:00 the master at arms come through, and everybody was smoking, which was taboo. And I got, what we call run-in for smoking in the rec room, and that didn't impress me much. But anyway, those were just little things. But no, we fitted in well, because we knew how to work lines to secure the ship, and all that sort of thing.

26:30 **Were you aware that there was going to be a war?**

Oh yes, yes.

Just wondering how much you?

Maybe, maybe when we joined the reserves early on, maybe we weren't that aware of things, but you weren't there then. But in, in the late '30s, middle '30s,

27:00 a chap called Adolf Hitler was running around, taking countries, and it soon, you know, until we joined the reserves, there was mention of those sort of things that could happen, and we had to do extra things. And people say, "Why did you join?" Well it just seemed like a good thing at the time to do.

27:30 And of course, a lot of others joined the army, and they, they started recruiting long before the war started, type of thing. And I suppose, dare I say it, after a long, long time in the navy, 38 years, I've got no regrets. It was a good life, fortunately we lived to tell the tale.

28:00 **What did your family think about you joining the navy, on the Sydney?**

My parents had no objections, my father was in the army, he was a Light Horseman, trained up at Blackboy Hill. He never got away to the war, actually. My brother, my elder brother, Donald, was Donald Stuart,

28:30 David Alexander, I forget the other, Donald Stuart, David Alexander, Robert Bruce, so they were all Scot's names. But anyway, Donald Bruce, Donald, Donald Stuart was in the base people, he was a sort of a tradesman, but he was mainly stationed up at Nungarin, where they had the big army depot up there. Mainly

29:00 with tyres and equipment of vehicles, when somebody's car wanted a tyre or something, they'd taken them up there. Fortunately they never got away to the war, my brother David was in the school cadets, and unfortunately had an accident with a rifle.

How did that happen?

29:30 Brother Bob, Robert Bruce, he tried to join the anything, he wanted the navy but he was colour blind, the navy said, "Oh you, no, we don't want you, you're colour blind, you'll blow the things up." And then he tried for the air force, but that was when the war was just about over, so he wasn't in, he wasn't out, he was just, he just missed a little bit.

30:00 **What was your action station on the Sydney?**

Well, my first action station was in one of the shell rooms, which is down in the bowels of the ship, and a compartment no bigger than this room, and not that I was

- 30:30 claustrophobic, but I didn't like it down there. Mainly because they would go to, what they call action stations, and there being no speaker equipment there, when the action station was finished, they'd pipe, you know, secure. And of course, that wouldn't come down to us, because it would be down below and great big hatches that were dropped on your head, and
- 31:00 where the, the shells and that sort of come into hoist, before they go into the turrets. And a couple of times, we were sort of forgotten, and when you get hungry or something like that, you think, it's dinner time, I shouldn't be here. Anyway, I left, I got away from that, and I was then sent to the four-inch gun deck, and I stayed on the four-inch gun deck, on a P2 mounting,
- 31:30 there was four, single four-inch guns there, and P2 was my mounting. There'd be a dozen blokes on the mount, and we were, that was my action stations all the time I was on the Sydney in the Mediterranean.

Did you enjoy that part of your work on the ship?

Well that was life, action station was there, you know.

- 32:00 We had a lot of air raids of course, we had a lot of others actions and that, and all that time would be on the gun deck. But apart from that, as far as seamanship, coming into harbour, I was a quarterdeck man, on the after end of the ship, the blunt end.

What did that involve?

Well, that would involve the maintenance of the upper deck, scrubbing decks and washing paintwork, and painting and what have you.

- 32:30 The ship would come into harbour, or something, then we'd secure the after end, and vice versa when the ship left.

So can you step me through, so you're onboard the Sydney, what is your first trip?

Well Sydney was my first warship, though the,

- 33:00 the Yarra was classified as a navy ship, yeah. The Yarra, under Captain Harry Howden who became quite famous in the finish, the Swan was under Lieutenant Commander Harrington, and the first trip we had on the, on the Yarra, was up

- 33:30 to Canarvon. And the second trip only went as far as the Abrolhos, but we'd go, do training, gunnery and all that sort of thing as far as ... and then we'd sort of spend the weekend in Geraldton, and then do some more, come back again.

Was this patrol work?

Well, there was nothing really to patrol, was there, in those days? We come to that later on,

- 34:00 if you like.

Sure.

Post war, yes I did. Canarvon, we had an experience there, because we went in there, arrived there about noon, I suppose, on the weekend, and the ship anchored off the very long jetty that's up there. And we go ashore in the motor boat, and they put us on the

- 34:30 jetty. So it'd be 20, 25 people going ashore. We were invited to go up to the banana plantations. Anyway on the jetty, there was a little motorised trolley that went backwards and forwards. So this day, we started to walk, and I suppose,

- 35:00 we, it's a very long jetty, and we got halfway along there and of course, the little train come along, and we stopped the driver. And we, we asked him where he was going, he said, "I'm going out the end to pick up people." and I said "Well, all the people are here." And he said, but we want to go that way, and he wanted to go that way, so we picked up all his trolley and that and we turned it around, and we bought him

- 35:30 back into Canarvon. But later on that night, as it happens, that screaming easterly breeze comes in, and it was violently, the weather changed violently, it was raining and things there. And the, the tides, if you know that jetty, that jetty can finish up almost 20 feet above the, the water.

Gee.

It's built for big ships, not for rowing boats.

- 36:00 Anyway, about midnight, when the leave was supposed to be up, the motor boat, and I remember Harry Howden said, "Well, it's very rough, and if you want to come back with me, you can come back, if not you can sleep here tonight, and we'll pick you up in the morning." OK. But anyway, the motor boat came in, was driven by a midshipman, and of course, one minute the boat was down there, and the next minute it's up the top of the

- 36:30 jetty, kept doing this. And it come up to the top one time, and Harry said, "Hold the boat steady." and he

stepped off, and of course he followed the boat all the way down, and he crashed onto the bottom of the boat, he must have been blue all over the next day. But apart from that, on the other ship, I think we were taken, we went

37:00 to the banana plantations, and we were all given a hand of bananas. We came back onboard and as soon as we poached the ship, the officers there must have said, "OK, leave them all here, and they can be, we'll have them in the ward room." Of course Jack being, perhaps a little bit, having a few beers under his belt, or something like that, he said, "Not on your

37:30 nelly." you know. So we promptly threw them over the side. But they were drastic things, silly things that stick in your mind.

Which ship were you on when the war broke out?

On the Sydney.

On the Sydney. How did you receive that information, was it announced?

Well, no I mentioned that, I came out of Kumpstons, then I had

38:00 no job, and had virtually just sort of followed on.

Right.

There was no, they just said. Well, then of course, just before that, when, when war was declared, then we became just pawns to be put where they wanted, and as I mentioned, they took 120 people odd out of the old depot from Mullet Street [?], onto

38:30 the Sydney, and it was just a follow-on of what we signed up for.

Natural progression.

Yes, natural progression.

So where did the Sydney first depart to?

Ah, well as I mentioned, Collins came and took over in November, and I think the first job we had, was to escort the Queen Mary,

39:00 which arrived and anchored just inside Rottneest there, and it was all as was inside, but on the outside she was just painted grey. And we were told to, Collins was told to escort the Queen Mary down to Cape Leeuwin, around the corner. OK, so we got out there, and we were doing

39:30 a zig-zag, like an anti-submarine type of zig-zag in front of the Queen Mary, there was an aircraft escort too, up top. And we could see the, the Mary sort of building up in speed. And we got to the stage where it was getting a bit closer, so Collins said, "We'll cut out the zig-zag business." so we were just running straight, and I think the Sydney got up as fast as it ever got to, in its lifetime,

40:00 it was doing nearly 34 knots, which was quite good. And then Collins, I believe he was sent the signal, as, at the moment you have an air and sea escort, as from now, you have an air escort, bon voyage. So we turned around and come back to Fremantle. But all right, in November, the Sydney then departed and went around to

40:30 Cockatoo Docks, in New South Wales, in Sydney Harbour. The Sydney went into dock, and we thought that it was going to get a lot of modern equipment, maybe or whatever, protection for the gun deck mainly, that would come later. But anyway, it turned out that we had a little bit of Christmas leave, the ship got its

41:00 bottom and its underwater fittings cleaned and serviced, and that sort of thing. And they, we painted the damn hull again, and the Sydney, when it went down, was as it was born, you know, in England, it never had an extra put on, no radar, no improvement at all. But they did in Egypt, get some protection on the gun deck. But

41:30 I jumped a bit there. But anyway, we came back to sea in January, and then of course, all the convoys were starting to come.

Just before you get into the convoys, how did you spend Christmas in Sydney?

Well, good question.

42:00 There was a lady who lived in Sydney...

42:05 End of tape

Tape 2

00:31 **So, what was the story we interrupted to change tapes, George?**

Well, this, there was another chap in Swanbourne, Harold Thomas, they're all gone now. But Harold Thomas, when we got to Sydney, he said, "Oh, before we go." go and get drunk or whatever, we go

01:00 and do what we do a duty call. So we all trotted out to Manly, and we visited this lady and her husband, and that was very good, because they were quite sober, and she invited us back again. So the second time we went back, unfortunately Harold was a bit of a boozier and the others were a bit raucous and any rate, this lady, Edna

01:30 said, "Out, out, out." kicked us, kicked them all out. But she said, "Well you can stay here, you can, you can come back." so that every time I went back to Sydney, that was where I virtually lived and stayed, over in Manly. They shifted around a couple of times, to Willoughby and Balgowlah, and now she's up on, a skyscraper there, I forget the name of it.

02:00 **Did she become your girlfriend?**

No, no, they were seniors, no, I was only what, 17 then, 18, I was only 18, they were a married couple. Bill Sleeman used to be the, shouldn't have mentioned that name, Bill her husband, was a head man in the taxation department, and then he joined the army, and he went off up to Singapore,

02:30 on one of those things. But anyway, that became my home there. And over Christmas, alright, we spent there, and I know the bankers had a ball there one night, and I was invited there, but I only had a sailors uniform, so it was a black tie job, so I stayed home and looked after nothing. But anyway, that was my...

How did you

03:00 **find your up-homers, how did you meet them?**

Well, through Harold Thomas that knew her, when she visited over here one time. He must have had the address out in Manly, so we went and found it, and then that was it.

I haven't heard the name up-homers before?

Well that would happen, and I had,

03:30 as others would have, I had up-homers in Wales and Scotland, that's where you go when your, sort of temporary home is. They're friends, and you go there and stay there.

That's very generous of them?

Oh yes, it was very generous of them, yes. But it was mainly friendship, and there was a lot of friendship like that during the war.

04:00 But that friendship went on for 50, 50, 60 years until something went wrong. Anyway, alright come back to the Sydney there, the Sydney come back to sea in January and we start picking up convoys, the US one was one of the first of the

04:30 convoys when we took it from Sydney down to, around the Bite, down past, the bottom corner there into the Bite, and then we left them, went back to Sydney. The second big convoy we went halfway across to New Zealand, and we met a convoy US-3, which had a lot of New Zealanders, of course. And

05:00 we brought them right around to Fremantle. In April, we took a, another big convoy with other ships of course, there was even a Japanese ship in that convoy, that joined the Allied forces and, I think, the

05:30 [HMAS] Canberra was one of the other ships. But anyway, we took them as far as Cocos Islands, and on Anzac Day of April 1940, we said, "Alright, that's as far as we go." So we turned around and because it was Anzac Day, all the ships were flying flags, and the Sydney steamed down through the middle of the convoy, 'course full of army

06:00 blokes, and they're all waving and shouting, shouting and that was good. And because we had a sick officer, not that that mattered much, we did have a sick officer on board, and we thought, "Oh, yes, we're coming back to Fremantle." But alas they got a signal immediately, and they must have said, "Right, the Sydney's destined for the Med, so right off to Singapore." We went to Singapore

06:30 and got fuel, then went to Colombo, then to Aden, up through the Suez Canal, and in May 1940, we arrived in Alexandria.

Just before we discuss the time you spent in the Med, George, during those earlier convoys, what would you do on board, during a convoy?

07:00 Well, mainly you've got some ships out front there, even the Sydney, but they'd be pinging for submarines. If you, there's some history there, and this happened one time early in the piece, where the

Sydney and the Canberra were, were sold off,

07:30 because we heard that the Graf Spee was down around Heard Island, and although we went down as far as, nearly, near to Herd Island, by that time, the Graf Spee had gone, but it was then on its way around to South America, where it was finally captured and knocked off. But anyway, as far as we were going, we were just going there

08:00 to either capture or shoot it or do something like that, stop it anyway. But the duties of crews, were on the bigger ships, was mainly defence if they run into a raider ship, or something like that. The smaller ships, and the Sydney too, would have its ASDIC [Anti Submarine Detection Investigation Committee] gear going, if there was any sort of submarines, but there was, fortunately there was no Germans subs out here in those days.

08:30 But that was the purpose, the navy would sort of lead the way, and the convoys would plod along. And the chap in charge of the convoy would have to keep them, you know, at a speed and in position, and all that sort of thing.

What, where were you stationed during a convoy, cruising station, battle station?

No, we were then at cruising stations,

09:00 we worked a lot with an English battle ship, called the Ramallies. The Ramallies, under RN [Royal Navy] control, I don't know, they must have thought there was a lot more problems in the area, so they were on two watches all the time. And when the Ramallies came into Fremantle, and we tied up behind it, it was like being

09:30 tied up at the back of a blooming cattle ship, because they opened all the doors and hatches and all that. But under their routine, two watches, everything would have been secured, all the dead life, no air at all in them. And, and believe me, it wasn't very comfortable, being parked behind it.

What was your cruising station?

10:00 At that time, at all time after that, I was on the four-inch gun deck.

So during those convoys, you were at the four-inch gun deck?

Yes, yes, well you do four on and your watch off, you know. We'd be at three watches.

How you were rostered on and off watch?

Well, the watch system, start off at midday if you like. The afternoon watch

10:30 goes from 12 til four, and as I mentioned they split the dogs. There's a first dog watch is from 4 til 6, the second dog watch is from 6 til 8. Then you get the first watch which goes from 8 o'clock til midnight. The morning watch goes from midnight til 4 o'clock in the morning. Then 4 o'clock, then you come back to 8 o'clock, and do the four-noon, takes you back to noon.

11:00 By breaking it up like that, if you do the afternoon watch today, the next day you do the four-noon, and so you go back one each time. But that breaks it up so you're not doing the same thing all the time. So virtually you're doing four hours on, and the rest of the time you'd have meals, and letters, and dozing, and what have you.

11:30 What would you do when you're on watch?

Well, of course there was no aircraft, so it was just a matter of hanging around mainly, hanging around.

Whereabouts?

On the gun deck, you'd be on the gun deck all the time, you'd stay there. But the gundeck, because there was four guns crews, there'd be about 50 men on there,

12:00 and what they would do if the need came, if there was somebody went overboard, or something, man overboard, or there was somebody to be picked up, they'd often take the guns crews down to those sort of jobs. We would also get involved when they come out of Fremantle, they'd stream paravanes, what they call paravanes,

12:30 so that they'd have a big shoe on the bow, and attached to that would be a float out there, and a float out the other side, and that would be lowered down to the depth that you wanted the paravanes to float. And they would, the idea, the wire between the bow and the float would be a serrated wire, so that if you run into a mine that was moored, the serrations were

13:00 supposed to chase that through. And then the mine would be released from its base down there, this doesn't happen in the middle of the ocean of course, but in waters up to what, you know, 30, 40, 50 feet, something like that. They could be moored, they'd have a big heavy framework underneath, with a coil of wire, and they'd set that to run, say 15 feet below the surface.

13:30 And that serrated wire, if it hit the para-vein wire, would chaff it, and then release the mine. And

technically then, the mine is been de-activated, and it would come to the surface, and many times, well in our, my experience anyway, many times we'd come across a mine floating in the sea, and the only way we would

- 14:00 handle it, would be to fire bullets into it, to try and explode it, which in many cases you could. To actually explode it, you'd have to hit one of those horns, which had an acid content inside. And if you broke the horn, then the acid would go down, and that would explode the mine.

What kind of ammunition did you fire at them, to detonate them?

Well, we only had the rifles in those days, mainly .303's,

- 14:30 Lee Enfield rifles.

Fairly light ammunition, then.

Oh, that was only .303, point three of a, point three. They weren't very big, but they were a service type of rifle the army used, and everything.

Oh, they were a powerful rifle, alright, weren't they?

They were powerful rifles, yes. And of course, they virtually went through

- 15:00 World War 1, and virtually went through World War 2, too.

George, can you describe the four-inch gun deck?

Well, there's some pictures and all that there.

Yes, I'd rather listen to you describe it.

Alright.

I'd like to look at the pictures later.

You can see the, you can't see the... alright, well the beam of the ship was what, about

- 15:30 40 feet, well let's say there was a square of about 40 foot square in between the two funnels. There was a four-inch mounting in each corner there, two on the port side, two on the starboard side. There'd be about 12 in a guns crew, and it was just a matter of hanging around.

- 16:00 There was no aircraft, so you couldn't do much with that. If we had have come across another ship or something. There was one ship, not with our ship, but there was an Italian ship at the beginning of the war, the Romalo,[?] it was captured, I think by the [HMAS] Adelaide. But to apprehend

- 16:30 a ship like that, you know, then they probably put a couple of four-inch rounds over their head, or something like that. But no, that didn't happen. But on the convoy like that, it was very, very tiring.

How would you fill in your watch on the four-inch gun deck?

Well, you'd sit and talk, or you'd go to sleep, or you'd lay down or something, and it's your mounting, you'd stay close to your mounting

- 17:00 if required. Sometimes as I mentioned, they'd take you away for different jobs, like a sea boat crew, or if they wanted extra lookouts, if they were expecting things. They could take us away for different jobs like, but we were sort of a handy pool of men there, that if they wanted somebody for specific purpose, you know, sea boats, or lookouts, they did have lookouts of course.

Can you describe the four-inch gun mount, how did that work?

Well, it was virtually controlled from a four-inch director, which was right up on top of the bridge mounting, there was a six-inch director to control, used to guide the turrets.

- 18:00 The four-inch would. Hello, your blinds fallen down again at the door. Keep on going. The four-inch would, there'd be an alarm, alarm aircraft. OK. So we'd all close up on your mounting. I was, perhaps mainly a loading number, but there was a captain of the gun, there

- 18:30 was a trainer, a bloke that would train it left and right, there was a bloke that used to read the others, but they'd all have a job to do. And we'd get a direction on our side, red, red 3-0, would be whatever it was, red 3-0 an aircraft, because the RAF [Royal Air Force] used to sort of follow out, or strange things. Just for exercise purposes,

- 19:00 for exercises, red 3-0 aircraft. OK, so we'd close up, there'd be a layer and trainer, so we'd turn around to a red 30 position on the port side, and they'd follow them with a thing, then you'd get a range. Then the gunnery bloke, office, with a four-inch shells, load, load, load. And then they would be fired,

- 19:30 from the mounting, yes, fired from the mounting. On the six-inch, they were fired from the director control. But, a four-inch shell was about that long, like a bullet, oversized bullet, weighed 48 pounds. And being a loading number, when they get load, load, load, OK, we'd grab one of these and stick it up

the smith, the bloke would open the breech, we'd stick it in,

20:00 close the breech, and then, we were on target, like, fire from there, boom, away you'd go.

Were there any dangers operating the four-inch gun? For a loading number, were there any dangers?

There was one occasion that did happen, but if, like on a

20:30 rifle, if the firing pin didn't hit the right place, you would get what they called a misfire. And if, you'd pull the trigger, and boom, you know, it hit, and it didn't go off, you'd have what they called a misfire, and then we wouldn't be able to, you couldn't touch the gun for quarter of an hour or something, for it to cool down. We did have one, one day, where

21:00 one of the senior gunnery people came along, we had a misfire and he came along and said, "Open the breech." Alright, so he was in charge, and we opened the breech, and you could see that this one had been hit. And there was the panic when, when he was holding a bloody bomb in his hand, and then, then somebody almost knocked him down, and grabbed the shell and threw it over the side, and it went boom,

21:30 alongside the ship.

We'll just pause there, I think.

Those early days before we got to the Med [Mediterranean], you know, 'cause there was no, virtually no enemy action as far as we were concerned. But when we got to the Mediterranean, then our work really started. Because the Italians, used

22:00 what they called Savoia bombers, the pictures of there, savoy bomber bombers. But they used to come over that high, that you couldn't see them. And the first thing you'd know, that something, you'd have bombs dropping all around you, that was when the dangerous part was on. A four-inch gun was also a surface, HA-LA,

22:30 low angle, high angle, but our four-inch guns would not get anywhere near them. But it soon became known, and Collins, Captain Collins was a specialist at this. But, you'd see them, you wouldn't see them, but you'd sort of see the spaghetti business, sort of dropping. And they would work it out, "Alright, we go that way or we go that way."

23:00 and he sort of got pretty good at it. I can show you a picture, a photo there, where they'd drop, what they call a stick of bombs, and I can show you there's four bombs, about eight, there was always eight in a stick, and there was, no there was three bombs, one, two, three and then they missed one,

23:30 and then there was four went across the ship, right across the ship. But if they had have put that middle one in, it would have gone right down the funnel. But there again, to the aircraft, well, an aircraft gunnery, as we were doing, they're not designed to hit the plane at all, especially in stokers later on, in stokers or dive bombing,

24:00 torpedo bombers or something, the idea is to put up a barrage of shell fire at a certain distance, and the planes have got to come through it. They're not, you're not specifically, you aim at the plane, but you don't expect to hit it with your gun, but you put up a barrage of shellfire, and they, they're supposed to come. And if they successfully run through, and run through one of your, it cuts them to

24:30 pieces, you know, that brings them down. But later on, yes, it was quite hairy there in the Med, because there was aircraft all the time, and we were on standby all the time, day and night.

Well before we get, we get to the Med, George, what was it like mooring in Fremantle?

Mooring in Fremantle?

Yes, what was the harbour like in those days?

I can tell you a story,

25:00 that one of the first times that Collins took over the ship, and if you know Fremantle, when the 'doctor' comes in, the 'Fremantle doctor' comes in, the breeze is quite strong, and there's an inflowing tide there. Anyway Collins, first time he came in, and he sort of hugged north wharf, with the

25:30 intention of doing a U-ey [U-turn, 180 degree turn], and coming back to A-shed where we used to berth. And between the wind and the, the tide and right in the middle of the harbour at that time, there was a great big mooring buoy there, about six foot long, and there was a mooring right in the middle of the harbour. Anyway, Collins thought, right, all I'll do is go there, do a U-ey and come back to A-shed. You familiar with that sort of set up? OK.

26:00 So, he must have got half way round and he thought, "Goodness gracious, I'm not going to make it." So he sort of backed off a bit, and all he was doing, he was backing and backing, and he was not getting anywhere, but he was sort of going downstream all the time, and we came to this great big mooring buoy in the middle of the harbour, and that went over the top of that, boom, boom, boom, came up the

other side. Anyway, from then, he said,

26:30 "Full astern', or something. And we finished up about 15 feet in the north wharf side, north wharf of that side over there. And as I mentioned, I was on the quarterdeck, quarterdeck man, and it was just a matter of stepping off the ship onto the, to put a line on it. But that was how the Sydney got a crumpled stern. Got a damaged stern there. And it, it kept that all the time through the Med, until

27:00 they knocked it out in Malta at Christmas time, later on. But she was called the ship with the crumpled stern.

So the wind got hold of her and swept her down the harbour?

Yes, well the wind and tide got hold of her, and he couldn't get around, and then he thought there was only one option, was to back, back off, and of course, he, we secured then, and of course, the tugs come along, tugs don't normally tend to navy

27:30 ships. Because navy ships are supposed to be skilful enough not to require a pilot or a tug. But it was strange after that, every time Sydney came around Rottneest, there would be two tugs waiting there, and they followed the Sydney into harbour, and that used to get right up Collins' nose, he didn't like that.

You were lucky you didn't collide with any other

28:00 **ships in the harbour?**

Well, he never got that far, but you know, we damn near went into the pilot boat's jetty there, just before the bridge. But he could probably say I could see it all coming, you know, and you've got to do something like that, and be... but anyway, after that, he, he handled it much better, but he come down the middle and turned on his chute rears, and do the right thing. But I don't know, he must have thought he

28:30 was driving a destroyer or something like a, like driving a light motor car you can do a U-ey and all that, but you couldn't do it with a limo, or something like that.

He just felt a bit confident maybe?

He must have been very confident there, but that, he only had the ship, so he wasn't used to it at all.

As you just mentioned, I'm surprised he didn't try and

29:00 **turn her on her two screws in that wind?**

No, you wonder there about, you, something queried about screws. But screws, are the best way to control

29:30 the ship, the rudder is just like, for fine tuning really. But you could turn the, you can't, you couldn't turn the ship with rudders, so much, they're helpful, but that's fine-tuning. But your engine, you work your screws, and that, that does the job.

I would have thought maybe a bit of, a bit of throttle on port engine, and a bit of reverse?

Well, that's right, well ahead on one, stern on the other, and that's,

30:00 that's the most effective way to turn. You see the ships in Fremantle Harbour doing that.

What was it like visiting, or taking leave in Fremantle in those days?

Well naturally, I lived in Perth, I'd go home to Wembley, and come back to the ship. I almost got engaged there,

30:30 but my darling was going to wait for me until the end of the war, but as soon as the ship went out of the [Fremantle] Heads, she married an army bloke. Oh well.

Did, so did you go out in Fremantle at all, or just head straight to Wembley?

Well, we'd go to Fremantle, then come into Perth. We loved dancing,

31:00 I met my wife at a dance at the Embassy, down at the foot of William Street. And there was several dances there, the RSL [Returned and Services League] and Wellington Street the Railway, and West Leederville Town Hall. And we'd go from one to the other, and Jolimont Hall, I'd go back there. But there wasn't

31:30 the night life and the cafes and all those sort of things, that you've got today.

The dance halls sound like they were a great place to go?

They were great places, and of course, they had, and even, my wife was in a group called the, what did they call themselves 'Working Girls War Effort', or something, We go. They were a group of like working girls.

32:00 Edna was a tailoress there in the corner of William Street and Hay Street, the Glen Buildings. And of course, by that time, they were mostly making blooming American uniforms, made all those grey uniforms there.

So you had met her before you went to the Med?

No.

32:30 No.

Perhaps we'll have.

Maybe I did, maybe I did.

Shall we weave your meeting into the story a bit later?

Yes, we could do. Perhaps. Maybe.

What pubs did you drink at when you were on leave in Perth or Fremantle?

Well we had a bit of a pact with the

33:00 Savoy, that was our main pub. But, you know, you wouldn't stay there all day, but you'd go in, in the morning and you'd bump into half a dozen of your mates, or if you were, come in later on, you'd come in and there'd still be half a dozen blokes there, you know. But the Savoy was our main hang-out. And

33:30 very sociable, not that we were great drinkers in those days, we weren't, not great drinkers. But it was just somewhere to meet in town, if anybody was loose, or something, they'd meet. Of course, most of them then, of course we were all Western Australians, they all had a home, and they'd have to get away from Mum, and that kind of thing.

Was there a favourite watering hole in Fremantle?

No,

34:00 I can't think of any, but the one, there was opposite the bridge there, the Orient, oh there was one there. Going back to the old reserve days, once a year they'd have a march through Fremantle, and all the old biddies would be on the Orient pub, and the others too, and somebody would know somebody, "Oh, there's Bill." carrying on,

34:30 it was quite a night.

We were talking about your convoy work earlier, you mentioned that you took a large convoy up to the Cocos Islands.

Yes.

Who was in that convoy with you?

Who was in it?

Yes, what ships?

Well, I can't tell you off-hand, I could tell you there, if I had my book.

Can you mention a few names?

Oh there was some very popular ones.

35:00 Oh, I'd have to look them up there, no good with the. There'd be about 20 ships in it, about 20 ships, quite a big one.

Yes. Was it an escort convoy, or?

Well, not only us, but there'd be half a dozen navy ships involved there, we were only one of them,

35:30 we were only one of them. I think the [HMS] Ramallies was there, and that went right through to the Med with them. But as I mentioned, we pulled out, and we, well we were taken out anyway, they must have received a signal, you know, proceed to the Med. We had to do that to get fuel at Singapore, Colombo and then up.

What do you remember of stopping at Singapore

36:00 **and Colombo on your way up the Med?**

Singapore, well we were only there a short time, overnight probably. And they had leave, one bloke fell in the canal there, and got deaded.

He died?

Yes, he was trying, must have drink the water or something like that, but he, no, he got deaded. Didn't

- do him any good,
- 36:30 he was as full as a fiddle I suppose.
- Did you get any leave at Singapore?**
- Yes, we had a little bit of leave at Singapore, but not much, not much.
- It's your first time overseas, was it, you know, in a foreign country?**
- Yes, it was my first time overseas, yes, of course, we were all young, we hadn't had that experience. We got to Colombo, we were there for a long time, well not a long time, for several weeks. Strangely enough,
- 37:00 there was a panic one time there, but there was a lot of what we called buzzers, and get a buzz, and even the papers, and they read the papers, 'there's an enemy raider off Colombo', and we went out, we were naturally there, there was another old English warship there, but we were sent out there, and we chased around the ocean there for a couple of days looking for these things, and eventually we
- 37:30 found it, and it turned out to be the Dutch ship, called the Christian Huygens And later on, we're still going, that was the ship that took us to England, from Alex to England, later on in the story, you know. But anyway, it turned out, it wasn't a raider, but it could have been, and there were German raiders running around in those days. And
- 38:00 there was a couple of ships that got knocked off, you know, by those raiders, the Lark Bay, [HMS Largo Bay] was one, and those German ships were, were pretty efficient, believe me, they knocked them off. And this of course happened to my Sydney, up off Canarvon in November of '41. Picked on the wrong, or didn't read all the signs and
- 38:30 signals and then got clobbered.
- That's something we might have to discuss with you a bit further, later on. What did you do while you were ashore at Colombo?**
- Well, what can you do. You go around, you're looking at shops and that, and you're besieged by little kids, gimme, gimme, gimme money, you know, they want money and they had,
- 39:00 shops and all sorts of things. I think I bought a lovely, they had a lot of intricate stuff, I think I bought a large, a quilt and I thought, "I'll give that to my mother." And that used to be on our bed here for a long, long time. A quilt, and I think I remember we bought
- 39:30 a jar of tea, I thought mother would like that, real Indian tea, but that went off and you couldn't even drink it.
- That's nice of you though, to be thinking of your mother.**
- Yeah, well. As I say, we were young, and had no other great connections there. I suppose we had girlfriends before we went, but there was nothing too serious.
- Were you missing home?**
- 40:00 Well yes, you miss home, but you wouldn't say you get homesick or anything like that. No, I suppose we were, it's hard to explain how you filled in your day, but we, it was, you know, on the go all the time, and you were aware that you had jobs to do, and you had to do them. No right through,
- 40:30 you know, you never had time to really stop and think of too much, you know. It was all for a good cause, and you put your mind to it.
- So your thoughts were always busy with what you were doing?**
- That's right, yes. Well, we were. That's right, and you just wanted to do the best you could, and that kept you quite busy.
- We're getting the wind up there from behind the camera, so we'll change tapes before we ask you any more questions, George.**
- 41:02 **End of tape**

Tape 3

- 00:33 **What were some of the buzzes that you heard on board, when you were in transit towards Alexandria?**

Well, the buzzes used to fly, and we would hear of enemy raider ships all over the place. And of course,

if they did turn up, they were certainly unexpected, but it

01:00 kept everybody on their toes.

What sort of things happened to you on the way to Alexandria?

Well, there was not too much excitement, not too much excitement.

Was it tedious?

No, it never ever got tedious. No,

01:30 I remember it got bloody hot though in Singapore, because we were sent off with a very strange rig, we had blue jumpers and white pants, and that to us, seemed to be the wrong way around, because it was that hot and humid in Singapore. And we even had those, we had pith helmets, and I don't know what happened to them, but anyway. On the top of a navy kit bag,

02:00 we had what they call a kit bag, it was about four foot long, and it had a soft top on it, like a cloth top, with a string pull, and that was where, your pith helmet went. But they were so blooming uncomfortable and of course, when you shifted ship, or shifted from one place to the other, the pith helmets, being so fragile, you know, they got smashed, so they were all

02:30 thrown away in no time. But a lot of blokes have even forgotten that we had pith helmets. But no, I remember Singapore, you know, because it was so hot and humid, that rig, having blue shirts, top jumpers on was, was a killer you know, and white pants, because the pants got filthy. Anyway, you'd have a ride in a rickshaw, and all that sort of stuff, and.

03:00 **Where did you do that?**

Well, mostly in Singapore and Colombo. But they were different to the rickshaws in South Africa, a different thing. No, but to get from A to B, you were there somewhere, and you wanted to get to the pictures, you'd jump into a bit of a rickshaw thing, and take us to the pictures. And you'd do that once or twice, and they rob you,

03:30 and you know. Anyway. No, life was, I don't know, tedious, you'd say right, leaves up at midnight or whatever, you know, and you'd virtually go back along, you know, before time and all that sort of thing. There was no, you wouldn't meet anybody that you knew, and there was a different, different world all together.

So what was it like to arrive in Suez,

04:00 **and Aden?**

Well, we virtually passed through the Suez, there was, sort of, no stopping there, we stopped at Aden. The next place you stop is Alexandria. But it was, that was all sort of interesting there to come up the, the Suez Canal. There was a lot of sand there, there was a couple of stopping places, the Great Lakes

04:30 was a place, it was all sort of one way traffic there. And they'd, ships coming one way at Ismalia, or the Great Lakes, would sort of have to wait til this convoy went, like the trains sort of have a loop line. But the bit of Lakes, was one place was, you might get stuck there for a day, a couple of days, we can come back to that later on, if you want to. When we left there, but

05:00 the other place was, is Ismalia, was a great sort of a basin on the Suez Canal, but Ismalia is the, the Club Med sort of thing for, for the Egyptians. And there was a lot of beautiful houses there, and beautiful boats and yachts and beaches and all that, and that was there, like their summer holidays and that,

05:30 the wealthy, for the wealthy people, they had their places there, they'd get away from the heat, I suppose, of Cairo and Alex, and one thing and another.

Did you get to walk around there?

No, no. We'd, no a couple of times, I forget now, but anyway, we might have stopped for a day or something, you know, or overnight, to let convoys past there. But virtually it was almost straight through on that occasion.

06:00 You get to Suez, and the big Suez Canal offices and that were there, and then straight through, and bang, you're in the Med..

So did you.

Only sightseeing, only sightseeing. There was that big Australian memorial,

06:30 halfway down the Suez Canal.

Oh, what was that?

There was a big memorial put up to the First World War diggers, and they tried to transfer that down to

Albany, or something, didn't they.

I don't know.

You don't know about that? Oh, well, I don't know what happened to it. But it was a big twin spired thing, it disappeared, I don't know what happened to it. All right. So, OK,

07:00 not much greenery, a few coconut trees along the way, but everything was quite desolate other than that. It wasn't that wide, it was, be as wide as this block, I suppose, 50 or 60 feet. And going that way was plain sailing, but coming back it was a bit different, when we get to that maybe.

So did you head straight for Alexandria?

07:30 Yes, we went straight to Alexandria.

Tell me about Alexandria?

Well, Alex was a lovely place at this time, very historical. There's a, there was a pylon in front of the entrance, or out to sea there, but that was, apparently one of the old towns that was there, and

08:00 they all got wrecked eventually. But the Pinnacle they called, Pinnacle, but that was still standing. Anyway, you come into a breakwater, something like Fremantle, it opens into a big bay there, and we had a mooring, number one buoy they called it, which was right over next to, almost in front of King Farouk's

08:30 palace, his summer palace. It was a beautiful mooring, we'd drive up and sort of anchor there. But looking around, there was Royal Navy ships, there was, the French fleet were there, the Lorraine, Duguay Trouin cruisers, and the Saffron, [Suffren class cruisers] other destroyers and that. They had every type of ship there,

09:00 submarines and feluccas, these sailing boats coming backwards and forwards.

Sounds very colourful.

Very colourful, yeah, everything, I can show you a picture there, if you looked around, and you could sort of count ships, there'd be battle ships, there'd be cruisers, there'd be destroyers, there'd be civvy ships there, passenger liners.

09:30 There'd be something or other, you know, all the different types of ships, and all these things. And then strangely enough, the blooming Sunderland bombers would come in, and they'd bloody land in the middle of that lot. How they'd miss them, I don't know. But they'd, when they'd take off, some of them, they'd say, "Oh, right-o, it's a bit clear." you know, off they'd go, and they'd jump over the sea wall which was next to the Sydney there. And you'd think that they were coming in-board, but they didn't.

10:00 **Did you get some leave in Alexandria?**

No, well a short time leave, nothing else.

Were you warned at all about some of the night life in Alexandria?

Well you get warned about night life and red light areas, and the attractions there, you know. Come and

10:30 see the ladies and the monkey and... There were there other places that mother told us to keep away from.

What did the navy tell you about these places?

Well they just, they, the officialdom gets there, and they always produce a screed, you know, don't go to the red light area and don't go to the

11:00 knocking shops and all those sort of things. The town was full of, there was many, there were more French sailors in Alex, than there were British people, British sailors. And they used to go ashore every day, and they used to have their families and everything there, and they never sort of moved much, they never went to sea at all.

11:30 They had one French battle ship, that was, later on perhaps we'll mention that, that we took out on a bombing thing, Abardia,[?]Arbter] was the all.

Well what happened directly after arriving in Alexandria, what happened next?

Well, I don't know, we had a bit of a rest. We actually were inducted, we got to

12:00 Alex, and we wondered why all the flags were flying, and we finished up flying flags, and it turned out to be Empire Day. Ever heard of that, Empire Day?

No, actually I haven't.

So all the British, all the British ships were flying, you know, like we had a, we would fly an Australian flag on the bows, and a White ensign on the stern, or on the

- 12:30 gaff, one or the other. But on special occasions like that, they'd pull out a great new White ensign, and they'd fly that from the rain mast, so there'd be flags all over the place, and all this, and it was very exciting until we found out it was Empire Day. And that was the day, 26th of May, that we arrived in Alex. And of course, we were inducted then into the Royal Navy's Eastern
- 13:00 Mediterranean Fleet, Western Mediterranean Fleet, under Andrew Cunningham, the admiral. We were then delegated to the 7th, 7th Cruiser Squadron, under Vice Admiral Jack, Jack Storey, Jack somebody. So we joined then with, with the [HMAS] Orion,
- 13:30 the [HMS] Neptune, and the [HMS] Ajax, I think we had four cruisers, five cruisers somewhere. So we become a cruiser force then, and there wasn't too much lead time there, because we'd go then out, as a cruiser force,
- 14:00 and we'd do patrols all around, go out as far as Crete, and back to, half way to Malta and then back again. And then, well you're getting into one of the first big jobs we did, with bombardments on Bardia and Libya, on the Libyan Coast there, along Tobruk. We took this French battleship in, and that,
- 14:30 the destroyers would actually go in closer to Bardia and Tobruk, they'd go in close in shore, perhaps shoot up a few shore barracks and positions, because the, the Australian Army were, were in the desert at that time. And the destroyers would go in, and play merry hell, and one stage, the [HMAS] Waterhen, one of our destroyers, got
- 15:00 clobbered, and didn't come out. But the ships, the [HMAS] Sydney, like jobs, we'd have, they'd designate a target, some barracks or buildings or something, and we'd sort of bombard those sort of things, mainly with six-inch guns.

You were on a four-inch, so are you...

I was on a four-inch, there was nothing, we just had to keep out of the way there, that was all. There was no aircraft.

- 15:30 As I said, this Lorraine battleship, had a big thing, about 12-inch guns on it, and that, that sort of had a mind of its own, it sort of opened fire long before we did, and it was still firing when we took off. But that was the only time any of the French ships moved there, we can come to their position later on. But strangely enough, our
- 16:00 aircraft, a Walrus amphibious plane, we called the 'Pusser's Duck', it used to be launched on a catapult in between the funnels there.

On a catapult?

On a catapult, we could catapult it off, or it could be dropped off on a crane, you know, in the water and taken off that way. When it came back, we'd, it'd land alongside the ship, and a crane would pick it up and put it back on the catapult again.

- 16:30 But anyway, that was doing what they call spotting for our targets. You need someone to, you see them on the ships, you get a range, you know, like of so many yards, of what ever. And you've got to know whether your, bullet, your round land the deck, so you can up-range or down-range or something, of the gun.
- 17:00 But to do sort of bombing like that, target, targets like that, we had the Pusser's Duck used to be there. And we had a, a RAF pilot bloke, Tommy Price, a navy Lieutenant Commander Bacon, and an wireless air gunner, but they would do the spotting, and they'd say, "Right, you know, you're firing short or you're firing over." or something like that. So they, they would, you know,
- 17:30 be in touch with the ship, and you know, or shift your target, shift your target there. But anyway, at one stage of the game, this story varies a little bit here, because I thought it was... there were three, according to me, there were three planes on Malta, the air defence of Malta at
- 18:00 that time. They were bi-planes, something a little bit smaller than the Gypsy Moth, you know, the things that we fly around here. And those three were called 'Faith, Hope and Charity.' And according to me, those planes came over, and the Brits apparently didn't recognise what the Pusser's Duck looked like, or belonged to, so they shot it up. But anyway,
- 18:30 the story later on was corrected there, and they reckoned it was an Italian plane that shot them up. But anyway, the old Pusser Duck got shot up, and it staggered away, and it crashed on Mersa Matruh aerodrome, and the crew just got out, and walked away from it. But they were lucky, it was full of holes and all that, but they landed on Mersa Matruh aerodrome, and they got away, so that was good.

So what do you do without your duck?

- 19:00 Well, we got another one eventually, and that got smashed up.

Did not having a Pusser's Duck at that point, did you have to drop back, or do something differently, because you couldn't figure out if you were hitting your targets or not?

Oh well, they managed, you know, they managed to blow the place up, and all that.

- 19:30 A bit of fine tuning, I suppose, the gunnery. But you could see what was happening. No, lots of other times we didn't have aircraft, later on in the war, we were doing bombardments, and the Sydney was doing bombardments, but that was the only time we virtually used the Pusser's Duck for spotting like that. But we would
- 20:00 also use it, fly it off now and again, and it would sort of circle and be the eyes, if there was anything out there, you know. Later on, we run into some Italian ships, we'll get to that later on. But anyway, the Lorraine would come back into Alex, and that crew were there, and
- 20:30 when France fell, they wanted, the Brits wanted them to join the British fleet. But half of them were Vichy French, and the others were Free French, there was more Vichy French than other ones. And at one stage of the game, they said, "No, we're not going to join you." And they said, "Well, either you're either with
- 21:00 us or agin us." and they said, "Alright, OK, we're agin you." So for a week or so, at one stage of the game, they secured all the French ships at their moorings, and the Brits all got lined up, they had submarines and battle ships all pointing at them, if someone had of said "Boo." you know, there would have been hell to pay. But anyway, they
- 21:30 eventually sort of capitulated, and they said, "Right, well, we'll become neutrals." So they came, the mob in Alex became neutrals. But there was, around in Tripoli somewhere, there was French battleships and there was a bit of a stoush around there, when a couple of them tried to run, get out, One battleship got away somewhere, but
- 22:00 they sunk another one there. But that was the trouble, that they were half Free French and half Vichy French. I mean, the trouble. Same thing happened later on, when we, much later on in Madagascar, where the Free French, the Vichy French were holding Madagascar, and we had to, with the 7th Destroyer Squadron, we had to go and captured bloody Madagascar.
- 22:30 Which we did, later on, right.

So after the whole confusion involved with the ships, and them becoming neutral, what happened next as far as the Sydney was concerned?

Well they just stayed there, they just stayed there. And they were travelling backwards and forwards every day, and we were going out to work everyday.

And were you just on

- 23:00 **patrol?**

Well, we'd go out on patrols, and later on, well we got into action and all that, and you know, we run into the Espero, a destroyer, and we sunk that one. And we run into the Zeffiro later on, we had, in July we had the action with the Colleoni, and that.

- 23:30 Go into that deeper later on, if you want to.

Well.

Later on.

Well, what's happening now, as far as the situation is concerned, do you want to go to that, is there something else that happens in the middle?

No. Do you want to, do you want to go onto the Med, or what?

Well, what's the next step for you, as far as the chronology is concerned?

- 24:00 Well we had what, 15 months in the Med, and the Sydney was a very famous ship there, we were the first Australian ship into action in the war. We were the first ones to do any bombardments. The first ones to sink an Italian ship.
- 24:30 One of the very early parts there, there was a great kerfuffle, the whole Mediterranean fleet, and our cruiser squadron and the destroyers, there was, we had all the British ships we could, they were all at a place at the foot of Italy called Calabria. And that
- 25:00 was the first fleet action since Nelson's days, in 100 years, the British fleet had never had a fleet action. Any rate, it got to the stage where apparently, they invited the Italian ships to come out and fight, and see who was going to be King of the Med, and they showed up a little bit, but they backed off and they didn't come out.

Can you tell me what happened with the Espero?

With the Espero?

Yes.

25:30 She was one of several ships that were with an Italian force, but she just got caught on the outer perimeters of it, I suppose. And I can show you photos of it, it got clobbered, and blew up.

What did the Sydney do in order to facilitate that?

Well, we were firing, we were certainly firing and chasing and then all that

26:00 sort of thing. And it was claimed by Sydney, it was our six-inch shells that hit it, and exploded it. And then we stopped to pick up survivors, and, and the Italians as soon as something happened to an Italian ship, that one, or the Zeffiro, or the Colleoni, they, their

26:30 bombers would come over, and they would bomb even their own men in the water. And being on the four-inch gun deck, we'd be flat to the board, you know, trying to keep the aircraft away. We'd be firing.

So you were actually protecting the Italians from the Italians.

That's right. We were trying to pick them up, and they were bombing. And one of our ships later on, one, not

27:00 one of ours, but the RN Havoc, was hit, while stopped picking up things there. But, the Zeffiro, well, we, there was nothing much, we were too far away, and we can, we only saw it virtually on the horizon, and we thought, we've got to, smoke bomb there like an atomic bomb going off. But the other one, the Zeffiro, we

27:30 left, we left boats with, and they put blankets and stuff, and leave the boats for them if they can get in the boat OK, if they couldn't bad luck. But you get into a lot of things there. I've just finished reading The Cruel Sea, you've never read those books, but they get, that was one of the famous,

28:00 famous ones, The Cruel Sea. They, in their case, they, they sunk a submarine, or they nearly sunk a submarine, and of course, they had, what was it, no they sunk something. There was a hell of a lot of men, that's right, they had a hell of a lot of men in the water around that part, and then

28:30 they were going to, they picked up a 'ping', they got a 'ping' on the submarine, underneath all these men. And, and the skipper had to make a decision, do I go and drop depth chargers which would have killed them all, or not. You know, there were several incidents like that. And while,

29:00 you, you know, after sort of something like that happens, you're stopped in your stationed, and the submarines in the area, and you can't afford to stay there, you know, you're a sitting duck. And you try to pick up men. On the Colleoni, I can show you photos there, we picked up, all in about 50 of them, I suppose. But once again, the bombers made it

29:30 impossible to stick around. And in the case of the Colleoni there, we left a 32 foot boat loaded with stores and, and blankets and that. You know, if they could, if the survivors, if they could get to a boat, OK that was it. But you couldn't afford to. And that happened all the way through, that it was on every, every skipper's mind, that you couldn't stop and be a stationary

30:00 target for bloody submarines, you couldn't tell whether they were there, or whether they weren't there. That was a, some of those big decisions those skippers used to make.

What sort of shape were the survivors in, when you saw them in the water?

Well, you'd see these things, but the survivors in every case, even these convoys, motor convoys

30:30 and all that sort of thing, the ships would be full of oil, and these survivors would be floating around in a mess of oil and debris and Christ knows what. And by the time you pulled them out, in the Med at least, it wasn't cold, but they couldn't breathe, or the oil would catch fire or something, they were terrible situations. But in the Russian

31:00 convoys and up in the North Sea there, you know, it'd be better if you froze to death in three minutes than floating around in oil and Christ knows what, you know, it was terrible.

It must give you a feeling of complete helplessness to be seeing all those survivors, and not really being able to doing anything about it?

Well, you try to do the best, but some, you know, the general opinion would say,

31:30 oh God, they've been bloody firing at us and they would have killed us, and what would they do for us. And they wouldn't do anything, the Germans wouldn't pick up any British survivors or anything like that, and the Italians probably didn't get the chance to do that. But they were there all the time, but dare I say it, the Italian

32:00 navy had far more, and bigger ships than, than the Brits [British] had in the Med, their cruisers, like the Colleoni and the Bande Nere, that one, they were ships able to do more than 40 knots. But as soon as, and this happened in the Colleoni action, actually the first ship that we run into, alright,

32:30 was the Colleoni, no it wasn't, the Bande Nere. The Bande Nere was the first ship we run into, and we must have hit it gently, and then the Colleoni, sort of came to their rescue, that would have meant two to one against us. But then as soon as the Colleoni came, the Bande Nere said, "I've had enough of the today." and he scarpered, he'd gone.

33:00 And the Colleoni was the one that sort of finished up getting belted. But that is, they had the ships and they had the men, but they couldn't handle the ships, they weren't able to match the calibre the Brits had. It's as simple as that I suppose.

33:30 They could have, as I mentioned in that Calabria thing, they could have wiped the Mediterranean fleet out, right at the beginning, but they didn't.

What was your job, while all that was happening, onboard the Sydney?

While what was happening, on the gun deck?

Yep.

Well that'd be, that'd be a classic situation where, they'd want

34:00 the ship would go through, or they'd drop the sea boat, they would probably have, in that case, they would have the proper sea boat crew there. But the sea boat would come back, and they'd grab 20 or 30 blokes off the gun deck, we'd put a scrambling net over the side, and 'cause a lot of us were pretty good swimmers, we'd go out and we'd try and pull them and

34:30 put them on the scrambling net to get them in, but, yeah.

So you were actually in the water?

Well, the worst thing that ever happened to me, I was on a scrambling net, and I pulled a bloke alongside, we tried to lift him out of the water, and there was only half of him.

It's OK, George.

35:00 It put me right off, the worst thing that ever happened.

It's an incredible confronting situation that you were put in, you were just in there doing your best, you know, George.

Yeah.

You're just not expecting something like that, you were trying your best.

Yes.

How would you discuss

35:30 **this with, you know, some of the other men afterwards, did you talk about it?**

Well, that was probably one of our failings, we picked these blokes up, and we'd feed them and water them and look after them, but you know, they, they would certainly, probably never ever do that, never ever, never heard of anybody. A couple of cases there,

36:00 our sister destroyer, the [HMAS] Nestor, it got stopped with a bomb, and all they'd do when a ship, they'd try to, they'd try to get the men off it, and they'd try to tow it away, but the bombers give us hell, you know. But they, no, the air force, I suppose was the dangerous part of the Italian people, the Italian forces.

36:30 **How long were you in that skirmish?**

In the Med, we were there, what, about seven months, from May to January, next year, '41.

Did it get on top of you, just the pressure of being in such a, enormous battle fleet?

37:00 There were some incidents that got me, it used to be, I still have nightmares over the dead thing. But no, the other, it was just a job, we had to do it, and that was it. There was some...

Was the worst thing about it, the fact that it was relentless?

It was day on, day night. The ship was at sea, a lot

37:30 more than... There are figures there, I think that we were virtually steaming about six miles every hour of the war that we were in the Med. So.

You must have been at your action station pretty much all the time?

Well yes, when there was something doing like that, a ship was sighted, or. Well,

38:00 90 percent of my time would be spent on the upper deck, on the gun deck, with all the blokes, yes.

Would you sleep at your action station?

If you could cat nap yes, you could sleep, if you had the chance to sleep, quiet for a while, get your head down. But, no, we spent a lot of time up there, a lot of the meals were brought up to you on a tray,

38:30 a big dish, you know, dish of something.

What sort of meals would they bring up to you?

Well it was very hard to, you know, you couldn't get a, separated stuff, it'd be a, a big fanny of soup or something, and a big tray of this and that, you'd have to work it out yourself.

Work it out yourself what it was?

Finger food, it was finger food, you'd dive into it.

39:00 **Did it make you more bonded together as a team, that intensity?**

Yeah, well, we had a great bonding with our guns crew yes, yes, a great bonding. But it was such that almost, you know, you were, not as though you could wander far. There was one in each corner of the

39:30 ship, and we wouldn't know who was virtually on the other guns crews at all, we wouldn't be able to, sort of, interchange or that, that was your job, and that was where you lived, and that was it.

Did you get any time off, as far as leave was concerned, during those seven months?

No, there was no long leave, no long leave, or anything like that.

40:00 In Alex, well there was, there was nothing to do, nothing to do. I was with my cobbler, Vic Gibson one day, and we met an Egyptian police lieutenant, and we hired a little Vee-Wee thing, and we were driving around through the alley, and they drive like mad men

40:30 in there. And we did the wrong thing, we sort of, we hit a bloke, bumped a bloke, anyway, didn't do much damage, bumped into his back or something, and he ended up sitting on the front mudguard, and. And when we took the car back, this police lieutenant bloke,

41:00 he said, "Did you kill him?" We told him, we hit a bloke, you know. He said, "Did you kill him?" "No we didn't kill him, no we didn't really, he was all right, he ran off, you know." And he said, "Gee." he said, "If you hit anybody in Alex, you've got to go back and run over them again, because if you only wind them, you're responsible for him, and his family and all his bloody ancestors." So if you ever had an accident there, you've got to kill them.

41:30 **Oh dear.**

If you kill them, there's nothing said, but if you don't, you're responsible for their family.

Oh dear.

But that was about the only time, I think we had a vehicle. But you'd be riding around in these garries, these horse drawn wagons and things. But no, there was nothing there to entertain you really. Because you couldn't go to the pictures, it was all in Arabic, and.

42:00 And you wouldn't want to go to too many of these dives.

42:02 End of tape

Tape 4

00:31 **Are we rolling? OK. George, did you go to Crete with the Royal Navy in July?**

Yes, yes, we went to Crete quite often. Go back, and that was one there, that around July 15th, or something, we were out on a patrol,

01:00 we were in our, with five Royal Navy destroyers, and the Sydney had [HMS] Havoc with us. And there was a Commander Nicholson had the other four destroyers, [HMS] Hyperion, and they decided to, we'd go south of Crete, and the other ones would go the other side of

01:30 Crete. And that was actually how it all happened on a patrol, there was, classified as a patrol. So OK, Nicholson and his mob run into a couple of Italian cruisers. So they realised, they couldn't fight a couple of cruisers, so they scarpered, they come around on the north of Crete,

02:00 and come round the corner of Cape Spada. And of course, in this time, Nicholson had broken wireless silence, and said you know, "I'm coming, chased by a couple of cruisers." So anyway, the cruiser, we

came around, and we met virtually opposite Cape Spada, which is the point there of Crete. And as I said, the Bande Nere

02:30 come around first, and, but anyway, the destroyers come past, and they went past us, past us in the sea. But then they turned around, and came back to make a force with us. But as I say, the Bande Nere came around the corner, and we put a couple of shells into her, didn't do that much damage. But the Bande Nere had the admiral apparently, on board. Gullo Galli Mario

03:00 or something his name was. But he decided he'd had enough, and he shot off and left the Colleoni to have the action that we had with them, that was the 19th of July. Once again, we stopped to try to pick up survivors, and that was the ship that we left. We picked up a couple of hundred of them,

03:30 I can show the photos of them, no, not a couple of hundred, 50 of them. And we chased after the Bande Nere, but that was off at full speed, 40 odd knots, and we couldn't catch it. So we came back, and that was it. But that was the action we had there on the 19th of July.

George, can you explain to me the, the action in a bit more detail, what kind of firing or

04:00 **exchanges you had with the Colleoni?**

Well, the Bande Nere, as I said was the first one, and they hit the Sydney's funnel, they put a hole in the port funnel, the forward funnel, before it scarpered.

04:30 But the other, there was a lot of zigging and zagging as you can imagine, and they were firing at us, and we were firing at them. And our, our firing was a bit, far more accurate than theirs. And we virtually hit them in the middle somewhere, and it must have stopped them, and they were on fire and stopped, and there was a big hole in the bow's, they had. Then it got to the

05:00 stage where they were dead in the water, they couldn't do anymore.

Did they stop firing at you?

Well, yes, they certainly stopped then, yeah. They'd had it, that was enough.

How did they indicate that to you?

Oh, they don't, they don't hoist a flag or anything like that, and say... But no, you could see they were, they were damaged, they were sinking, they were on fire,

05:30 and when you get to that stage, as they were, that's enough, you know. And apart from that, we were probably just moved out of range, we were just out of range of their guns.

Did your guns have a greater range than theirs?

I shouldn't think, no, they had virtually; their mounts were in millimetres of course, but it was only a bull's whisker short of six-inch, the same as ours.

06:00 59 mills or something, but that was their measurement. But once again, their, their seamanship and their, the tenacity of the Italians was not good enough. As I think it was proved, like in the army and the air force any of these things, they didn't like someone shooting at them.

06:30 **What happened once they were unable to return any more fire, what did the Sydney do?**

Well, as I said we left a cutter for them and some gear, and probably left some of the destroyers to pick them up. But we went chasing off after the Bande Nere.

Can you tell me about that chase?

Well, we just

07:00 knew that that was the direction, and they were heading back to, back to the Adriatic, back to Arunta, I suppose, their base. And there was no way we could catch them, we had no way that we could do anymore damage to them, so that was it. We turned around, come back. And that was one of the first big, that was the first big naval action

07:30 that was had in the Med, with cruiser to cruiser, in fact we had two cruisers. But we got a very big welcome when we came back to Alex, they, what they call, clear lower decks of the British ships that were in the harbour, and we steamed down through the middle of them all, and they were waving and cheering and God knows what. Collins got decorated out of that lot

08:00 and three or four of our officers got gongs, and that was it. The sailors got nothing, but that's the way it goes.

Was there a big parade or ceremony for them to be decorated?

No, no, there was just a, no it was all done by post, I suppose, and signals, and that. There was just a signal received, and a notice on the board, you know, Collins been awarded a CB [Most Honourable order of the Bath - 3rd Class Companion Award], and the

08:30 gunnery officer and all these people, they, they probably get a mention. And no, there was no, it was all just in ship sort of stuff. No, well there was no, the rest of the tour, we were on our way again. You say, did we go to Crete? We went.

Sorry, if I can interrupt you there, George, just while we're talking about that action, did you stop and pick up survivors from the Colleoni?

09:00 **You mentioned that you left a cutter there for them.**

Yes, we had Colleoni survivors on board. And we had a funeral service, we buried some of them, and we dropped a lot of them at sea. And I can show you photos, yes, of the Colleoni blokes, that we brought there.

How did you care for them when you brought them on board?

Well, in the most

09:30 humane way that we could do, they were cleaned up, they were given dry clothes, they were given food, they were given blankets, they were given medical attention. What more could you do, we couldn't, you couldn't do anymore for them. Feed them, water them, took them back to Alex. I don't know what happened there, they would have been taken off as Prisoners of War, I suppose.

Did you have much contact with those

10:00 **survivors?**

Personally no, no.

You mentioned your worst experience earlier, was that a Colleoni survivor?

No, no that was on one of the destroyers, the Espero, that was the Espero. But no, we were probably stood by, waiting for aircraft to come over, so we would be closed up, ready for action on the four-inch gun deck.

10:30 That was one occasion that, you know, it all, it's hard to remember how it happened.

Were you attacked from the air on your way back to Alex?

We were attacked all the time, when we were going and coming and we, yes, we were attacked on the way back, yes. Well the Italians seemed to, they probably had a system where they could

11:00 notify somebody that they're being attacked, and position, and you know, within half an hour, the bloody bombers would find you. We had a lot of bombings, and we were very lucky to get over that. And I deviate a little bit there, but another time, it wasn't there. The time they must have had,

11:30 when we weren't expecting aircraft, I was taken off the gun deck, because my eyesight was pretty good, I used to pick out bloody aircraft. But I was in the wing of the bridge as a lookout, and I got hit in the bosom here with a piece of shrapnel. And the only other bloke that was killed, you know, there was nobody killed on the Sydney, there was three of us injured.

12:00 And my other mate, Tommy Barden was in the HA [Health Affairs] director, the director we had. To get into those, there was a manhole in the bottom where they'd come up a ladder and go through the manhole. Well he got a bit of shrapnel, it must have bounced off something, and it got him on the inside of his leg there. He was unlucky, or a bit lucky, or something. But no, I spent a couple of days in the sick bay, and on light duties for a couple more days,

12:30 and then I got over that.

What action were you in, when you copped the shrapnel?

Well, I was doing lookout duties.

What action was it?

I don't know, no, it was just an air raid, just a raid of bombers. We'd be going between A and B, and they would, somebody would start dropping bombs there, unexpectedly.

So had you seen them as lookout, before the shrapnel hit?

No, no, well you wouldn't, you wouldn't see them, as I said, you rarely saw them.

13:00 The only people who would see them would be, the bridge people, the skipper and that on the bridge, in open areas. I was, there was a bit of shelter on the wing of the bridge where I was. But the skipper and that, you know, a bomb would fall somewhere on one of the ships, or in the area the ships were in, and then they'd say, "Right, aircraft alarm, blah, blah." and they'd look, they'd be

13:30 watching in the sky, and on this occasion I was looking for other ships, not looking for anything in the sky. Anyway, it told me not to keep my head down. Couldn't help it.

Can you describe what was happening on the four-inch gun deck during those actions that you told us about?

Well,

- 14:00 when, when it was on, it was on, and as I said, I was one of the loaders and I was pretty strong in those days, but I used to do most of the loading. And I think the Sydney fired off, seventeen hundred and something rounds and it worked out about 340 rounds per gun. And I think I would have handled most of those bloody things.
- 14:30 Anyway, but no, while that's on, you're gun screws closed up, you're waiting for someone to say "Load, load, load." and if you're firing all the time, you've got a, you've got an ammunition locker there that we would go, from here to the back door to get the shells out of the locker. A couple of blokes, sort of in between, bringing shells to you. And there'd be other
- 15:00 blokes bringing up shells from the shell room. They'd come up from the bottom, up to the upper deck, if there was a continual firing. It didn't happen very much in my opinion, because we, but after it was all over, we'd have to fill the lockers up again, you know, ready to use lockers.

Were you ordered to continually fire when you were in the action with the Colleoni, for instance?

No, no.

- 15:30 It was quite hairy on the gun deck, because when the six-inch guns were firing, the forward ones were firing, if they were firing on an after bearing, we would cop the blast of that on the gun deck. And if the after guns were firing, on a forward bearing, or even the beam bearing, we'd get a hell of a bollocking on the gun deck, from that blast there,
- 16:00 it was blooming awful. We were totally exposed, when we first went to the Med, on the gun deck we only had safety rails around it, like a guardrail, like a wire rail around it. And somebody, they said, this is no bloody good, there was shrapnel coming in there. So any rate, they
- 16:30 confiscated all the sailors' hammocks, and they secured them all around the rails of the gun deck. And then of course, later on, the blokes, when they had no hammocks to sleep in, we finished up with sort of vegetables or anything to put on there. And the only addition that the Sydney got on that list, we were trying to get this when we went to Sydney, some protection for the gun deck,
- 17:00 but the Sydney got some steel rails put on, when, just as it came home in Alex, it was the last thing. Apparently in the Suez, Port Suez they did that, not in my time, I wasn't there then. But there was no protection at all for us.

Sorry, did you fire the four-inch guns at all, during those

- 17:30 **actions with the Colleoni?**

No, no.

What would you be doing during those actions, at your action station?

I thought you'd say that. Somebody asked me what were you doing, I said, "We probably would have our head under an ammunition locker, keeping our head down, keeping out of the way." there was nothing we could do, because there's no, you couldn't get anything like that. There was no air attack in that action

- 18:00 at all. But it followed up on the way home. Yes, they did, followed us all the way back.

So you were kept on your toes when you on your way back to Alex?

Yes. And of course, after that, then things looked a bit dicey up in Greece, and with the Orion and the Ajax and the Neptune, we actually took

- 18:30 troops from Alexandria, and put them onto Crete. And we did the same thing up to Greece. And as history tells us, we put them on there, and of course, later on when the [HMAS] Perth relieved us, they had to go and get the buggers back again, what was there. So yes, we spent a lot of time in Suda Bay,
- 19:00 Suda Bay, they call it, on the north side of Crete, there.

Can you describe Suda Bay?

Suda Bay was just a, a barren rock, there were people ashore, I suppose, but nothing there really. But they landed troops there, and of course, they made a sort of a city of their own, barracks and things, you know, pretty

- 19:30 smartly. And I mentioned, we got another Pusser's Duck, and for some reason, our Australian pilot Tommy Price, wasn't there. So we got a pilot that was flying Sunderland bombers, Sunderland sea planes, those big Sunderlands, you

20:00 know the Sunderlands. Anyway, we would have been, I don't know, we would have been, I think we were tied up alongside a stone sort of pier, a very elementary stone sort of pier business. And as normal with, even the sea or in a harbour or something, when a Pusser's Duck came back, they would land virtually alongside the ship, or

20:30 in line, parallel to the ship. This day, this English bloke was driving and you could see this thing coming in, and he came in, and he, we were sort of watching, we'd all come up, "Oh, the duck's coming back." we all sort of lined up watching. And you could see this bloke, and he was 15 foot off the water, and he must have said I'm down, you know, I'm on the water.

21:00 And he let go of everything, and the Duck crashed into the water. That was the second duck we lost. He really folded it up. He, you could see him there, but being in the Sunderland, being so far off the water, he must have thought, oh I'm down, you know, I can see the water. And that cost us another sort of Pusser's Duck.

What sort of reaction was there aboard the Sydney?

Well,

21:30 there was a lot of hoo-ing and haa-ing and all that. But, I don't know what happened there. Anyway, they must have left it at sea, we must have gone off. But mainly we would take stores or whatever, troops, and we'd virtually unload them and off we went, and we did the same thing up in Greece, before the Germans come, you know, the Germans were coming through there. And

22:00 I can tell you, on, on the four-inch gun deck, right, this. Anyway on the gun deck, between the gun mountings, there was about 50 tonne of lumber there, for damage control work. And on one of the patrols up through the Dodecanese Islands, was the first, we thought, "Gee it's cold."

22:30 you know, and that was the first time I ever saw snow, on the way to Greece, on the islands. So anyway, in the stuff that we were taking up there, there was bails of blankets, so we complained, but this is what happened in the Med, and more so later on, when we went up to Russia.

23:00 We were never issued with any protective clothing. I've got a photo of when we've got a blooming sou'wester and a raincoat on, but I can't remember that. But you know, there was no protection against, we had no duffle coats, or any gloves or anything like that. Anyway, it was that cold there, that we finished up, this is no good, and somebody got a bright idea, right we'll re-arrange the lumber, so we finished up,

23:30 we made a bit of a channel in there, and we asked, "Can we have one of these bales of blankets?" So we finished up covering it with blankets, and that was the only protection we had on the gun deck. Because, while you were standing by, you'd leave one bloke on a mobile telephone, you know, you'd in touch with the thing all the time. And we'd

24:00 sort of take shelter out of this icy wind, in this lumber rack that we'd built, bit of a shelter there, it was good, it was good. No, went to Athens a couple of times, Piraeus was the port for Athens, like Fremantle is to Perth sort of thing. We bombarded Scapanto, an Italian base there.

24:30 We had MTBs there, the Italian motor torpedo boats running around the Rhodes Island and that, they were a bit dangerous, you had to watch them.

Did you open up the four-inch guns on them?

They would, if we had of sighted them, but fortunately we didn't run into any, but the Orion did. But those were the sort of targets that the four-inch would use, yes.

Can I just ask you, where you at the second bombardment of Bardia?

25:00 When was that?

Was it in Sept, no August?

June, July August, no, no, I don't think so, no.

Would that have been just before that long period you spent in Alex Harbour, on dock?

We didn't spend a long time in dock, we, we had a day or something in dock, didn't we.

I don't know, I just thought you spent a fair bit of time there, getting.

25:30 We had a day in dock, because we, from the bombs that were being dropped, they damaged the rudder or something, the propellers, we were only in and out. We spent more than a week, nearly a fortnight in Malta dock at Christmas time 1940. But August, no we would be running those runs up to Crete and, and to Greece in August, I would think.

Did you go up into the Adriatic?

26:00 We went up the Adriatic, yes. Yes, the, yes.

When would you have been in the Adriatic?

Before Crete and that time, before Crete. There was the Sydney and the Orion, and the, the fleet stood off

- 26:30 the bottom of Italy there, and they invited them to come out again, but the battle ships were all tied up in Taranto, and they, they weren't coming out. And it was Cunningham's idea that, you know, we'll teach them. They were still pumping out news that the, what do they call it, the Mediterranean was their ocean, and they were king of the
- 27:00 Mediterranean. But Cunningham proved that they, you know, they weren't. But the fleet attacked Taranto at the time, mostly the fleet air arm blokes in the Swordfish aircraft, and just to prove about the Adriatic, we had the job, the Orion was our flag ship, the Orion and the Sydney,
- 27:30 and two destroyers, and we went up the Adriatic, way up, and half way up, about as far as Brindisi, or something, we run into a convoy going across there, we opened fire on that lot, and sunk a couple of ships. And then we turned around, and thought, "Oh bugger!" We had to come out through the entrance to the Adriatic Sea,
- 28:00 which is not very wide, and we thought, "Oh, all hell will break loose if we try and get through there." But anyway, we came through there without any trouble. That was more or less, sort of, showing the flag, waving the flag, showing how good they were.

So it was a proud moment, was it?

We thought so, yes, we thought so. Even the big boss, Cunningham, you know, they're sending signals, congratulations,

- 28:30 that's very good.

From there did you take convoys up to Malta?

Well then, after perhaps Greece, or between, we took half a dozen convoys up to Greece, but there was one major one, where we had,

- 29:00 towards Christmas time, you know, they were, Malta was very short of fuel, and all that sort of thing, and I think out of about 53 ships, there was only about ten of them got through.

Really?

They were losing ships, like they were going down.

How did that affect your morale?

Well it didn't, what can you say about that?

- 29:30 Didn't affect our morale, we knew things were damn tough, and we were doing it damn tough. And we would have sympathy for all the blokes that weren't, that were getting knocked off, getting sunk. But they were mainly merchant ships. They even had, because the aircraft could pick out the capital ships, our battleships, the [HMS] Warsprite and Ramallies, [HMS] Renown,
- 30:00 and all those, Queen Elizabeth, they even had an old ship or something, and they mocked it up like a battleship, and they stuck that in the middle of the convoy, and they had all that. All it had was a bit of AA [anti-aircraft] defence on it, you know.

How do you mock up an entire battle ship?

Well, they did, they did, they mocked up, mocked up a thing, quite a sizeable thing, to make it look,

- 30:30 you know, with dummy rigging and all that sort of thing.

What was it made out of?

I don't know, they would have made it, welded a lot of stuff together and funnels and all that, you know. Pretty hard for the aircraft to pick it out, but most of the attacks, the Malta convoys were sunk by aircraft, not by submarines, or anything.

How bad were those air attacks around Malta?

Well if you know Malta, Malta is a very strange place, it is a very rocky sort of island. They had a beautiful harbour there, a beautiful harbour, but it's all surrounded by cliffs and that type of thing. And when we, we'd go ashore on leave, as I said,

- 31:30 **we had Christmas 1941, 1940 there, Sydney had four Christmas's in dock over Christmas. Anyway, but from the harbour, you'd go over to the cliff wall, and they'd have a lift there, and they'd take you up on the top of the cliff, to get to their famous places. And we had time to see these famous places. But what saved**

- 32:00 **Malta, was that a lot of stuff was underground, they lived underground, and you'd see ships coming with oil and wheat and all that sort of thing, and they'd drive down the street like in England. In England, in the old days, they had coal for their fires and galleys and all that, and the coal truck would go along, and they'd open up a hole up in the street, and they'd pour the coal straight down, and it'd go down to a basement.**
- 32:30 **In Malta, they'd do that with a load of wheat, or something like that. All their stores, it was down under their cliffs, and the bombing could never get to it.**
- Sounds amazing.**
- Amazing, yes, well some of those convoys got into there, but Malta was a service -
- We'll just have to pause and interrupt there, we've got a -**
- was the garage for the British fleet in the Med there.
- Sorry, we've just got a problem there.**
- 33:00 One of those famous last, they were famous, made famous because of the number of ships that were lost. But also, we lost the Nestor, we were, convoy in an echelon shape, in the... [HMS] Norman was on one flank, and the Nestor was alongside us, and she got hit by a bomb and stopped her. And then they
- 33:30 had to take the crew off, they took the crew off. And it was a humourous scene, at one stage there, where they all got on the, they were on the ship, and somebody said, "Right, everybody down aft." so they all raced down aft, and they were standing there, and someone says, "There's a torpedo coming, everybody up the front end."
- 34:00 and they'd done that a couple of times, you know. And my mate was there, Bill Goddard and he said, "Oh, if they're going to hit us, they're going to hit us again." you know. But you got to that stage, where, you know, if it's going to happen, it'll happen. But anyway, we tried to take the Nestor in tow, and once again the bombers gave us that much hell, that they, the admiral said, you know, "Oh no,
- 34:30 we can't do it." you know, "We've got too far to go, and it's too slow." alright, and we had to sink the ship ourselves. Not us, but one of our other destroyers, torpedoed it, or gunned it, something, and, and shot it, you know, sunk it ourselves. But that was how the bombers were, they were deadly, those convoys. That was, I suppose, the most rugged part of the Med, that we had, apart from the Colleoni action.
- 35:00 But those convoys, they were murderous.
- You must have been almost sitting ducks in a convoy?**
- Well, yes, well you are sitting ducks in a way, but normally, the cruiser squadron would be not actually, in those sort of situations, not closely
- 35:30 closed up with the convoy, but you'd be in the area, you'd be a little ahead of them, or alongside of them or something like that. And as I say, the, once bombs are starting to, and all the skippers got pretty adept at picking these things, dropping them, and they'd, and they could alter course to get out of way. Whereas the merchant ships couldn't do that, they couldn't do that. But the aircraft had to, they would
- 36:00 have, they dropped a hell of a lot of bombs, and I suppose their hit rate would be not exciting, not very good really, because they would have to estimate the speed of the convoy, and direction, a bit of wind loss and that, and they'd go over and say right, you know, pull the lever and drop their bombs, and wouldn't know if they'd hit anything or not, they'd be gone by then.
- 36:30 **It's surprising really, isn't it. You'd think that they'd be in the best position to easily bomb you from up there?**
- Well, they had no opposition, of course, they had no opposition. They could come over at a great height, over 40, 50 thousand feet. It would mean that they'd be looking at, like looking at an ant on the ground, I suppose. They must have had some sort of bombing sights,
- 37:00 or whatever. But they would see a clump of ships, and they could say, right, aim at the middle of them, and boom, hope to hit something.
- Did you spend Christmas at Malta?**
- Yes, we spent Christmas 1941.
- How did you celebrate Christmas?**
- 1940, 1940.
- 37:30 Well, we were in dry dock, which makes it very hairy. We were sort of, there was no accommodation ashore, but we, you're sitting in dry dock, and you know, we were sort of biting our fingers. Because there was no sort of protection, being sitting in a dock was like sitting in a motorcar with no wheels, or

something, you know.

38:00 But Malta, fortunately had some aircraft, some RAF planes there, guarding it, so in Malta, although they had air raids and all that sort of thing, we had several air raids, I can't remember too much bombing of that there, while we were there. But we had short periods of leave, a couple of days, if you wanted to stay ashore or not. And we visited their,

38:30 a couple of famous place, a couple of famous churches there. Christmas, you asked, we had Christmas, we had Christmas dinner, we had the... I'll tell you something, the routine on Christmas Day is the sailors are sitting down, and the youngest one, wears the

39:00 captain's hat and the skipper is supposed to serve a meal to him, and that bloke is in Concord, south Perth, Noel Gardiner, my mate. I see him every Friday, not today, but.

You've been mates all these years?

Yes.

39:30 But that was the drill there. The captain finds the youngest bloke on the ship, and they cut a cake or do something. But in Malta, it wasn't, not so much for us to do. But I can show you some photos there. We used to go out to the airport, and if you could convince the air blokes, you could handle

40:00 a top gun machine gun, they would take you for a flight, and I had a flight from Malta, over Italy, over Albania and back again, in a glass topped turret, my head was going like this. It's not for me, I can show you a photo of that, Maryland Bomber.

40:30 Maryland Bomber.

Well, I think we'll wind up here and have lunch, what do you think George, a good time for a break?

Alright, whatever you say.

40:40 End of tape

Tape 5

00:30 **George, just before we broke for lunch, you were mentioning you hooked up with some of the RAF guys, and they took you up in a bomber, where did you go?**

Well, it was a flight and they went up over, sort of Taranto, across the Adriatic past Albania, and back again.

01:00 Just a patrol thing, just a patrol.

So it was just a bit of fun really.

A bit of fun for me, yes. I suppose it was something they were doing, they'd be sighting things and seeing what the fleet was doing, and all that sort of thing, I was getting a bloody headache looking for other aircraft. No, that was good, no, there's some photos there I can show you, a Martin Maryland bomber.

01:30 **And what did you think of the RAF blokes?**

Well, they were doing a job, just the same as us, the same as us.

I mean as people to muck about with?

The only thing I sort of thought, "Well that's not for me, anyway." It's like a, like a visit to a submarine, I've done that to, and I thought, "Well that's not for me, either." you know.

02:00 Anyway, back in Malta we had Christmas there of course, we had a good look at the island, one thing and another, and we were there for a fortnight and they took the bump out of the bum of the Sydney, they filled it up with concrete apparently, or something, the must have done something and filled it up with concrete, so we run around with that. But no, the bombing and that had apparently damaged our

02:30 propellers and rudders and that type of thing, but they were virtually the repair ship of the Mediterranean in Malta, they were very good.

Where did those blokes come from, who were repairing?

They lived there, that was their careers, there'd be, the Bloggs family would be gunners, they'd do all the gunnery stuff. And the Smith family would do all electrical work, and the others would do all sort of painting ships

03:00 and all that sort of jazz. But it's been like that for hundreds of years. They were virtually the garage for the Mediterranean fleet. Malta Harbour, beautiful place, but as I say, that was on the sea level, but Malta was way up on the cliff top.

So was it for quite a few weeks that you had a bit of leave?

We had, well it was sort of open gangways,

03:30 we couldn't do nothing. So we weren't living ashore, but you had to go ashore for a shower and toilets and that, but we were supposed to be living on board, which made it a bit dicey. But anyway, we were there for about a fortnight. Over Christmas.

Is it that time that you met up with the RAF blokes?

Yes, be in that period. Well, we'd be looking for somewhere to go, and something

04:00 to do, and somebody would have said, "Do you want to raise the hairs on the back of your neck?" Or something, "Go out there." No, we'd be talking to the chaps up in, probably up in the bars there, in where was that, famous street but never mind. They'd say, "Oh come out and have a look." you know, and they'd come and have a look at our ship.

There's been some criticism about the RAF, that they weren't really

04:30 **there when some of the navy needed them?**

Well, they never had any planes of course, so we never had any RAF air power, we never had an air power in the Med, they were looking after Malta, mainly. They were sort of working the other way. And of course, they were further up, if anybody, if they had any,

05:00 oh I don't know about defence, but I know they were doing a lot of flights across to Tripoli there, where Rommel and what was his name, the army bloke there, Montgomery and Rommel and that, were chasing each other around. That was further to the west of Malta,

05:30 you know. But they were doing a lot of flying blokes from England to Malta to Tripoli, and back and back and back. And they'd had that, see you've got a lot of reading to do, but they had a dummy. Montgomery, and that was true, that was a true story, they had a Pommy corporal, apparently, and he looked like

06:00 Montgomery, and they took him to school and taught him up a bit, and they flew him to Africa. And Rommel thought that was Montgomery, you know. But like those other blokes, there was someone else went to Gibraltar, dressed up as Churchill, you know.

Yeah.

They were very cunning, the war boys, it was all a battle, not only at sea or in the army, or

06:30 in the air, the scientists and the boffins, we'll come to that in a minute if you like, in different techniques. But anyway, all right, so come the day, what's the, he gabbles on. We left Malta, and with HMAS Stuart, one of our destroyers, one of the old scrap iron flotilla.

07:00 **So you're actually, you've left the Sydney at this point?**

No, no I was on the Sydney. We came back to Alexandria on the Sydney of course, under escort with the Stuart, but it was interesting then, that outside HMAS Perth was there. And they start sending signals, "Hope you have a welcome when you get back, and have a drink for us and blah, blah, blah." But also, there was an English ship called the [HMS] Southampton,

07:30 a beautiful new cruiser, and this is where the Germans come in. The Germans then came right across with, it'd be 50 Stuka bombers, and they dive bombed that lot, that was miles away from us, fortunately. But they blew the front off the Southampton, killed a lot of blokes. But that was the first time the Germans had come in with their Stuka bombers.

Did you see some of this damage when you were there?

Well, we saw the damage on the Southampton, because they towed that into Malta. But as I say, we didn't see that much damage in Malta itself. Because not to the people, they would go into the underground business, you know, like on an air raid, and the RAF blokes, they had fighters there to look after that lot. But they had no answer to

08:30 those Stuka bombers. So alright, we steamed back to Alexandria on the 11th of January, 1941. And well, I can, let me digress a little bit. The time we were in the Mediterranean, go back a bit more. There was a very rich

09:00 Indian Maharajah, that donated a swag of money to the Brits, to the British Royal Navy, for the new destroyers, the N-class. He, he sort of financed a whole lot of that lot. And of course, the RM said, "Oh thank you very much, but we've got no sailors to put on them ships." So

- 09:30 Admiral Cunningham that was in the Med, thought, "I've got a bright idea." he said, "There's thousands of Australians in the Med on the Sydney and on the five BMW [British Merchant Vessel] ships, there's a whole mob out there that would be grateful to accept those ships." So half way through my time in the Med, with a lot of others, with at least 100, and, nearly 200 of us,
- 10:00 left the ship. But we were told we were on draft to England, to the new N-class destroyers. And we thought, "Oh gee, that'll be beaut, England in the spring, that'll be lovely." Didn't quite work out that way. Anyway, when we left Malta, coming over the speaker system, "All those that have been nominated for draft for England, will leave the ship in Alex." So we thought, no, that's no good either. So we packed our
- 10:30 bags and said, "No more work, OK, we're not going to do more." But anyway, we got back to Malta, to Alex, and on the 11th of January, they put us in barges, and sent us ashore to an old, it was a school, just next to Farouk's Palace, and the Brits took it over, and they called it
- 11:00 HMS Canopus, as a holding thing. Because a lot of survivors and all that were put there, and we were in there, I can show you a photo, we were hanging on the bars there, and four o'clock in the afternoon, the Sydney sailed away and left us. So that was the end of the Sydney for me. But at least then, we met up with a lot of people, we met up with a lot of survivors of the Nestor, that I said was sunk on that Malta
- 11:30 convoy. A lot of other coppers off the ship. But anyway, a lot further on, because we were fully experienced and that, when we got to England, they put us on a new ship, and you know, we were au fait and you could drive it away, without any virtually working it up.

Was it disappointing to be leaving the Sydney, considering you'd spent such a lot of time on the Sydney?

- 12:00 Well we thought it was a bit of a rough deal, but once again as the commander said, "Once you're get given a draft like that, you know, you're supposed to forget everything else, that's you, you're supposed to do it." One little anecdote there, because we were sort of juniors and crowded on the Sydney, we shared a, a locker, what we called a locker. We
- 12:30 had our, our gear, it would be as wide as that with two doors, and two of us sort of lived in that locker, where you have all your gear and everything. And at one stage of the game, with one of my mates, Stan Darby, we bought an iron to do our ironing, see. That was all right. But Stan was about the only bloke that saw the captain to object about the draft,
- 13:00 and he said his wife was stagnant or pregnant or something like that. That didn't fit in. But anyway, unfortunately he went down with the ship, so did the iron. That's the way it goes.

So you would have, he should have not complained, is that what you're saying?

Well yes, we had a sort of a motto in the navy, "You don't volunteer for anything, you don't knock anything back."

So he knocked something back?

He knocked it back. It was just one thing. But you know, a lot of other things, people knocked back drafts, there was a lot of interchanging of crews between ships and that. And at that time, while we came off the Sydney, there was a lot of new people that went to Alex to take our place. And also on the BMWs, and those.

- 14:00 But normally, you know, normally, we used to say, you didn't do any more than two years on any ship. But that was life, you know, you move around, and that's good in a way. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose.

So you're on your way to where?

We were on the way to England, but we went to this HMS Canopus, and we were there all of January,

- 14:30 as I said it was a school and they converted it into a, like dormitories and God knows what. And they were then, from then on we were collecting survivors and people had to go to England, RM blokes that had to be sent back. As I said, we were there for four weeks, so what do you do? We used to be able to go for a swim, we could play football, soccer,
- 15:00 bit hilarious, we couldn't play their game, and they couldn't play our game. But anyway, that was it, but anyway, we were there for about four weeks. And then of all things, they had a train line that come right into the yard there. I don't know what the school would have done with that. But eventually they put us into this train, at the end of the month, at the end of January, and then we chuffed off and the train takes you almost,
- 15:30 about 25 miles short of Cairo. And then they branch off, and they head towards the Suez Canal, and then we finished up at Port Suez. We got there, and they put us in a ferry and took us over to the other side, and they put us in an army staging camp, out in the desert.

What was wrong with that?

We was there for only a short time there, however we had time to

- 16:00 be riding camels and God knows what. And then, one day they said, "Right, into a ferry." they put us back in the ferry, went down to Suez and they said, we found then we were going on this Dutch trooper, the one that we chased around in Colombo, the Dutch Christian Huygens. So, OK, we got on that, and
- 16:30 we were joined by a lot of people, you know, going to England, army, civvies all sorts of people. The ship was in the canal facing to the sea, but it had to go out, turn around and come back. But it then got into trouble, because the Germans were dropping bombs all along the Suez Canal, and they sent a couple of small ships, and we'd get, go for five miles
- 17:00 or whatever, but then they sunk a big Greek tanker there, that really absolutely blocked the Canal. And it took us about a fortnight to get through the Suez Canal, which is only what, a three-day run or something. But that, coming back to the scientist, they were dropping these bombs, and they got, instead of dropping a bomb and it goes 'boom', that's, that's finished. They were dropping what they called magnetic mines, that they'd drop it, like aiming for convoys,
- 17:30 and they'd know that a lot of small ships would go first, but the big ones would be at the back. So they'd have a, like a clock on it, and they'd set it, so that say, seven ships would go over it, and the eighth one would go boom. And they had big Wellington aircraft, with a big magnetic ring around the nose and tail, and all that. And they'd fly up and down, trying to set them off, you know, and they'd get to the stage where all of a sudden, 'boom', it'd go off.
- 18:00 But they'd, there was a lot of ships, it took us a long time to get through the Suez Canal. We picked up some people at Ismalia, we got to Port Ford at the Red Sea end of the canal, we picked up a lot more. We went to Aden, and I think we picked up seven spies or something, they called them spies. We had to keep guard on them.

What nationality were

- 18:30 **they, Italian?**

I don't know who they were, we didn't know, we didn't know. But as soon as we walked on the Christian Huygens, they said, "Oh gunnery bloke, OK, well you can take over the gunnery business." As soon as we'd go near a civvy ship, they'd, they'd grab the navy blokes and the other blokes would stand back, you know, anyway. Then we, like we picked up a lot of people at Aden,

- 19:00 then across to Mombassa, come down the African coast. Once again, we picked up a lot of civilians and South African army blokes going to Cape Town, and a lot of the English WRENS [Women's Royal Naval Service].

That would have been refreshing?

Yes, but yes, but anyone. Mombassa, even in town there, the WRENS weren't allowed to talk to sailors, they could only talk to officers.

- 19:30 Dare I say it, there was a few WRENS that kept going back to England saying, "Look what the navy's done for me, Mum." Wasn't very, anyway, you work it out. Alright. So that was what they get for talking to officers. So we come down to Durban, and the Christian Huygens went into dock there, and Durban was a beautiful place, it was the first time we'd seen lights on anywhere.

- 20:00 They put the ship into dock, and.

Why was that so special to see lights?

Well, if you've been 12 months without seeing a city without lights, or something, all through Colombo, all through Singapore, all those places. Anyway, it was fantastic. Durban was something like Perth, you know, and they have the hills up the top there, and

- 20:30 they put us in private cars, they were very generous there. They said we'd be there for 14 days, and there was a fleet of Rolls Royces and God knows what lined up, and we were supposed to get into army trucks and go to this Wayville Camp, and, and there wasn't too many of us got there, because people picked us up. A family picked me up, Englebrick,

- 21:00 old Poppa Englebrick, he had a chain of pastry shops. And we used to talk to old Poppa there, he'd say, "Who's winning the war, George?" I'd say, we'd read the paper, I'd say, "Looks like your mob." because the German subs then were working up and down the coast. This was later, when we came back there, because that's what we were doing, chasing those subs up and down. But anyway, alright. So, there was a lot of blokes nearly missed going onto

- 21:30 England, but they got there.

How did the locals treat Australians?

They were fantastic, absolutely. As I say, they'd big Rolls Royce, they'd say, "Four people, five people, two people." you know, and they'd take them home to virtually make them, give them an up-homers, they'd wine them and dine them, and you know, it was fantastic. This Poppa Englebrick, he had two

daughters there, and he said, "Alright, the two girls can shack up together, and,

22:00 and the boys can have the other place, the other flat." And we used to go dancing, up at Effland Gardens, up in the hills there, it was lovely, a lovely place. Alright, down to Cape Town. We had sailors hats with HMAS on it, and blokes said, "You can't wear a blood hat like that." because we followed the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in

22:30 there. The first AIF division went through Cape Town, and they were, had a lot of grog in them, I suppose, and they were putting cars up in the post office and all that, and they said, "Don't mention the fact you're an Australian." Anyway, back to the matters. Then away we got to Freetown, but it was amazing, that on that Christian Huygens, it was flying a Dutch flag.

23:00 And to this day, I reckon the Dutch and the Germans had something going for them, because they never, ever touched us. And yet they were knocking off convoys all around us. Anyway we got to, went up to Scotland, as a matter of fact, up to Gurick [Garrick], and they complained about a transport ship, you know, a passenger ship coming into there, because the Germans would find out, and they'd get bombed. So they said, "That's no good, rack off down to Liverpool." so we

23:30 landed down in Liverpool.

What were the facilities like on the Christian Huygens?

Well, they were spartan to say the least, they turned the bottom, the top decks were all cabins and all that sort of things, but we were down in the holds, and they, sort of make temporary wooden frames, and there wasn't too much comfort there, but we had a lot of fun. We had a lot of fun.

24:00 We had a lot of rice, too, we couldn't get away from the rice.

What did you do to have fun?

Well, I don't know. But no, well they made us work, they make us lookouts, and the gunners crews and put us on guns crews, we were doing lookouts. But no, apart from the, that amazed me, they've got a, they had a, sort of a canteen onboard for us, and we had to go down

24:30 into the basement and get the grog and bring it up. Anyway, the first couple of times the boys went down, and they came back and they were all sozzled, so we had to send someone down to do it. And the old bosun, he, "I'll, I'll fix them, I'll fix them, so I'll take them all their names." so he had Smith and Brown and Watson and so-and-so, and so-and-so. And he checked the list every day, he had 12 different faces. He didn't wake up to that.

25:00 But anyway that was just a bit of a sideline.

So what happened when you landed in, was it Liverpool or Scotland?

Liverpool, Liverpool, alright. Well, we landed there, we had breakfast. They bombed the hell out of Liverpool that same day. But we were on a train down to London at midnight, we

25:30 caught a midnight train down to woop-woop.

Is this leave?

No, no, leave, no. We went down to London, they put us on a train down to Portsmouth, and we, that was like our base, the Royal Naval Barracks at Portsmouth, HMAS Victory. And we did get leave, yes, we had leave from there. And I think my first leave, I went back to Wales

26:00 with Vic, we had a lot of leave there as a matter of fact. We had, yeah, we went back but I was supposed to go to a ship called Larissa [?] the Poles, they gave that to the Poles. The Poles, Australia got five of them, the Poles got one, and the Dutch got three, and I don't know where the others went. But anyway.

Sorry, three, three what?

26:30 Three of the ships. The Polish navy. But they, a lot of Poles and, and Swiss people, would come over, you know, they'd get out of Europe and they'd come over, and they'd say, you know, "We want some ships." or we'll help fly aeroplanes. We had a lot of foreign blokes, besides Americans. Americans didn't come til much later, but, anyway.

What were the barracks like

27:00 **in Portsmouth?**

Well, they were a bit lousy, especially they hounded us a little bit, because we, we didn't like that at all, because we just wanted the ship to get out of the place. And we had a navy RAN Officer up in a separate building, up in a two-storey place. And he couldn't help us to get us a ship,

27:30 but they did, they filled up the [HMS] Napier, and the [HMS] Nizam and the [HMS] Nestor, before we came along, so they, we filled up three ships, and they were serving up in the North Atlantic. The barracks, alright, the barracks, they put us in the barracks, a block called 2B, and I don't know how long we were there, but one night, they'd,

28:00 they'd dropped a bomb on the barracks, and it blew the end wall out. So, it was quite a big building admittedly, and we said, "Oh, well, where do we go and live next?" And they said, "Oh no, you've got to stay there, there's no more room." So we said, "This is no bloody good." so we finished up, we sort of, had a, acquired a flat outside, and we used to in and out the gate there.

28:30 **Are you there with some of your mates from the Sydney?**

I was there with my, yes, my best mate Vic, and a few other blokes, yes, there was half a dozen of us. And then we sort of, got more leave and I went up to Scotland, and took Vic up to Scotland. And then, Vic had an Auntie in Tooting in southwest London, and on long weekends, or short leave or any other time, we'd sort of

29:00 end up in London, and that was very good.

What would you do when you were in London?

Well, there was nothing in London for us, but it was better when we went out, got out of, we were about ten mile out of London, I suppose, in Tooting. And we had a look at London, we had a look at The Strand, and [the] Underground and

29:30 all that sort of thing, and Buckingham Palace, and God knows what. But that was getting bombed to billy-o, that was getting bombed to billy-o. And then we went down to Portsmouth, and that got bombed to billy-o. So but eventually, alright, so. As I say,

30:00 we had a lot of leave, because they had nothing, they couldn't do anything with us. And they probably say, "Give them 14 days leave." and you know, "Get them out of our hair." Eventually I went back there one day, and they said, "Right Ramsay, we've got a job for you. You can go down to a place called Gosport." which was over the other side of the bay at Portsmouth, to HMS Vernon, which was a

30:30 torpedo school. So on a six weeks course down there, I then became a seaman torpedo man. So I got away from the gunnery rate, and I became an electrician torpedo man.

What did you think of that new job?

That was very good, it suited me down to the ground.

Why?

We had a lovely time in the middle of the

31:00 '41 there, we could go to school in the morning, have breakfast, go to class, dinner, class, and you knock off at four o'clock. Between four and six o'clock, supper time, you'd do your dozing, and write letters and do whatever you wanted to do. And then after supper, we'd go and play tennis til midnight, it was daylight, broad daylight, broad daylight.

31:30 And I did win a little heart there, at one stage. But she was married, and she was, her husband was on the [HMS] Danae, up in Singapore. She didn't know whether he was up or down or where he was. But anyway, no, it was just pure platonic friendship, she was a lovely dancer, there was nothing, nothing happened, you know, you couldn't even kiss them good night, you take them home, because it was broad daylight. But anyway, some how we might have

32:00 got around that, but there was no funny business or anything like that. That was about the romantic side of it. So we went down to Gosport.

Sorry, how long were you actually at torpedo school?

About six weeks.

What sort of things were they training you to do?

Well they had sort of four sections, five sections, they had

32:30 white head, what they called white head, was the name, there's a Miss Whitehead running around here. White head, to do with torpedoes. Then there was high power, low power, depth charges, and then other small demolition charges and other stuff. So virtually,

33:00 you had the whole ambit to do, to know, and torpedoes, of course, torpedoes, white heads, depth charges, God knows what, all that high powered electrics stuff. And almost on completion of that course, I was drafted to Norman, HMAS Norman,

33:30 G49, brand new ship, lovely ship. And I got my first job, and it was my last job, I was allocated to work with the Chief EA, electrical artificer, called Buck Phillips. He was a funny man, nice man, but he was a

34:00 touch tat-tars. But anyone, I would work with him, but.

He was a touch what?

He had the tat-tars. He was, he was a bit of an alchy.

Oh right.

He was a bit of an alchy, and he, anything with small screws or anything like that, you know, George come here. But he, his main job on the ship, was the major electrics and the gyro compass.

34:30 And from a start anyway, would mean, we'd have a little room as big as the little house out there, the gyro room, and I'd sort of clean it and paint it, and keep the gyro check on it, and all the rest. And the gyro would have, what they call repeaters, all around the ship, on the bridge, down the engine room, there and there, all the different compartments, down the block.

35:00 And they, when the ship, when, when you shut down the ship, say you shut down the gyro, then of course, one of my favourite jobs, I had to go right around the ship, the whole lot of them, and line them up on a certain heading, that he'd give me, 1-2-0, or due north, or what ever it was.

Line up all the torpedoes?

Yes, line up all the torpedoes. And eventually when that was done, he'd make the breaker, and bring them all in.

35:30 And I'd have to check, check. The, no I used to love that, it was good, we used to do electrical work, it was nearly all electrical work that I had, which was good.

What were the men like that you worked with?

Very good, very good.

Apart from the alcoholic?

No, they were all very friendly. We had what we called the torpedo party.

What's a torpedo party?

Well, that's the

36:00 blokes of, of equal sort of, training, I become a torpedo men, so we had a torpedo men's mess. They were all messed together, that was good.

Where had all these blokes come from, had they come from different Australian ships?

Well they came from, my other two blokes that I used to do watches with, they both come off the scrap iron flotilla,

36:30 one was on the [HMS] Stuart, I don't know where Regolo come from, but they were in the scrap iron flotilla. My action station then, became depth charge release number, which was situated on the bridge, where if they'd run into a sub, or echoes or anything like that, they would release the depth charges from the bridge, that was my duty. And my night action station, was on

37:00 the searchlight, which was another story. But anyway.

Would have been good to be operating from the bridge?

Yeah, yeah, well it was operated from the bridge, alright, go back to that. We used it a couple of times, and I would have a pair of binoculars at my position, and they'd have a radar echo, and there'd be a ship over there,

37:30 and the old man would want to have a look at it. So, "Standby searchlight." you know, and I'd have a look. Yeah, alright, "Searchlight target." meaning that I've, I've got it like that, and he's saying "Make the beam." and you'd chuck on the switch, and the searchlight would go chasing aircraft or something. "Get rid of that, get rid of that beam, oh!" Anyway. It, it worked a couple of times, but after a couple of times it didn't do that, the old man forgot it,

38:00 didn't like it, which was good.

Was it a different kind of world operating from the bridge?

Well, I got used to it, I liked the bridge, because we were right in the middle of everything, you sort of knew what was going on. We were just like situated in the back side of the bridge. But I can tell you something else. It always stuck in my craw, that we went from the Med,

38:30 where we were living with shorts and no shirt and all that sort of thing, and we went to Russia without a stitch of extra clothing or anything like that. And believe me, it was very bloody cold, at a couple of stages. That was winter time, the worst time you could go to Russia. Anyway.

Is that where you're heading at this point?

Well, I'll come to that in a minute. Let me come back.

39:00 This other mate of mine, Georgie Youngman, used to live out at Scarborough. Lord Nuffield was the man that owned the Morris Motor Company, or started the Morris Motor Company, made the Mini

Minors and all that. When the war started, Nuffield presented a commando unit that went to Norway, with great big leather coats, beautiful big leather coats, big fur collars. And how Georgie

39:30 Youngman got possession of one, I don't know. But that coat all the way to Russia and back away, stood on the bridge, and Georgie Youngman would be in it, and he'd be doing my watch, and I'd follow him, "Right-o George out." but that coat stayed put with the three of us, someone was in it all the time, it was good, otherwise it was very chilly. What did you say.

40:00 **Where were you heading to now, you've gone from Portsmouth to,**

Portsmouth yeah, to torpedo school and we picked up the Norman in Southampton.

Yes. So you're coming from Southampton to where?

Southampton, we were heading to Russia. The first job we got, normally with a lot of

40:30 people that don't know the ship, they would go to Scapa Flow, to the top of Scotland there, and they'd be up there for a month or two months, until the old admiral was satisfied that they knew all the gunnery and torpedo stuff and all that.

Is this because it's now an N-class destroyer, rather than what you were on before?

Yes, yes, coming down a smaller ship only half the size, but a beautiful ship, brand new, lovely.

41:00 **What was the trip like to Russia?**

Well we'll come to that in a long way. Alright. The, the war had started, and the Germans weren't that far out from Moscow, at that time. There was a chap, Sir Walter Citrine,

41:30 was the leader of the British Trade Union. And he went to a meeting with Churchill and Roosevelt on a big British battleship, the new one, the KG5, the King George the Fifth battleship, and they said, "Right, we want you to go up to Russia and start the lend lease." so that was alright. So anyway, he had about about half a dozen cronies with him,

42:00 and two British destroyers picked him up from the north of England, and they got him

42:06 End of tape

Tape 6

00:31 **Rolling.**

So while Citrine was pretty niggly, because he thought he was going up to Russia on a battleship, and he finished up on destroyers, and the first two RN destroyers didn't please him too much. So that was where we picked him up. We had to go, we picked him up, we went as far as Reykjavik in Iceland, we picked him up. And then we took him up to Archangel, via

01:00 via the North Sea, north of Bear Island, further, 72 degrees north, there's a famous Bear Island up there. Around that, and down the Cola Peninsula.

Why's it called Bear Island?

It probably had polar bears on it.

Did you see them?

One time. No, no, we were miles away from that. But that was, some of the convoys and special convoys and that, had to go that. But

01:30 normally the convoys to Mermansk didn't do that far, because it was too far. But it was about the only place that we, that you were out of range of German bombers or anything like that. And as you might know, the German bombers were all over Norway and Sweden, all along that coast, they played merry hell with the convoys to Mermansk. But we went down the White Sea, past Mermansk, we came to a river

02:00 called the Divina River, and there was a lovely lady on a beautiful launch that guided us into Archangel. Archangel, where we left Sir Walter, and he took off with his gang, and they first went to Malta, but because of, to Moscow, but because the Germans were outside, they shifted in for meetings, way

02:30 out east somewhere. So we were there for a couple of weeks, and it wasn't, alright. We managed to sort of, go ashore and it was virtually only a, it reminded me of the old American movies, you know, of the stockades with the wooden poles and sort of an enclosure like that, the old cowboy stockades.

Like a corral?

Well, that was

03:00 like that. But everything was wood and snow, and God knows what. It was very interesting, we got inside and had a look one time. We couldn't talk to them, we couldn't buy anything, there was nothing to buy anyway. But we managed to, with a packet of cigarettes or a chocolate or something like that, we'd do a bit of bartering.

Did you get a hold of any vodka?

No, vodka was very scarce. We never,

03:30 ever saw a man up there, a man, you know, a man, army stuff, because they grabbed them all, they took them all, everything. The guards, the women that walked the wharf were all, of course, dressed up with a hell of a lot of clothing, they looked mammoths, you know, they had great lumps of woods in their hand. And the only people we saw really, were the urchins, and they were running around, with

04:00 handfuls of money, and.

Urchins?

Urchins. What do you call them, kids, little kids, you know, urchins. Lost, you know, only. Anyway, little kids.

Why did you need to carry the log?

Oh, they used to chase the kids away from the wharf, that was all, they chased the kids away from the wharf. But the kids were pretty smart, they could, they had no trouble with them.

04:30 We had trouble with the ship actually, as I say, there's some photos of them here. But the, the ice used to come down the river, and it would get between the ship and the wharf, and virtually want to tip the ship over, to tip, to lean it over. So every couple, or three hours, you'd have to let go of your lines, ease them right out, and let the ice flow go through, and then you'd come back to the jetty again. That had to go on day and day, day and night.

05:00 Gave everybody the oops. And eventually one time, our skipper thought, oh we'll go out to the White Sea and do a bit of AS [anti-submarine] work, submarine chasing. There were some RN [Royal Navy] ships in there, a big one called the [HMS] Suffolk. Anyway, come the time when the Suffolk was ready apparently, we came

05:30 back and we escorted the Suffolk, which was reported to have a belly full of gold on it, to pay for the lend lease. And we escorted that back to within sight of Iceland, and then we got a signal, alright, "Go back to Archangel and pick up Sir Wally." because he couldn't get back, there was no trains or planes or anything for him to get, so we had to go back and get him again.

When did the Sydney sink?

That was

06:00 November the 19th, 1941. But alright, you've come back to that. But the Sydney.

It was about this time, wasn't it?

Oh yeah, well, it would have been November, we were up there in November '41, yeah. And we did hear of the Sydney getting lost, about three weeks after

06:30 it happened. Came over the BBC [British Broadcasting Commission] news, about three weeks after it happened. Might have, well that was even perhaps before, we might have been on the way to Russia at that time, November. Any rate, we brought Sir Wally back.

What was your feelings when you heard that the Sydney had been sunk, or was missing?

07:00 Well, it gets you, it gets you, but what can you do about it, you can't do much about, couldn't do much about it. And, as I told you, I'm President of the HMAS Sydney Association, and we lost what, 93 West Australians, and a lot of those blokes, half of them I would have known, I'd

07:30 know them all. But once again the ship came back to Sydney in February, February 8th it stopped in Watson's Bay, and then the 9th it came round to Circular Quay, there. Bennelong Point, where the old trams used to come in there, do you know Sydney?

Not very well.

Not very. But they got a very good welcome. Once again, a lot of the crew, some of the

08:00 crews got changed over. The ones that joined it in Alex to bring the ship home, they would have stayed. The band were the only people that stayed, the band, they said oh, we've got enough depot bands around, so you'd better stay with the Sydney. So unfortunately they all went down. They got a new ship, new skipper, you,

- 08:30 you talked to Tom Fisher apparently one day, Tom was on the Sydney at that time. And he reckons the skipper was a new bloke, a good bloke, but he was very inexperienced, he'd never had command of a ship before, he had a new crew and they weren't experienced either. They run into a, they had no, no details
- 09:00 or technical information of what was happening. The Germans had it all. You must admit, I do, I admit the Germans had the lot because they could make rendezvous with their submarines, or their supply ships, and they'd be there on the dot. And they knew that the ship they were calling themselves, the Strak Malacca [?] they knew that it was in the Indian Ocean, but they knew it was over the other side
- 09:30 of the Indian Ocean, a hell of a long way away. But the Germans were specialists and all, and it was like a Joe Louis meeting a kindergarten kid, a horrible cock-up. One of the nasties, which had happened a lot of times, in history, all these things happened. Churchill had them, lost Gallipoli,
- 10:00 the French lost their fleet and the Italians lost their fleet. So it goes.

I guess after the Sydney's fortune in the Mediterranean, her later misfortune was to be either expected or unexpected, still?

Well, I don't know,

- 10:30 you say these things. I suppose, if it had of happened to us in our time, it wouldn't have happened at all. But, there were a lot of things that shouldn't have happened, there's a lot of things that haven't been answered, there's a lot. I mentioned that we made a shelter on the gun deck out of 50 tonnes of lumber, there was never been a bit of that lumber ever found, or oil or
- 11:00 life jackets, or flotsam or jetsam, nothing has ever been found, and that's amazing. Even the other one hasn't been found. Why it happened, I don't know, but I put it down to the [HMS] Zealandia being the Sydney's albatross, because the, the Zealandia, once again, was taking,
- 11:30 it did about three trips up to the Sunda Strait unloading Australian troops, and they were put ashore up there, without a, a rifle or a bloody tin hat or anything, and they had nothing at all, and that was sacrilege. And the Zealandia on that last trip, that the Sydney escorted, the Sydney went down to Albany and met it, and bought it up to Fremantle, and it should have been in Fremantle for a couple of days, three days,
- 12:00 before it went on. But they wanted more ice cream and green vegetables, and they wanted this and they wanted that, and they wanted, time wouldn't tell them how fast the convoy was going to go, and all that sort of thing. So that if they had have left on the 11th of November, as they were scheduled, it might not have happened.
- 12:30 To me, I believe there was a signal from this bloke to say, "I'm not going to come down the run line to Fremantle from Sunda Strait." A run line is a straight, direct line, he says I'm going to stand out further to the west, in case I run into a radar. What in the hell was he doing a couple of hundred miles up against the West Australian coast, he was miles off his course. A lot of things, .
- 13:00 don't get answered. Says she poking things.

Do you blame the captain?

Yes, I blame the captain. I blame our control of naval shipping, I blame the Zealandia, who else can I blame? The Zealandia would have made it quite late, it was due back in Fremantle

- 13:30 on the 19th. And it got clobbered on the 19th, still had to get through, still got up to Sunda Strait there. All the girls, all the wives and sweethearts knew that, alright, Joe is coming back on the 19th, and of course, they didn't turn up, when they, after a couple of days. But the Government didn't find out for about what,
- 14:00 ten days, got over east, and the government, in my book, they finished up with egg all over them, because they didn't know what was going on, they'd never heard of it, and all the rest of it, it took them a long time before they... As far as I know, the first people that were picked up, were picked up by the Shell tanker called the Crokus, and of course, nobody was talking on wirelasses. And they went around to Portland in Victoria,
- 14:30 before they unloaded these Germans that they picked up. The passenger line, what was that, the [Water]hen, you might know, the big passenger line anyway, that picked up a lot of people, that went right around to Sydney before they unloaded them, they got around to Sydney and said, "We've got a lot of survivors here."

What survivors were they?

Well there were survivors from the [HMS] Cormorant, and they came ashore about 17 miles north of Carnarvon, at the 17 Mile Well. And the first

- 15:30 thing anybody knew, was, one of the boys from Quobba Station, met a bloke, and fortunately for them, he must have thought, "Oh gee, they're hungry, they're knocking off the ship, the sheep." And the, one of the boys, the Quobba boys, but he spoke to this bloke and the bloke spoke English,

- 16:00 which queried things a little bit. But the next bloke they, you know, they spoke to, he couldn't. And then they realised they weren't... They, this first bloke thought, "Oh they might be off the Sydney or something." But it soon came out, that they said, "No, Christ no, they're Germans." But there was, there was about 50 Germans, they picked them up eventually, with a bit of hassle they picked
- 16:30 them. There was an old Sergeant Smith or something up there, and a couple of other people. They took trucks and all that up there. And if you know, if you know that area, they're virtually on a, on a cliff face, and there was no way it, it was a climb and a half to climb out of there from the little bay, little cove that they were in. And apparently
- 17:00 there was a German doctor, message went something, and he said, "Oh, we're prisoners of war, you come down and get us." And the old copper said, "If you're not up here in bloody half an hour, we're going." so they soon made their way up there. But they all come back down through Carnarvon and Geraldton, and at first, people thought, "Oh no, they could be, you know." they were, the buzz got around that they picked up survivors, and then a lot of them
- 17:30 thought, "OK, they're men off the Sydney." But they weren't, they were the Germans. The Germans, a couple of the Germans when they come through, come through Geraldton, they said, "Oh we recognise you, you were here before." and the Cormorant was in Geraldton as a widge [?] ship or something, under a Japanese name. So they recognised them, as. But they all came down to
- 18:00 put them in a, took them down to Harvey I think, and then they took them over to Victoria. But once again, the, the government forces never interrogated them, Depnes [?] still had his diary in his hand, and they, he never, if they had of had that, they would have got positions and details and all the rest of it. God, I could go on, anybody could go on for hours and hours and hours.

What do you think of the various conspiracy stories?

- 18:30 What sort of a conspiracy can you make there?

Well there's all kinds of theories about why the Sydney's never been found, and who's responsible. Government secrecy, perhaps the Japanese, submarine.

Yes, all those things. But no, no, well I've got my theory, anyway. But,

- 19:00 no, the skipper was wrong by, by sighting each other, they sighted each other at four o'clock in the afternoon, and it was about 7.30 before somebody said, "Bang, bang." I'd like to know what happened in that time. So the, the Germans were stuttering and stumbling and, and not answering
- 19:30 signals, and hiding their flags behind masts and all that, so that they couldn't find out. There was a lot of, which was their tactical, their way of doing it, they, Depnes had the same crew for years there, and they were all specialists, they all knew this, they all had different uniforms for different occasions. They had all camouflage over their guns, so there was no way of knowing
- 20:00 that it was a radar. They could have asked for medical help, they could have asked for food, water or whatever, they could have asked, there are so many things that could have happened. And came the, as I said, well, the Sydney, I'd like to know what happened between half past, four o'clock and half past seven.

What about the theory that the Germans had in fact surrendered, and lured the Sydney into?

- 20:30 Well, that's a possibility, we can't deny it.

Would the Germans be capable of that kind of?

Well, I'm not saying, they could have come up with some sort of, with a ruse, what they call a ruse, but that's legal in wartime, that is a legal thing, they can claim to be something that they're not. They could have, as I say, well you say that, you know, that, they could have wanted medical aid. They

- 21:00 did have trouble with the engines, they were burning out bearings in their engines. They could have said well, you know, "We've got engine trouble, blah, blah, can you give us some help?" We had a Sister Alice Harris, that lived just down the road here. Her father, her father was a headmaster of Kent Street School, but Sister Alice
- 21:30 was the nurse in charge of the hospital at Claremount insane hospital there, there was half a dozen houses there. And would you believe it, they had, sort of, they had Australian officers in there getting treatment after they come through the army hospital, where Hollywood Hospital is now. And they got, the Aussie blokes got turfed out, and the German blokes
- 22:00 took over in there. During the course of the Cormorant's things, they picked up, they picked up about four ships before they got the Sydney. There was a Greek tanker, Georgie something or other, the Mareeba was an Australian ship, the Velabit was a, a Yugoslav ship,
- 22:30 but anyway. They, they picked up survivors off those things, they would have picked up an Australian life raft, because the Velabit and the Mareeba were both in, in Australian waters. And they must have said, well, you know, "We'd better buy a couple of life rafts there." so they were Australian life rafts, they

weren't, navy issue or anything like that. They were ICI [?] and the

23:00 odd thing-o, thing-o. But anyway, what I'm getting to is that in amongst all that, they picked up three little Chinese boys. And the Cormorant, when they met a supply ship, called the Cumberland, they transferred all those people into the Cumberland, but they kept the little Chinese boys. And Harris had them, Harris had them down at Claremount, and I said, "Do you ever talk to them?"

23:30 And she asked them, you know, "What happened?" And they said, "Oh ship come too close, you could throw potatoes at it." which you could almost believe. But they certainly shouldn't have come to that distance, there was no, you know, there was so many things that shouldn't have happened, that did happen, and oh. The control of shipping, our control of shipping that was in Leeuwin Depot at that time, they'd pick up the paper, the daily paper, and they'd say, "Oh there's a

24:00 ship coming into Fremantle." and that was as far as they got. But the Germans would have known exactly where the ships were that they were calling themselves. They were professionals, absolute professionals.

How did you pay your respects for the Sydney, when you heard that the Sydney had been sunk?

You can only pay for it in your own heart, in your own way, there's nothing you can do about it. Because we had our bums to the wall.

24:30 We were battling there. On that trip there, we got to what, 26 degrees below zero. And my terrifying experience was, that overnight, or even a couple of times during the day, the ice would gang up on the, on the rigging and all that, and there'd be damn enough to turn the ship right over, you know.

25:00 And we had to go right around all the rigging, and the wires, guard rails and all that sort of thing, break the ice off and get rid of it.

Did your morale sink with, hearing that the Sydney had been sunk?

No, no, no, you just, what can you do, just say, sorry about that. There was, at that time,

25:30 we were playing with convoys in the, in the Mermansk convoys, they would take out 50 ships, and get five ships into Mermansk, you know, they were, well that was history, you know, and that was what we were living with. Fortunately the weather, I say this, fortunately the weather we had going up and down, was that bad, that it sort of stopped any sea action or submarines, or

26:00 virtually aircraft, you know. That was virtually a Godsend, in one way. You win some, you lose some.

Did you take [Sir Walter] Citrine back to the UK [United Kingdom]?

Yep. We took him back to the nor-west coast there, to a place called... See you handicap me there, it's all in the book.

No, it's OK.

To nor-west Russia,

26:30 just only a little fishing village, and we went back to Scapa Flow and within a week, they said we've got another good little job for you, and we went off full speed, we had an air escort, we went over to the Norway coast, and we met a little fishing boat in one of the little unused fjord there,

27:00 and we brought Prince Olaf of Norway and his head blokes there, half a dozen of them, head of the army, air force and that, and we brought them back to, to Wick, a place called Wick, up the top of Scotland.

What was there?

What was there? There was nothing, a fishing village, just a fishing village, just a fishing village.

27:30 Why had you gone to Wick?

Well that was where, after we dropped them, as with the other bloke, we went back to virtually our haven, or, you know, where we were sort of trained, at Scapa Flow, which was up between the Orkney Islands, up there somewhere. And

28:00 that's the back end of the world up there. But alright, so, very soon after that, that worked out very near Christmas time, and we came back to the Clyde and we went to Gurick, and we shut down the ships, and we had some leave. Half the ship's company went on leave,

28:30 we had seven days.

What did you do?

I think we come down to Tooting with Vic, I come down to Tooting with Vic. And then we went back afterwards, and I was, with only half the ship's company, I was duty electrician on board, running the

generators. We had generators for power, and no shore power there. Normally you'd get shore

29:00 power when you shut down, but there, there was just a couple of ships together, you know, and you run on your own generator. And it was cold as cold, and the sailors up the sharp end were sort of turning on all the toasters, they had these toasters, they used them for radiators. I had to go round and knock them down, because we didn't have the load for the generator, it was too much for the lights and the, you know, the stuff that was needed.

29:30 And I was going around, and I found big Willie, knocking all these radiators off, and then the, the engineer came back onboard with his guests, and of course, I had the radiators turned off. And he said, "I want the radiators on, I'm giving you a direct order, I want the heaters on." you know, blah, blah. I said, "You can't have them, otherwise we'll have no electricity." Anyway, I won the argument

30:00 a bit, but no, we had a ding dong over that one. But no, Gurick was a nice place.

Did you have a good Christmas there?

Yes, I think we had a Christmas there. But, we might have had a bit of, well no, it was all broken time there. But, I don't know, we must have had something for Christmas, nothing special though, I don't know where it happened.

30:30 Alright. So, we had a refit there, and we went back to Skaper and sort of, tried everything out again, and then next minute we went down to a beautiful little bay in Wales, called Milford Haven. And they assembled one of the biggest convoys I've ever seen,

31:00 with about 50 odd ships in it, and we said goodbye to England. And once again, we came down as far as, we dropped a few ships off at Gibraltar, then we went to Freetown, then fuelled at the Azores, and then down to Walrus Bay, to Cape Town, and we met up with our other N-class ships down there.

31:30 The Nestor, Nizam and, no Napier came after us, so no. No there was three of us there, the Australia's, there was three of us there in Simons Town, which is the naval base at Cape Town.

Bit of a change of weather?

Oh, it was beautiful, we loved the weather, that was lovely. Change of weather, you said.

Yes, different climate to the North Sea?

Yes, we were glad to get away from that.

32:00 But all the time we were up there, as I said, we, we never had any protective clothing at all, you'd go to bed with your football socks on, and your football jersey. To run around on the upper deck to go to, on watch or something, you'd put everything you had in your locker, you'd wear everything you could find. We had no bloody warm stuff at all, that always bugged me, that our navy never had that.

32:30 You see the Royal Navy, those blokes had duffle coats, and sea boots and all that, we had no such thing. But no, there was, the weather came good, of course it was quite hot. And we then came back to war stations there. Because the German subs were operating, I got back to Poppa Englebrick

33:00 there, and that was when I must have said, "Who's winning the war." because I'd read the paper, and all we were doing, we'd go out from Durban and pick up a lot of carcasses, the horses looked like bloody elephants, when you saw them in the sea, and people, survivors, you know, clinging onto rafts, but they were sinking ships. But the Germans once again, their information and that. When we went to Cape Town, and worked between

33:30 Cape Town and Durban, they all went up to Mombassa. And after a month up, of that going on, we'd go up to Mombassa, and they'd all shift down to Cape Town. So they knew all about that. And the South African people were like that. And Chrissie, Chrissie Englebrick, one of the girls.

Did you have a bit of a romance there in Durban, did you?

Not a romance, but we used to go dancing, we loved dancing and all that. So did Vic.

34:00 And as I said, we lived in one of the girls' units, and that was alright. And we had breakfast with the old man, and old Poppa, Poppa there. But the, that's right, in Durban especially, we must have gone to dock there,

34:30 we had some time there. But one night we went to the pictures, and Chrissie. No anyway, we were there, and the ship had come in to a place like Fremantle, and there was a dirty big, a beautiful big black Buick, sitting on the end of the mall waiting for us. So Chrissie was there, and she knew we were coming in. We were at the pictures one night, when there was a flash on the screen, "All navy blokes return to your ships." or something.

35:00 And we were sort of sliding down the seats, and she says, "No, you've got to go, you're definitely going." so they kicked us out. They woke us up in the middle of the night, and they said, "You've got a recall up." how in the hell they knew that, I don't know. But when one of their ships, called the Orangi, [Oriani] when they sailed with a load of troops, or something like that, they would have a party the night

before, and all the lights on the island and

35:30 everybody, you know, everybody that was anybody would be on board, they'd be grogging on, OK we're sailing next morning. And apparently the Germans let them go, this is what I say, the Germans and the Dutch, they had a thing-o going with them, and I think the South Africans were much the same. But it was damn well annoying to us, because we were working under secret orders and that, you know, oh don't tell anybody, what, you know. But Chrissie would come and meet me, and, you know, we'd be away for a fortnight, and we'd come in

36:00 unexpectedly, and she'd be waiting.

Tell me a bit about Chrissie's family?

Well, Chrissie had another sister called Marta, and a Norwegian, sort of boyfriend. They used to go to the dances with us. And old Poppa, Poppa Englebrick had a chain of pastry cook shops

36:30 across South Africa somewhere. He never had a wife or anything, I don't think. But oh, he'd sort of, he was friendly to us, he wasn't anti or anything like that.

What kind of home did they have?

Nothing elegant, nothing elegant, just a unit type of thing.

You mentioned a big black car.

37:00 A big black Buick, yeah.

That would be an indication that they had some money, wouldn't it?

Oh they would be right for money, there was no shortage of money. We didn't have any money, that much. What she's done the wrong thing.

So what else were you doing at that time, when you were working between Durban and Cape Town?

Well that kept us very busy.

37:30 It came, alright. That was sort of into mid way through the year. By the, after June where Madagascar come into the picture. Madagascar was under French control, once again, under bloody Vichy French control, and

38:00 they didn't want to play ball, or done something. So our forces said, "Right, you know, well that's it, we've got to knock them over." So they had landings at Tamatave and up the top there. And anyway, we re-took Madagascar, as such, it became British again. And Christmas of that year, we spent in a dry

38:30 dock, in Tamatave, up the top of the island, that had been filled up with a lot of animal skins and all that, and it was real, absolutely smelly, smelly, smelly. But then we seemed to get caught up more with the Japanese,

39:00 when they came into it. And as I said, we were then, well we were attached to the Eastern Indian Ocean Eastern Fleet there, and we were running quite a lot across the Indian Ocean backwards and forwards, the Diego Garcia and the Andoman Islands, and we had a big fleet movement

39:30 up to the entrance of Sumatra there where the Japs were one side, and they thought, "Oh, here we, this was going to be a big stoush." but they didn't pull us into gear. They could have, and trounced us, because we didn't have that much, we had a few, a couple of battleships and one carrier, and enough, we could have got knocked around. But then we were backwards and forwards all over the place there, to India, Bombay, Karachi,

40:00 the Maldiv Islands. To over Christmas time again, well that must have been after Christmas, alright. And then up til April, yeah it would have been April, we finished up in Mombassa.

Mombassa.

Mombassa.

40:30 Mombassa, it's on the map, Mombassa, very big.

I think we're getting the wind-up there on Mombassa, yeah, so we might change tapes there.

40:42 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:33 **You just mentioned to Julian [interviewer] that you were in Mombassa, but I wanted to ask**

you, you joined the British Eastern Fleet, somewhere in Sumatra. Was there a lot of Japanese ships around?

Yeah, well that was where, one of the first things after, after sort of getting away from Durban, Cape Town and that, we did go over to the edge, biting a bit of a go

01:00 with the Japanese, yes.

What happened?

Well they didn't want to fight us anyway.

How many of them were there?

We had no idea, but the fleet was there, and just not far after that, they came along and cleaned up the Perth and the [USS] Houston and all that.

How, how did you know that they were there?

Well, we had radar, and we had an aircraft carrier, so they would have picked them up.

01:30 **So why didn't you actually engage them?**

Well that was in, sort of, what no-no territory to us. That was, if we had of gone into there, I'm sure Singapore and Thailand and all would have gone crook, because they weren't that friendly with us. Possibly the Japs [Japanese] were,

02:00 the Japs had long before that had taken Singapore and that, they would have been quite active there. And the Japs, so we sort of read in books, that they weren't necessarily, their main aim was to take land,

Right.

not so much

02:30 go fighting ships and navies. And they would have had the Yanks [Americans], they were getting a bit of a hard time from the Yanks at that time, weren't they, Coral Sea and that.

Yep. Anyway, anyway leaving the Coral Sea behind us. What happened in Mombassa?

Mombassa, I was asleep in my hammock there one night, and somebody said, give me a shake, and they said "If you want to go to Australia, the

03:00 [HMS] Nepal is leaving for Australia at 7 o'clock in the morning." which caused a bit of a kerfuffle there, because we grabbed what we could out of the locker, into a bag, and away we went. And I left all my tools and that behind, you know, it was a bit hard that way, I left a lot of gear behind, but it was, mainly our personal gear, clothes and that. So,

03:30 OK on that day, we sailed away from Mombassa, come back down through Mauritius, Port Louis. We had a tanker like this, Apple Leaf, the one they call the [HMAS] Westralia now. That came half way across the Indian Ocean with us, topped us up

04:00 enough to get us to Fremantle. Somebody worked it out very well, because there wasn't much left by the time we got to Fremantle. OK, so, we landed in Fremantle, I was granted 14 days leave. So it had been the funniest 12 months of my life. Anyway.

It must have been good to get back home to Fremantle?

04:30 It was good to get home, yes.

'Cause you'd been away for how many years?

Three and a half years, I was away for three and a half years. So we went on leave, and then reading the orders, they said, "Right, report to Leeuwin on such and such a date." We had a look at the date, as I said, we'd meet each other in the Savoy Hotel and we'd discuss these things. Somebody said, "Oh the navy doesn't

05:00 work on a Sunday." somebody said, "We'll go down, we'll just show our faces." and others said, "Oh no bugger it, we'll go the next day." So apparently the navy did work that day, and of course, there was a great kerfuffle, because we'd missed the troop train.

Troop train to where?

The Eastern States,

05:30 via Midland. But anyway, they pursued another effort, they blasted us to pieces. But they did read out where the drafts for everybody, and I picked up my rate before then, I was a leading seaman by now. Leading seaman torpedo man. And

06:00 my name was called out, "Ramsay, drafted to HMS Hero." and Ramsay was shaking his head, looking

silly, what in the hell is the Hero, never heard of it. Turned out to be a salvage tug, it was working up in Darwin. Anyway, after they called all the names out, you know, they called Ramsay back, and they said "We've got some bad news for you. We've had a report

06:30 the Hero is missing." and I said "You beauty." and that got me into trouble, I had to explain the next day to the commander I didn't really mean it, does that mean I can stay here. And the, the great job in Leeuwin Depot, Leeuwin Depot was built then in 1942, and they used to run sheep there.

This is back in Western Australia?

Yes, back near Fremantle, where it is today, Leeuwin Depot.

07:00 Now Leeuwin Barracks, of course. But anyway, Leeuwin Depot was, the prize job of Leeuwin Depot, everybody was going to get it, was sheepherder. And, and anyway, that didn't work out. But eventually, and there's some photos there, they, that's right, they said right, we're off again. So with that, we had two buses, and they put all the luggage in one bus, and all the bods in the other, and they put another,

07:30 a WREN, a WRANS [Womens Royal Australian Naval Service], one of our WRANS in a little Ford car. We followed that down to the wharf there, and there was a stoker on the Alfie Camm[?], one of the trawlers that were in Fremantle Harbour, and they were doing a boiler clean. So they dragged him out, he was looking like Al Jolson, and they had to put him through the tub and God knows what, and clean him up and pack his gear. And then I, we took off, and we got half way up between

08:00 the two hotels in Cottosloe there, the, what's the name of them, not a great one on hotels, there's one at Cottosloe. The,

The ADH [?] ?

No, no, on the highway, on.

Albion.

Albion, and the other one, there's one, the Albion and the one up the hill there. Anyway, the, the bus broke down, and of course, by this time,

08:30 the time had gone by, and the RTO [Rail Transport Officer], the Rail Train bloke was in Perth, grabbing all, any sailor that he looked like, and said, "Are you supposed to be on draft there." because we were missing. Anyway, the boys were deciding which pub they were going to go to, fortunately we stayed in the bus. But anyway we got as far as Perth, and there was a bloke, an RTO bloke there, and they were holding the Midland train for us. And right, "Out of the bus

09:00 into the Midland train." and the guard was there waiting to blow his whistle, and go, and they were trying to hold them to get the sailors on, and it was only three or four blokes that got on the train, and next minute, somebody said, "If you haven't got a warrant, get off the train." So I was one that got off the train. And lo and behold that train took off, and that was another troop train we missed. We used to go to,

09:30 to Midland, and then you'd pick up the, the Kalgoorlie sort of train, they'd take you to Kalgoorlie. Anyway, the third time they had escorts and they really put us on the troop train. And it must have been very cold then, because they had a nice rug there with my name on it, and my initials on it, W, GRWA. I think I've still got that. Very good. But anyway, we got

10:00 to Parkerston, and the trench train and the local, our gauge train, different gauges, are you familiar with the, Parkerston was the other side of Kalgoorlie, and the two train lines were about half a kilometre apart. And anyway they said, "Oh leading seaman, good, you're the bloke, come with me." OK, so we had to, I had a party, and we had to shift all the officers' luggage over from the train, this train to that train.

10:30 We went up to Parkerston in a first class carriage, and we thought, "Gee, that's good." you know. And then we, I said, "Come on, we'll have dinner." So after we did the job, we had a lovely dinner, they had set up in the middle there, in the camp. So we had a meal, and then the colonel of the train, he was a little bloke, about five foot high, he said, "Come and meet us sailors." so right oh, up we walked. And of course, we walked the length of the train, and

11:00 the army boys were all in the second class, and we thought, "Oh gee, we're going first class again." So we walked past the first class, and then we came to these cattle trucks. And they were B-class wagons, that they got, and they sort of painted them, and put a little window on each side. A little toilet, bucket down one end, and a little wash thing there. And, "Right, this is yours, in there." So in we went with,

11:30 it'd be a dozen navy blokes and a dozen army commando blokes, and they were characters. But there was muck from the cattle that they used to have, still on the, they put the boards straight on it. Anyway, they gave us palliasses to sleep on, because we put all our luggage up in the train, in an open coach there. And of course,

12:00 out of these palliasses came these bloody scorpions, about six-inches long. And the army blokes would pull them out and go "Brrr." During the train ride, it was cold, there are some photos of us there. It was cold, so someone said, "We'll have a fire." OK, we'll have a fire. So somebody found a sheet of tin, we

found some coal along the line, all coal

- 12:30 burners in those days. We got a fire going, and there was more smoke come out of our carriage, than was out of the engine. But eventually, we fudged a bit, and we were head of the lines when the meals, they'd stop along the lines for, you know, things, but our cattle truck there was an empty wagon, then there was a mobile galley thing,
- 13:00 ahead of us. Anyway, we could get out of the train, and sort of climb over, and we would get our own gear out of the hammocks there, we'd even go into, into the galley and have toast at night and all this sort of thing. When they'd pull up at country stops there, we would be first in the chow lines. And the army, all the other carriages, the army boys in the, this little colonel bloke, the OC [officer commanding] of the train, would
- 13:30 inspect them every day, but he never come to us. But it was the funniest trip I've ever had in my life.

So, you're at the end of it, do you arrive in Sydney?

Yes, we got to Sydney. They sent us over the river to Platypus it is now, that's at Balmoral, the old depot there, Platypus. Because I was a, a leading torpedo man,

- 14:00 they thought I was an ASDIC bloke, and then because the ASDIC people, somebody, that was, then that ASDIC was getting powerful, and then they said, "Oh no, ASDIC's a very secret weapon, you know, we don't, we don't advertise it." They had their own badge, but they finished up wearing torpedo badges. So they sent me over to Rushcutter, where the ASDIC mob lived. And
- 14:30 I finished up with a very good job there, I was Callick [?] of the watch keepers dining room, and I'd do about three days in, in, in Rushcutter, and four days in Manly, that was alright, nobody wanted us. Until one day a very smart PO [petty officer] called me over, and said, "Well, what are you, who are you, where are you going?" And I said, "Well, I'm on draft to the Hero."
- 15:00 And he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I don't know, somebody sent me here, anyway." And oh, alright, he said, "Right, you're off, on the train today." and I said, "No, I can't do that, because all my gear's out at Manly." which it wasn't. But anyway, a bit nasty. The next time I fronted up, I went up to the little WRANS girl in this car and we went to dinner, and she put me on the four o'clock train up to Brisbane. Went
- 15:30 to Brisbane, and then went to all of the depots up the way, to Rockhampton, then I caught a train across to Mount Isa, that was the end of the line. And from Mount Isa to Darwin, we were on the back of an international open truck. A very funny old trip, up all the way, we started off all
- 16:00 right leading the convoy all those big American Mack trucks, and the big Negro blokes driving them, they were a wild bunch. And so we got to Darwin eventually, caused a bit of a rumpus when I got up there, because I had a report, of course, to the officer in charge, and I said, the army
- 16:30 were pretty tough there. I said, my boys, there was, these chaps just come out of service, and somebody said, "All you need is your pyjamas and a toothbrush." which was shocking. You know, 'cause the first night they come, and they said, "People are cold, what do we do." I said, "Well, oh well, all right, we'll do something." so we went to the quartermasters' store and we arranged that they could draw blankets, and return them the next morning. Well the convoy would go out
- 17:00 at eight o'clock in the morning, and the blokes would return the blankets and they'd say, they'd look for, they'd come to me and they'd say, "Oh yeah, we returned the blankets, but they didn't give me my watch back, or me quid note ." or something like that. But it seemed that these quartermasters were working a bit of a swindle, they, they'd, the boys had to have. One bloke came up, "I haven't got any money to pay for the blankets." and that, that got me going. So it turned out, that they were,
- 17:30 they would confiscate somebody's watch or pound or whatever, and they shouldn't ought to do that. And of course, when they went back in the morning, of course, they didn't start until nine o'clock, so that hit the fan a bit by the time I got up to Darwin.

Was the problem fixed?

It would have fixed it, I'm sure it fixed it, yes, it, it would have corrected a lot of that.

So you still have to work on the

- 18:00 **Hero?**

Well, I was chasing the Hero, but the Hero was not in Darwin at the time. So I was given a bundle of little jobs. I was captain of the floating dock there for a week or so, and I was driving the tin launches, they called them, delivering stuff around the harbour to the ships that were in the

- 18:30 harbour. One day the Carew come down, a little patrol boat, used to be a religious, or one of the religious people had it, it used to do Island work, but it made history, a bit in the early stages of the war. And it broke its back and it finished up on the rubbish tip down at Darwin. Any rate they got it, dragged it out, and the put a couple of

- 19:00 big RSJs [rolled steel joists], big beams through the engine room and the other one. You know, I was sent down there to commission that, and I had two or three boys and we painted and painted and did this, and they sent some galah up from, officer I should say, officer, from Cerberus, and he promptly rammed the jetty, and then he threw all the confidential papers over in the office one day.
- 19:30 It eventually went over and crashed next to, sunk next to the dock, floating dock. Anyway, by that time, then I went to the corvette called the Fremantle. And that was running backwards and forwards to Thursday Island over there. And eventually the Hero turned up, and I went to the Hero. And the Hero was a coal burner, First World War
- 20:00 ship, it was very uncomfortable, very hot, very dirty. Anyway, no, we had jobs in the harbour, it was mechanically sound apparently, or so they claimed when it left Sydney, with two good boilers. It got to Darwin, the base engineer condemned one, the other boiler, so it was running around there, one lung there. And it was supposed to be an ocean salvage tug, but it never left the harbour.
- 20:30 Til eventually it was time to, to bring it home, back to Sydney, and we had trouble trying to work out how fast they can go with one boiler, you know, one sort of engine. They worked it out, about six knots or something. Between Darwin and Cape York, there's an Island called Wessel Island,
- 21:00 and the Japs had a float plane on there. And that used to annoy all the ships, chase things and do things. Anyway, we were supposed to pass that in the dark hours. But of course on the way between Darwin and Wessel Island, every time you'd go past there, we'd chuck a bucket of coal on, you know, and we finished up doing about 11 knots, and got there about 24 hours ahead of time, so we had to go around in circles before we could pass there.
- 21:30 But came down then, came down inside the Barrier Reef, and we got to Mackay, and there was a great big storm, we got stuck there for about a week. Down to Brisbane, down to Sydney, went out to Mort's Dock in Balmain. And I had a bit more leave there.
- 22:00 And they said, "You've got to go back to Darwin on it." and I said, "Yuck, yuck, yuck." Anyhow, somehow or other, I had an ingrown toe nail. I despised that girl, I have to say. I had an ingrown toe nail, I went over to Balmoral Hospital the day before, and the bloke said, "Oh another problem, I'll have you back on board tomorrow." Anyhow, they successfully
- 22:30 poisoned it somehow, and I spent a month in, in Balmoral Hospital with a big toe wrapped up.

So they did something wrong did they?

So I didn't go back to Darwin, no, I couldn't stand that, I had 12 months of it. My next job, I had a few more jobs. They gave me a patrol job in Sydney,

- 23:00 with the naval, naval patrols going around dance halls and places, picking up drunks and all that sort of thing, that wasn't my kettle of fish.

You were sort of like some sort of an MP [military police]?

Yes, just in charge of them. No, better not say that. We were based, we had an

- 23:30 office in, in the Phillip Street Police Station, and I didn't like to know what was going on there. But anyway, then my draft came up to HMAS Hobart. So I joined Hobart, because it got damaged in the Coral Sea Battle, got hit in the backside with a torpedo and they bought it back to Sydney. And it took
- 24:00 them about 18 months to work on it, because the, the dockeries weren't too interested in work in those days. But anyway, it got repaired and we went to sea, and we got on the fringe of the Coral Sea battle, but if you know the Coral Sea battle, it was mainly an aircraft war, between American planes
- 24:30 and Japanese planes, way out. But the Hobart and the Australia, their job, our job was to cover any landings that the Japs might look at, they were looking at Port Moresby. So we had to sort of, but nothing sort of eventuated there, because they all got cleaned up.

What was your task, or your action station on the Hobart?

- 25:00 Well, I was a leading seaman torpedo man, and I went to X-turret, and because I was this and that, I was given, I was king of the turret ST's [single turrets]. And the turrets, in the turrets, everything was manual except the circuitry. So there was four ST's had each, had one each turret. And their job was to
- 25:30 keep all the firing circuits, check, clean and working and all that sort of thing. Secondary power there if power went off. They had batteries, so we'd look after batteries and God knows what. And virtually, I almost lived in the turret. And the turret, you only see the turret on top, but that, the rest of the housing, the shell room and all, goes right down to the
- 26:00 bottom, and there's compartments, you know, that go around and all that stuff, in between. Because it got a bit oily and dirty and all that sort of thing, we'd get bales of, sort of army clothing, it was too damn hot to be wearing overalls, so we finished up, oh we'd find army shorts and army shirts, you know, with a button off, they'd be a button missing, but

26:30 shirt would be perfectly OK. So before long, we had khaki shorts and I think we were the ones that brought in the khaki rig, we had a full proper khaki rig at one stage, which, eventually some admiral said, "That's not ours, we need white ones." Anyhow, that was very good. And we did a lot of bombardments,

27:00 went up to the Philippines, we bombarded a lot of islands there, and then over to Borneo, Balikpapan and all those places.

So you were bombarding with the [HMAS] Hobart?

Yes, mainly bombarding, because there was, there was no aircraft worries, really. But it was mainly bombarding, covering army landings and all that sort of thing, which virtually, alright, we'd

27:30 soften up a place, you know, before the troops landed.

Was this on a daily basis that you'd be doing this?

You'd go to an area where they were going to land next, and we'd cover that. Then we'd do other sorts of jobs, we went through the Philippines quite a lot, and stayed at a place called Subic Bay.

28:00 The Hobart had radar, good set of radar, which was the first ship with real radar that I was ever on. But Subic Bay was a landlocked bay and the big American fleet were there. And the Japs would come down, and dump a few bombs every now and again, and

28:30 the Yanks wouldn't know they were coming. They had a bit of a problem there between the air force and the Japs, because the Japs had the IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] recognition that the Americans had, they both had it. So they were talking, they didn't know whether they were talking to Jap planes or other ones. But anyway, the Jap planes would come in and they'd drop bombs and all this.

29:00 But anyway, one night they made us guard ship, and we gave them a warning, "Enemy aircraft 40 miles away." or whatever. And they said, "How in the hell did you work that out?" You know, they hadn't heard of that. Because their radar couldn't get over the hills apparently. So we had a very nice captain, Captain Dowling, Roy Dowling, and

29:30 we had been away from our supply ship for about three months, and he came up with a very good idea. He said, "I'll tell you what, if you, we'll be your guard ship, if you give us some tucker." The Yanks said, "That's alright, OK." so next, next minute we were eating chicken and ice cream and God knows what, and we got this lovely job of being guard ship for them for many times. At least we got some tucker, that was something.

Where were you when you were being the guard ship?

Well that was mainly in Subic Bay, top of Manilla, top of Mison Island [?]. That was getting towards the end of the war there, and then we went further north via Okinawa. And then we were the first cruiser actually that went into Tokyo Bay after the war,

30:30 it, that record didn't last very long. But we sort of, came to anchor very near the [USS] Missouri, but after a couple of weeks, everybody, every ship and his dog came along, and of course, they'd say right move, move, go further down the bay there, and we finished up right down the bottom of the bay.

How was it announced to you that the war had ended?

Well,

31:00 we'd get news, but we'd also get a daily news report on our board there, and you know, we could follow it a bit. But we saw that things were tapering off, and Okinawa was a hell of a battle, and we, lucky to miss that, because that was a real nasty bit of gear. But we had a lot of air raids, we had all sort of things.

Anything memorable that comes to your mind, when the air raids were still coming through?

No, well, they were few and far between, but as I say, there was some firing. But my career, my life was virtually in the turret, and I wouldn't know that they had an air raid.

32:00 There was one stage there, they had some, I was supposed to live in the torpedo man's mess deck, but I didn't live there, not as far as sleeping and living, I'd come down for meals and that. But anyway, at one stage, they called me up and they said, "Right, we've got a job for you, we want you to start a new mess, called

32:30 28C." and it turned out that they were all sort of no-hopers, they were real no-hopers, bandits. Anyway we straightened them out a little bit. One bloke let the side down a bit, because they'd take turns being what they'd call the cook and the mess after the meal, one bloke would be left behind

33:00 to get hot water in the big dixie to do the dobering and all that, so you know, one bloke washed all the dishes and cups and that type of thing. Then he'd cart the waste water up to the ship's side, where we had a ship shute, down the side, where everything would go. So anyway, instead of chucking water over the side, there was like a shute

- 33:30 each side of the ship, and you'd go to the one on the lee side. And anyway he went there with all this, and tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, and all our fighting gear went down the dome there, and of course, we couldn't get anymore. I went to the chief bursar, the supply bloke, and he wouldn't give us anymore, anymore fighting gear. So from then on, we said, well you know, you've got to, if you see a fork or a spoon, grab it.
- 34:00 But no, we got out of that, and this bloke, this Pusser made me run this bloke in, but I've never, I'd never run anybody in in my life actually, but I got him halfway and scared the daylights out of him. But no that was just a little bypass. But as I say, I lived in the turret, slept in it, I had beautiful, not bunk or anything like that, but I had bags of rags and all that to sleep in.
- 34:30 **Hobart doesn't sound like it was your favourite ship?**
- Well, well it wasn't my favourite ship, I'm afraid the Sydney will always hold that, but the Hobart was a good ship, a lovely ship, no problems there, the captain was a lovely bloke.
- So how did you celebrate the end of the war?**
- Good question.
- 35:00 Well, I don't know about any celebration, but anyway, all right. We came back, came back to Sydney, and tied up at Garden Island in Sydney, and the plan was all right, OK, the West Australians will stay behind and look after the ship, while the eastern states boys all go on leave.
- 35:30 So we stayed on board, the Queensland, New South Wales and Victorian blokes all went off on leave, and one thing and another, we were asking questions, "When are we going to get a trip to Western Australia?" And, "There's no trains or planes, you can't, nothing offering." so. It got to the stage, we were looking around, and we found one of our very old state ships, a very
- 36:00 small ship it was, called the Kyber. And that was around the other side, it had been in the navy, the navy were finished with it now. So they had a saloon, we went over there and said you know, "What are you doing?" They said, "Oh, we're going over to Western Australia." "Oh yeah?" "Via Adelaide." "Yeah, OK, that sounds good." And we, "Do you reckon we could get a ride back to
- 36:30 Fremantle?" "Yeah, OK, OK." No problems, we thought, "Oh this is good." So anyway, we had to go to our commander, Fred Cook, and we said, "Request to transfer to the Kyber, because it's going home." And he said, "No, no, you've got to do, you know, you've got to wait, blah, blah, blah." And in the finish, we badgered him, and he said, "All right, OK." and he said for half a dozen of us, we could go.
- 37:00 Then of course, it went on a bit further, and we went over there and the Kyber said, "Oh yes, you'll be doing two watches going over there, and we've got an indefinite stay at Adelaide." and they promised us a cabin each, but they said, "Oh no, there's no cabins, there's no cabins." This saloon, big saloon part of the ship, they just tack welded it in half a dozen places, which didn't look very safe to me. And they tied a lot of,
- 37:30 they had the big mast, a couple of masts and all that, and they tied it on with a bit of sisal, you know, second class rope, about as thick as my finger. And these were big masts and that, they were heavy, you know, in a rough sea coming round the [Great Australian] Bight. So admittedly, we thought "Oh Christ." you know, "Indefinite stay in Adelaide, no we've got to get out of this." so we had to go back to Fred Cook, and we begged him and begged him to get us out of it. Which we did eventually. Then any rate,
- 38:00 come the time one day, when right, "Right, you're going to join the [HMS] Stratheden at Circular Quay." So we, there was, oh there was only about a half a dozen of us left then, mostly PO's. So we went over to the Stratheden, it was tied up at the passenger terminal there. And of course, we walked straight on board, and we said "OK."
- 38:30 as sailors do, you drop your gear and, "What time's the leave too?." And he said, "Oh, there's no bloody leave, no leave, you know." So for some reason, the, half a dozen of the boys, they finished up in Kings Cross that night, and they all finished up getting picked up by the shore patrol, because they were on their wheels, and I was over at Manly. And something told me to catch the
- 39:00 first ferry back in the morning, I get these messages. And I came in on the six o'clock ferry, and by that time, the Strath[eden] was, all the gangways were up and they were singled up, and there was only one hole left in the galley, where the galley comes in. And I flew in there, and of course, we were all in trouble, all our blokes were brought back with a shore patrol, and,
- 39:30 "Where were you Ramsay?" I said, "Me? I was fast asleep down below, sir." you know. You had to, you had to do this to survive, it really was survival. But no, I got out of that, they all got fined five pounds or whatever it was. But they got it all back playing poker or something going, coming around. But anyway, alright, the Stratheden left Sydney, and lo and behold, we were all sort of saying, "Tat-tar Sydney,
- 40:00 tat-tar." and we got to the Heads, and put our hand out to turn right, blow me dead the damn thing turned left. We went up to Brisbane, next minute there's thousands of blooming army blokes, all with fighting gear, tin hats and everything, and we thought "Oh good God, we're off to New Guinea again." Anyway, they got on there, and lo and behold, the Strath came right around to Fremantle in one hop, and I think we beat the Kyber

40:30 there by a couple of days. So that was the end of that lot, virtually.

So what was it like to finally come home?

Oh well, it was wonderful, it was wonderful. So I lined up to get discharged, and they said, "No, you can be demobilised, now you can go down and be coxswain of the, of a boom ship that was

41:00 in Fremantle, called the Karangi." It's hard to believe all these things, no-one will believe it, I tell you. Anyway, I was still in the Reserve, I was still RANR [Royal Australian Naval Reserve] then, and then, I looked after the Karangi for a long time.

41:30 You wouldn't believe it, I had one sailor, all the others were chiefs and PO's, it was good when we'd go out, we did a lot of the moorings, a lot of the new moorings when the corvettes paid off, they parked them all down at Parkes, down at Coburn Sound there, where Stirling is now. But I had trouble, I had trouble with captains.

42:00 And one day we were finished work, well we had finished for the day.

42:04 End of tape

Tape 8

00:32 Normally does a lot of moorings and that type of thing. This Captain Block, Von Block, he was a Dutchman actually, but he was an oil tanker man, that commissioned the Karangi in 1942. But anyway, we used to work, there was a lot of senior blokes that were waiting for discharge, and

01:00 they made themselves a kasbah down in the forward hold, but when it came to doing dock work, you know, they were specialists. And we'd do a lot of moorings and that, with no trouble. I'd be the coxswain my job was in the wheelhouse. And we had this Von Block, and all of a sudden, he thought his wife, he was married, he thought his wife was killed in Europe. He got a cable

01:30 one day to say that his wife had turned up, so we were down the bottom, down at Garden Island there, and he put the Karangi up against, tied it up at Palm Beach jetty there, if you know that one, Palm Beach jetty. And he said, "It's all yours, 'swain, I'm going." I said, "No, sir, you can't do that, please, please, you can't do that, sir." and it took us about three months for him to get a relief.

02:00 And in that three months, we got this other little sailor, I don't know what he was, another little relief bloke. And he was an alcoholic, bottle of whiskey a day man, it went from the happiest ship to the worst damn ship that I've ever had. One bloke came along one day, Petty Officer Stewart, he said, "I've got three badges, you've only got two." he said, "I should be coxswain." I said, "Congratulations."

02:30 And I walked off, so that was that.

What happened next?

What happened next, well then, strangely enough, as I said I was in the Naval Reserve before the war. And the Naval, the Fremantle Division, the Port Division of the Naval Reserves, was of course, inactive during the war years. And

03:00 with another captain, one of my other captains, Captain Len Vickeridge [?], we started up the Port Division Reserves again. He got a gong out of it, and I got a BEM [British Empire Medal] out of it. So that, we got the Fremantle Division RNR [Royal Naval Reserve] back into gear. That run on until what, 1989.

03:30 And alas we got a new commodore, and he said, "I don't want sailors marching around parade grounds." he said, "I want them down at Stirling painting my ships." And of course, they put us on, we'd go down, we'd train on Tuesdays and Thursdays and weekends perhaps. And we'd get on a bus at half past seven at Leeuwin, we'd get down to Stirling, by the time we got there, it was time to come home

04:00 again. So that was a wish-wash of an idea, and that was the end of the reserves in 1989 at Leeuwin Depot. Now of course, the army has got it, it's Leeuwin Barracks there. A very valuable piece of gear, and they use it when the Yanks come here, they'll use it a bit more when they're doing these ship changes, it'll come to life again.

Did you have trouble settling down after the war?

04:30 Yes, I had a bit of trouble, same with everybody, I was a bit disenchanted. I tried to get back to my trade, tried to get back to my trade, Kumpstons had gone out of business. At that time, the foreman moved into London Court, he had a machine down at London Court, only had one machine. He apologised that he couldn't

- 05:00 take me on, because he only had one machine. So they sent me, who was I, I was telling you this earlier wasn't I, so we went over to Charlie Sheridan's and he convinced the officials that OK, we've got a pantograph machine and we're training the boy, OK, we're doing fine. But Charlie Sheridan had a pantograph machine, and it never worked, and it never will work.
- 05:30 But he knew that I could do badge work and a lot of other stuff, so I was doing that for a pound a week or whatever it was, and the other blokes were getting bundles, so I left there. My father, my father was a caretaker at the CIG [Commonwealth Industrial Gases] in Subiaco, and I got promoted from
- 06:00 making oxygen to making the acetylene. To make acetylene, they had like a two-storey joint, and they'd get, they'd have these great big vats, and every half hour or so, you had to get a, a drum of carbide and sort of open the lid at the top, empty it in, and close it down again. And that would start it up again, and OK, you'd make this acetylene gas. Well,
- 06:30 you'd have everything around you was supposed to be non-smoking area, and everything was supposed to be flash proof. But one day, silly old me, I wasn't the first one, it's been done before, but one day, I was there and I had a drum of carbide in my hand, and the drum bounced off me and went through the wall, it blew it here and bugged up my eyes, and one thing and another.
- 07:00 And they, "The only thing, oh it's impossible to do, you must have been smoking"; "No, I've never smoked in my life." you know. And. What did we do then? We went somewhere else.

Did you decided to try some other line of work after that incident?

Yes, next

- 07:30 I went, I think I went to Dunlops, Dunlop tyre people, I was in the despatch there, had nice new vehicles there, it was good.

What kind of vehicles?

Well I started with a Bedford, then I got a beautiful International, beautiful International. Was it an International, yeah, it must have been.

- 08:00 No it wasn't an International at all, it was a small one, what was it, oh I don't know, I forget now. So.

How long were you with them?

I was there for about four or five years. But once again, I don't know, these things happen, but we used to get a lot of orders for, in those days, down the railway yard, a lot of country people would want

- 08:30 tyres and stuff from Dunlops. And every now and again, we'd get a job to take stuff down to rail. And one night, they must have had a terribly big order, because they asked the three drivers to work back that night, and they, we started. Knocked off our own job, and I was just married then, and I would have had a cut lunch or something
- 09:00 for tea. But the boys got seven and six for their tea money, and of course they went over to the Melbourne Pub, and the buggers never came back. So silly old George, I loaded about three trucks all on my own, and I come home from the next day, I couldn't get out of bed, I'd done my back in. So that was the end of Dunlop.

What was next on your agenda?

- 09:30 Well the next on the agenda, my brother Bob started a firm. Bob used to be with Goldsbrough Mort, and he was dealing a lot with farmers and that. And he said, "Let's see how we go, and then you can come and join us." So eventually a month after, we joined up together. And Bob and his wife, and myself and Edna, we,
- 10:00 we were there, and we called ourselves Ramsay Thermal Appliances, and went through the country mainly, because... No, on one thing, anyway. We went through the country, where they had a lot, they were using these big Aga cookers, which was burning coke. And we said, you know, "Why don't you get a wood stove, because all you can see out the paddock
- 10:30 is wood." And we got rid of a lot of Aga cookers, and we got them onto Wellstoods and Raeburn Stoves, wood burners, you know, slow combustion stoves. Then one of Bob's mates was Donny Argus, and we finished putting shield units into gas refrigerators and that type of thing. And one thing got to
- 11:00 another, and then we, then I became a bit of a plumber, I run about six plumbers, putting in home hot water units into places. But then, every now and again, I'd dive off and go back to the navy.

Did you get involved in the reserve?

Yeah, I was coxswain of the naval reserve down here. But I'd take,

- 11:30 I'd take a bit of leave, and in 1950. But in this I became then, in the emergency reserve, where ships coming from Sydney around to here, or down from the islands back to Sydney, they'd be short of perhaps a coxswain and crew. And I'd

12:00 go with some of my reserve blokes, we'd hop on a ship here, and go around to Sydney, and have a little bit of leave in Sydney, and then they'd fly us back again, and vice versa, we'd do that. And then when the aircraft carriers, Sydney, stopped flying in 1950,

12:30 '55, they did a farewell trip around New Zealand for six weeks, that was good.

You went along for that voyage?

Yes, I was on that, yeah. I took, I was in charge of a dozen blokes that went with us. Then I had, in between, see I was fitting things in between, I was working here and working there, and doing

13:00 all sorts of things. I built this house in my spare time, in 12 months, in 1950 to '51. We, we got involved with a navy group building scheme, and I knocked off work altogether, and we built this, and it's still standing, that's good. Then I'd go back to sea, and

13:30 we did a lot of conversion on the aircraft carrier Sydney when they were trying to decide whether it was going to be a cargo vessel, or a landing craft, or whatever, and we'd load up a lot of gear and take it down to Jervis Bay and unload it. Then that was OK, we'd go back and pick it all up and bring it all back again. Eventually they decided to make it the Vung Tau Ferry. Took a lot of the blokes away to Vietnam.

14:00 I had several, half a dozen ships, the [HMAS] Anzac and the [HMAS] Vampire destroyers and that, I was doing relieving work on those. Then in 1968, I brought the first

14:30 defence of Western Australian over here from Sydney. Went over to Sydney and picked up the first of the patrol boats, the Acute class, and it was called the Acute.

Why?

Why? Well I don't know, they have a name for these things, like the class of patrol boats now, they were Fremantle Patrol Boats, because that was, the first one on the RAF was called Fremantle.

15:00 And anyway, the Acute was the first of that class of patrol boats, there was a lot of them, which preceded this Fremantle crowd that are still working now. But anyway, that was 109 tonnes and so forth and so fifth, it had and only had a, one gunner on the front and a bit of rocketing at the stern.

15:30 And I brought that over, as coxswain brought that over from Sydney in 1968. And we had a commodore here called Jim Ramsay, big Jim, smiling Jim, and being of that name, and we had about five Ramsays in the depot at one stage, when he was there. And when I brought this thing back, we had

16:00 a little trouble, we got a bollocking coming over the Bight [Great Australian Bight] which was normal, because the, nasty water there. We got holed up at Albany, getting over it, because we had a lot of damage, and the wireless operator was, finished up in the corner of this thing with his wireless over his head. Anyway, got to the stage where the Acute, being a normal, good weather schedule, should have arrived at Fremantle,

16:30 on a certain day. And of course, the day come and the TV [television] and all the, they're waiting at Fremantle for the ship to come, and it didn't turn up. And the governor said, "You bring that ship up, or we'll come down and bring it up for you." he reckoned the Rockies [Reservists] weren't capable of doing it. But anyway, eventually we brought it up, and of course,

17:00 when we arrived, nobody was there to meet us, we were history. But anyway, that patrol boat, then, as I was saying, Jim Ramsay called me, and we used to joust a bit together. And he said, "Come here son, I've got a good job, I know all about you, you've had it pretty good for a while there." he said, "You've bought that monster over, you can live on it for the next five years." So actually I finished my navy days,

17:30 on the Acute as the coxswain, and we were doing supply runs, well not supply, but fishery patrols up around the Montebellos, Broome, Derby, not Derby, but Broome's as far as we went, Dampier, round the Montebellos, but we were chasing, in those days, the Korean fishing boats used to come down there. And they used to

18:00 net anything and everything, blowies and crabs and sharks and fish, and they would get in the restricted areas around the Montebellos, and we'd have to chase them out. But once again, they had a lot of information. But one of the last big projects we had, was doing the surveys of Bunbury when they put the new harbour in down there. That took about three or four months at a time, that's three times.

18:30 And come 1976, and they, they said, "Right, you've reached the age, and that's the end of you." so I got discharged and that was the end of my navy career. So no more navy.

Did you receive the FM for your involvement with the Reserves?

The FM [RFM - Reserve Force Medal], no, I got nothing other

19:00 than the BEM, BEM, British Empire Medal.

Can you tell my why you received that medal?

Well for, with Captain Vickeridge[?], as I mentioned, we reformed the Port Division up again after the war, because it didn't operate during the war years. And it went from, went from 1950 to 1989.

19:30 **Sorry, I meant to say the RFM?**

That's the Reserve Force Medal, that's a long serving medal, it's the only medal that sailors are allowed to wear, as a matter of fact. It's a medal, not a gong or anything like that, it's a medal. There's not too many of them around, I can assure you. But that was for doing 38 years

20:00 in the reserve force.

That's a great honour.

Well it took a lot of doing. But no, I don't know, I must have had navy in my brains or something, but it just seemed to flow on, one thing and another come up, and I had a bit of time with Ramsays, of course, I had 15 years there. But I fitted a lot of things in

20:30 between there, somehow or other.

Have you been a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League]?

Yes.

How important has that been to you over the years?

Well, it's absolutely no use to, no help to us really. We do use the, I'm a member of the RSL because we hold our meetings there. And that was almost folding up just recently, but no, they've got a new lease on life, and away they go again. But no,

21:00 I belong to it mainly because my crowd, my Sydney boys weren't necessarily members of the RSL, but my coverage, you know, let them in and nobody queried that, but if it did happen. And they organise the Anzac Day marches or something. But once again, the RSL run Anzac Day

21:30 as such, and they run the general run-of-the mill everything that happens, but the navy are responsible for the order of the march, and the way the ships all line up and that. And in between another bit there, I used to be marshal of the Anzac Day parade there, for about 12 years, until I had a barney with somebody. No they

22:00 they, they said, "Oh, we're going to change things around, we're not going to have the navy leading the march, we'll have the army marching, we'll have the army, I'm going to put the army." I said, "You can't do that." you know. It's in the big book that the navy had prior privilege to lead the march. And they get around, they nibble away at times now, because they get a... last year they had some

22:30 Vietnam blokes, a special crowd, and this time they've got some disabled people to come and lead the march. But the navy will still be reasonably up front.

Can't everyone take it in turns?

Take it in turns.

Yeah, why not?

What do you mean, take it in turns, how?

Well, one year the navy could lead, the other year it could be the army the air force, or a special group like you mentioned?

No, the navy is the senior service.

23:00 **Well, why not give everyone a go?**

No, no, no, no, blokes like you are bad news, bad news.

Really?

Yeah. No, the navy will always be the senior service.

What do you think about children marching on Anzac Day?

That's alright, that's alright. They never used to, but now, what do you call, they are children of veterans, they've always been, they've always been welcome in my book, no problems there. But now they've

23:30 got more relatives, they've got more friends, and they've got, bring half their class if they want to. But that's because the numbers of the veterans like us are down to. I used to have 50 or 60 blokes in an Association, I'm down to about nine blokes now, and only two or three are on their feet.

What do you

24:00 **think of the growing popularity of Anzac Day?**

What is the popularity?

What do you think about the growing popularity?

I don't know about a growing population, although I will concede that it seems, nowadays there is a hell of a lot more people kicking the pickets than ever used to be before. But that's just one of the changes of things, that.

So you can't embrace

24:30 **the fact Anzac Day is becoming more popular with young people?**

Well, in what way? Only as a spectacle, only as a spectacle. They've got a lot more time on their hands, so they say, "What are we going to do today?" "Oh it's Anzac Day, we'll go in and see it." But they're not performing in it, they're not joining Associations or ship's groups. I belong to all the ship's groups, the corvettes, the N-class ships,

25:00 the old Mildura, that's gone, the Fremantle mob have gone.

What would be the point of marching if nobody watched?

Well, it is a national day, we call it the national day, it is recognised as that, and held all over Australia. It is

25:30 a national day, but like a lot of things, we are trying to encourage the younger people to come into associations, into ship's groups and all that, but they just don't want to come in. It's very hard, a lot of the club, associations, bowling clubs, all the rest of them, they can't get people to, young

26:00 people to join. Are you belonging to any associations?

Not the one's you've mentioned, no.

Not the ones you've mentioned no. What do you belong to?

Well, I'm not the one being interviewed, so it's probably not really relevant.

Sorry, sorry. But that's the type of thing. It is something that is happening with all the dance halls, a lot of the hotels, the bowling clubs, they've all got problems with,

26:30 with people to take over. However. Right.

What do you think about on Anzac Day?

Well, I've only missed a couple of Anzac Days in my career. Even the time I was in the Reserve, I can show you

27:00 photos there, in the good old days of 1950 odd, I put 800 Naval Reserves down Perth anyway, not on Anzac Day, but down at Perth Parade there, all under arms, fully booted and spurred and everything, over 800. And that's a fantastic effort. But not on Anzac Day, no, we have.

27:30 **You haven't answered the question though, I asked you George, what do you think about on Anzac Day? What does the day mean to you, regardless of who's coming, and who's not, what do you think about, and what does it mean to you?**

I think it's a patriotic day, it's my duty to be there. I consider that I think of the men that have gone before us.

28:00 The First, First World War diggers, including my mother's brother, Uncle Oriel, he, he got killed in, in Belgium, somewhere. It's a patriotic day, and anybody that's patriotic, should belong to. Most of the servicemen are, for all the time they whinged

28:30 about army habits and navy things, they all think it's a patriotic day, and it's good to meet friends. They meet a lot of chaps they haven't met for 12 months, and. No, it's, it's, they don't, they don't go there and complain, you don't hear them complaining about anything and they're not knocking the army or the air force or the navy.

29:00 **What message would you like to pass on to younger people about war?**

Well I would like to see them accept some responsibility, or learn that someone's got to be responsible

29:30 for the welfare of the whole country. A lot of people would say that navy, army, air force, they might not have liked it, but they got discipline, and they see something that's not visible these days, discipline, there's no discipline in these young people. All this road rages and all this, all new stuff to us, all this, and that shouldn't be,

30:00 because, I suppose even, even though national service unfortunately, but they were defending a cause.

People say that they shouldn't have been fighting in Vietnam or shouldn't have been fighting in Korea, or something like that, maybe, that's something. But if we didn't fight to defend our country,

30:30 then some bugger's going to come down here and take us over. Without being too much of a psychic, the way the world is going at this moment, in 20 years, there'll be none of this freedom we're talking about.

And what do you say to the people of today and

31:00 **tomorrow, if their freedom is threatened?**

Well, who can they blame, who can they blame except themselves.

Well what can they do if their freedom is threatened, firstly?

Well, they could be interested in some form of defence,

31:30 perhaps the nasho [national service], perhaps the nasho wasn't very popular, but at least a lot of people, my son included, went through nashos, and he was, dare I say it, a bit of a wild one, but he came out, and he knew a bit of discipline. And the nashos [National Servicemen], by the nasho training,

32:00 they learnt something and it is alarming at the moment, where you have school cadets and army, and you have navy cadets and all these sort of thing, and this do-gooders now saying, "Oh we don't want army cadets playing with rifles, because that's intimating that they want to go to war or something." it's wrong, it's wrong. And there, the navy

32:30 cadets, they're not allowed to parade with, with cutlasses or something, or ceremonial occasions, because, "Oh no, that's a wartime implement." and that sort of thing. There's that many people knocking the system, we're not going ahead, you're not gaining anything.

Do you think they've forgotten that we have already fought in wars, and may have to fight in wars in the future?

Well, they don't want to know about it, they don't want to

33:00 know about it. Somebody's going to look after the, somebody's going to look after them. You see this problem on the go at the moment, where [Australian Prime Minister] Mr Howard's saying the old people have still got to keep working to pay for, looking after the baby boomers. Turn that thing off, you'll have me shot here.

The baby boomers are interesting?

What have you got on there.

33:30 **How would you fight terrorism?**

Well, is terrorism a threat? I think it is.

I think you can safely say it is.

And what are you going to do about it?

Oh, that's what I asked you?

All right. Well what can you do about it, you've got to defend yourself. We've got a country, just north of us

34:00 here, and given the opportunity, brother they, anybody, this is the trouble with the world, people want land now. They're breeding and breeding, and all the people are going from country to country, they're invading Britain, they're invading Australia, if we let them. Britain now has lost, it used to be the power of the world at one time,

34:30 and now it's lost all its control, it's lost everything. And I don't want to see Australia do that. So therefore, we've got to have a force. Well then, all right, we had the Vietnam blokes and Korean blokes, now they are getting old, and there's no-one following

35:00 their footsteps. In ten years time, they'll all be on the rocks and, alright, the terrorists can sort of, have an open go, which we don't want to go, don't want to do.

What do you think about Australia becoming a republic?

Well I'm a royalist myself,

35:30 definitely a royalist. And the republicans are...

Say what you like.

Yes, you're going to quote it back in a bloody paper. Anyway, no, alright, the republicans, they're all sort of knockers, aren't they, they're knockers.

Of the monarchy?

They're do-gooders and all that. And these people that are knocking the systems,

36:00 and I don't know whether Howard is doing a good job, I think he is doing better than anybody that's there. But look at the number of people who are knocking, and even the publicity that this new bloke is getting, you know, people want to bring people down. [Western Australian Premier] Gallup wants to change everything, just for the sake of change. Now he's getting in there, he wants to change hospitals, he wants to put train lines down somewhere.

36:30 That's absolutely crazy. And apart from the fact that our country is quite wealthy, and we've got gas and oil up there, if he didn't know that he was going to get royalties and all that from there, he'd have, he'd be like the other bloke promising that we'll put 80 million into this, and 80 million into that. But should that

37:00 stream of money from our, the wealth of this country, that's in the anthem that we sing, country's rich in wealth and everything. But we've got to guard it, we've got to look after it, we've got to defend it. And we might have radar that can look over the hill, but

37:30 it can't do what it's supposed to do, pick up refugees coming down the hill there, can't do it. But we've somehow got to be able to defend something. If you go to, if you went to school, and you've got bullies or something like that, you'd expect somebody to try and stand up for you.

If you had your time over

38:00 **again, would you do anything differently?**

I have no regrets, no regrets, absolutely no regrets. There's a few funny things I've done I would do it differently.

And you found the navy rewarding?

I think so, the navy's been good to me, and

38:30 in a bit of modesty, I hope that I've given the navy something back again.

Did being in the navy change you?

Well, I'm not able to tell that, am I? The navy has changed, I know last year, was it, I had the opportunity to spend

39:00 12 months on one of our newest ships, the, the FFG's [guided missile frigates], that unfortunately have all been sunk by now, or getting to be sunk. But the Hobart, the new Hobart, I was on the cruiser, Hobart, the 01, but the new Hobart was here, DG, DDG-39, and it came around Australia as they usually do, they have a sort of, an around Australia trip to pay off.

39:30 And I had a week onboard, we had, there was an offer of four blokes, they'd take four blokes for a week, so they decided on, they'd take two veterans of the Hobart, the cruiser, and two blokes that served on it in Vietnam, and Clyde Goddard and myself were the two veterans, and any rate, we were onboard. But that's,

40:00 it's a different navy all together. Far more efficient of course, far more efficient, they could...

Well it's just as well then, that the navy's advancing and becoming more efficient, wouldn't you say?

Well, it is, but like they say in the ads there, you can join the navy, they want somebody. You can join the air force, they want somebody. Can't get them.

40:30 They pay you what, \$25,000 to change from being a seaman to being a submariner, and now they're going crook because, submarine, submariners when they come to Fremantle, they don't live on board, they want to go to Hotel Adelphi, the top pub, and of course. A bit of a complaint on at the minute, that the

41:00 the collarless boys are getting put into say the likes of Leeuwin Depot, or into barracks, and that's not what they want.

George I'd just like say that it smells and sounds like dinner's ready, so I'd like to thank you for talking with us today, and spending your day with us, and sharing all your experiences with the Archives.

Well, alright. I wonder sort of wonder what's going to happen

41:30 with all that guff.

All that guff?

All that waffle, that I've been waffling on.

41:38 **INTERVIEW ENDS**