

Australians at War Film Archive

James Nelson - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/1639>

Tape 1

00:38 **Are you comfortable Jim?**

I might move around a little bit because that's an old war injury.

If you need to stop just let us know.

Get up every now and then.

Well Jim we might start with where you grew up and tell me what life was like for you as a young man?

01:00 A Well to start off with I was born at Tempe, New South Wales which is just outside, next station down from Sydenham Street at a place Foreman Street, Tempe I was born there at home with a midwife and then, that was 1921, the 6th August 1921. And then my mother and family moved to Belmore

01:30 which is over on the Canterbury Bankstown line and I grew up there as a young fellow from about 6 or 7 years onwards until 18 when I joined the navy and I attended the Bankstown Commercial Boys School and then I didn't like the commercial work, and I transferred from there to Belmore Tech High [Belmore Technical High School] and did a technical course.

02:00 I've always been very partial to engineering and working with metal and woods and things like that and motor mechanics and that sort of thing. I then got a job Bennett and Wood, the Harley motorcycle people in Sydney and was working as an apprentice on Harley Davidson motorcycles, and there I met Jean, my wife and she

02:30 literally threw herself at me. You know the big concrete stairs you usually find in buildings, fire escape stairs or concrete down a well, I was coming up there and she was coming down, and she suddenly fainted and fell down and I caught her and carried her down round to the ladies room, and got the manager's secretary to come over and look at her and she'd just fainted and they got her fixed up, and then I, they told me to take her home.

03:00 So I took her home and that got things going, then later on we became serious, got engaged and I went away with the navy and went overseas. And, came back from overseas from the Mediterranean I was on the HMAS Perth, ['Amphion Class' naval cruiser, commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy in 1939] and came back on - well I had 28 days leave. So I asked her what she wanted to do, would she

03:30 rather get married or go on holiday. She said, "I'd like to get married," so we got married. That was in 1942, '41 - 42 I think, and then, our eldest son Ken, who now turned 60, two days ago, came along, and then after came Pam, and then we had Peter.

04:00 And Peter the youngest passed away about 10 years ago with cancer - cancer, lymphoma cancer [cancer of tissue of the lymphatic system], just got the daughter and son left at the moment. So that's basically my life up to marriage and children.

So if I can just take you back to when you were young, can you describe your town you grew up in? Maybe the kind of industries that were there?

04:30 Yes, the town I grew up in was Belmore... it is about 4 or 5 stations before Bankstown. It's essentially a labour district, mainly composed, at that time composed of labours, labourers. And my Dad was a foreman brick burner at the Punchbowl brick and tile works, and at that time was the Depression,

05:00 1928 to '32, and the majority of the men in our district were unemployed naturally, because it was a labour orientated town, and the government designed a very sneaky way of reducing unemployed numbers by gathering all the men together giving them a tent and some tools and packing them off to a so-called goldfield up near Goulburn somewhere, and that they'd make their

05:30 fortune panning gold. And of course they showed a dramatic downturn in the unemployed in the district

and the government really did well out of that. Needless to say they didn't find any gold and when they come back home again Dad's mate that he was billeted with up there in a tent, Wally Anderson, became my mentor. He was an ex-navy man from World War I and always told naval

06:00 tales and what have you. He's also a musician and taught me to play cornet [musical instrument, similar to a trumpet] and because of that he became a very close personal friend of the family and us kids him uncle, honorary uncle and then because of his influence I then joined the naval cadets and then later on when war broke out I was mobilised into the navy on to the Flinders Naval Depot [Mornington Peninsula, Victoria]

06:30 and then a few small ships and what have you on the way on to Perth for overseas in the Mediterranean.

Do you recall that things were very scarce in the Depression? I guess when your dad was away, do you remember what life was like for your mum and you kids?

Life was very hard, there was no to eat. They had a dole system in force at that time, in operation at that time, and we used to go up to

07:00 a depot somewhere in Lakemba and I'd pull my wheelbarrow up behind me and we'd get an issue of grocery, get coupons, and we'd get a dole issue of groceries. Not money but goods, flour, butter and tinned foods and what have you which I pulled back home in the wheelbarrow. And mother worked very hard and she took on cleaning jobs around the village for some of the wealthier

07:30 people, and we used to go around to some of these homes. She'd take me with her and she'd clean the homes and what have you. I remember one very sad day when the pawnbroker came down and took all her rings and weighed them all up, and gave her a few pounds for her wedding ring and whatever she had. Things were very, very hard. My father was away for 6 months and came back, never sent us any money

08:00 because he never got any money. And he didn't strike it rich on the goldfields so when he came back, Wally played a double-bass [large string instrument], and euphonium [large brass wind instrument], I played the cornet, and Dad rattled a box and we'd go up and stand on the railway station when the trains were coming in of a night time, while Wally and I were playing, Dad would wander around with a box. And then during the day Wally and I would walk around the town

08:30 up in the wealthy quarter, and play on the street corners and things, and people would give us bottles of pickles and bottles of fruit and various things and money, and we made a few bob [slang term for money] that way, uncle and I. And then, life was very hard yes. My eldest sister who died about a fortnight ago at

09:00 94 she was taken away, had a special permit to leave school at 12, and worked as a seamstress or worked with a seamstress sewing and she made a few bob which kept the family going. And Dad and Wally and I dug up the ground and planted vegies [vegetables] and we had our own vegies.

What sort of vegies did you plant?

Well Wally had a big, long

09:30 backyard, we had enough room to put in a big potato paddy [patch]. And we put the big potato paddy in and we used to get potatoes, plenty of potatoes which became a staple diet. Then, in our place, we grew cabbages, lettuce, radishes and all those sort of things and French beans along the fence, chokos and that's how we managed to survive through

10:00 the Depression.

Was there much of a barter system between families at all?

Yeah, we - Mum would make pickles out of the chokos and things, and bottles of pickles would be bartered with other people for bottles and jams and things like that. And there was a local Reverend Kingston, Billy Kingston at the Church of England at Lakemba, and he used to do a lot of charity work, come round and see all

10:30 the poor people as we were and he used to miraculously produce a chicken from somewhere. Where he got them from I don't know and I never asked. You never ask a minister of religion where he's pinching the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s from. But he'd turn up every now and then with a chicken for us.

What was it like when you had chicken?

Beautiful. Christmas - in those days, not like today, families only had chickens at Christmas time. It was traditional to chop the head off.

11:00 Get a wooden block and the axe, Dad would hold the chicken and I'd pull the head out to straighten the neck while he did the work of the axe, and then Mum would cook the chicken but to have a chicken through mid-year, was a Christmas feast, and particularly when meat and those sort of things were very scarce and hard to get.

Did that lift your spirits? I mean a simple thing like a chicken?

Oh yeah, definitely. To

11:30 get a good feed lifted your spirits.

How would you describe your general community spirit at the time, like if everyone was doing it pretty hard?

Everyone was doing pretty hard. The men all out of work used to hang around up the railway station at the pub, and there's a seat out the front of the railway station and the men used to sit on the seat and talk, and then go in the pub and have a few beers

12:00 and talk more. But the community spirit was good, everybody helped everybody else.

Was there much depression amongst the men that you could see just not being able to work? Could you describe that?

Yeah, even as a kid I could see there was depression. Dad was terribly depressed that he couldn't get work because when the Depression hit, naturally all building stopped. Nobody built houses so they didn't make bricks. The brick yard closed down, and that put him out of work. He was out of work for 6 years during the Depression, through

12:30 the whole Depression, and I know he was depressed, but he was a good Dad.

What sort of fun things did you do with your dad for recreation maybe?

Oh, I had a pushbike, well it was Dad's pushbike. Dad used to ride up to the brick works when he was working, on his pushbike, and of course when the work slows down he gave me his bike and I used to ride the pushbike. I joined

13:00 the local pushbike club and they used to have little races and things and time trials to ride from Belmore across to Hurstville, and they'd time how long it took you to do it, and each one would do the time trial from Belmore to Hurstville and the chap who did it in the quickest time became the winner you know. The time on the time trials, but then I got interested in

13:30 motorcycles. No, printing first. My sister got a job at Alex Cowell, the paper company that made Coxley Envelopes and Coxley writing sets, and all that sort of work and she was able to get me a job there too. And she got me a job at Alex Cowell and I became interested in printing and...

14:00 **What were your first impressions of the printing industry because you did go into that later on in life?**

Yeah I loved it, I still do, I still talk printing.

What was it about it exactly?

Well when you walked into the factory the smell of the printing and the smell of the paper gets you for life, you never lose it. I worked there strangely enough as 'gum boy'. There's a kitchen with copper boilers around, and it was my job

14:30 with a mattock [type of pick], the fish glue that goes on envelopes came in big solidified lumps, so you attacked it with a mattock and chopped off lumps and boiled it up in the - in coppers, and the girls on the machines would yell out, "gum boy" and put their hand up, and you'd run down with the ladle of gum and fill their gum up on the gum pot, to put the gum on the envelope,

15:00 and I never licked-up an envelope from then on, after you see that the gum was made up of fish oil - fish glue, and that was a good job. But everyday going home from there or going to work I used eventually the boss. And the boss said, "Do you like motorbikes?" I said, "Yes"

15:30 he said, "Would you like a job?" I nearly knocked him over on the way in and then I got a job in the motorcycles and I took on the motorcycles from thereon.

What sort of work were you doing there?

Mostly just helping with the mechanics, cleaning the parts, sorting the parts out and all that sort of thing, and did a bit of assembly work and then a chap used to go in, a

16:00 Stan Stein - had a motorcycle shop out at Hurstville, and he asked me would I come and work with him. So I went and worked with him, and then I got more in the mechanical sides of it then and stripping the bikes and helping him do the mechanical work. I used to ride from Belmore to Hurstville on my pushbike.

Can you describe your first ride on a Harley?

Not so much my first ride on the Harley, but my first ride on a

16:30 motorcycle was out at Hurstville, and I thought that was very good, then I applied for a job at Bennett and Wood, the Harley people in town, and then I worked in the sales department on Harleys, and then I got to riding Harleys. I was only 16, 17 didn't have a licence and I could ride the Harley. And at that

time the police department had Harleys, and we did the

- 17:00 service on the police Harleys, and I used to take them for the trial run after we serviced them. Quite illegally of course, then when I went down to get my motorcycle licence I used to teach the police to ride actually. And we go down to the Domain, take a Harley down, a police Harley down with a policeman, and teach him to ride in the Domain. And then one day when I went in for a licence myself
- 17:30 and the sergeant saw me, when I came in he said, "Do you mean to say all these years you've been riding you've never had a licence?" I said, "No, I wasn't old enough." Any rate they gave me my licence then I bought my own Harley. That was a thrill believe you me - been a Harley man ever since. And then Jean and I had Harleys all that time until I graduated up to second hand motor car, but before that, we had the Harley and side-car which we used to go
- 18:00 all over the place in. Jean even, I even taught her how to ride that, but she never rode it often, but she could ride it. When we get out in the country she'd usually have a bit of a go on it.

Can you describe the model, your first Harley that you bought?

The first one I had was a 1928 Harley, and... we - we were down in Mittagong and Rebel

- 18:30 motorcycle gang came in and they barged us, and then they passed us and then they pulled up, and I pulled up behind them for Jean and I to go and have some coffee at the coffee lounge, and I walked past and I looked at the bike, and one fellow there was on the ground, had his leg in plaster, he said, "What are you looking at pop, you wouldn't know what you're looking at would you?" I said you cheeky young possum, I was working on these things before you were born." And I said by the way, the
- 19:00 boss man came over and talking to me and he said, "What was your first bike then?" I said "1928" and he was most interested in that and when Jean came back walking past said to the boss, "When he gets better," I said, "tell him to come and see my wife, she'll teach him to ride a Harley and he won't break his leg again." And then we got in the car and the Rebels escorted us out of town. They all got in front, beside us and behind us with their horns going as we drove out of Mittagong, out of
- 19:30 town. And then later on down Sussex Inlet, I had a holiday unit down there, an old farm I'd bought and renovated, farm house on 25 acres and I rang her up from downtown the estate agents, he said, "Don't come downtown, we've got a bit of trouble on down here." I said, "What's the trouble?" He said, "Oh the Rebel motorcycle gang is in town, they're causing a bit of trouble up and down the street, they're on their bikes." I said, "Oh well, they don't worry me." Anyway I went downtown and
- 20:00 they saw me with the Rebel gang and that was quite amusing too.

Was there a bike kind of culture when you were growing up? When you were first...

No, it was very well organised, we had our various clubs, the Harley Davidson Club, and had our presidents, secretaries, and the ride captain,... road captain, and when we went on rides we -

- 20:30 we'd all organised the road captain would go ahead a lead, and then behind us we would all get in pairs behind, and we'd all keep a routine all the way through and it was a properly organised thing. We'd have our monthly meetings and what have you, but never any - no trouble - a real social club. There was the 'Yearal' Clubs and the Harley Clubs and the 'Boozer' Clubs and all that sort of thing, and they were all well organised.

Where did you tend

- 21:00 **to go on your weekend rallies?**

Oh, they'd pick out somewhere and ride down to Nowra or the beaches or somewhere down there, and have a barbecue picnic on the beach or somewhere like that. Or, ride to Wollongong, we had a hill climb down there and used to have events, hill climbing. And down at Wollongong, they had a 'flying quarter,' a straight stretch of good road

- 21:30 which they got police permission to hold flying quarters, fast flying quarter. That's when I did my first 100, across a flying quarter on my bike. I ended up, I bought an ex-police bike. Sergeant, crown sergeant some on a motorcycle squad, his Harley, we had been looking after his Harley, and he came and he gave me a tip he said, "It's got 40,000 on it" and he said, "It's going in for auction."
- 22:00 I said, "What are they expecting for it?" he told me the price and I said, "Is there any chance of me buying it direct before auction and he "Yes" so he put in word for me and I bought that bike. A beautiful bike, we had been servicing it and he used to do a bit of racing on it, and we hotted it up a bit, then he'd come down to the meet with us and we'd take the side car assembly off, and then he'd - he'd race the police bike against our bikes. And I bought that one, a beautiful, beautiful bike and
- 22:30 the side car, and Jean and I used that for years until I got a later model, but my first bike before that I had, was a '28 Harley, a springy-looking thing.

Jim, what can you tell me about your schooling?

Oh very rugged, I was a rebellious sort of child I suppose. Got me expelled

23:00 from one school.

That sounds like a story there?

Oh, not much too it, we were marching into the - in those days we used to assemble on the parade ground in our classes. They'd raise the flag and we'd sing, God Save the King, so we'd march to our class rooms, into our classes, marching along, and

23:30 someone in front had dropped his lunch and there was tomato sandwiches squashed all over the floor. This teacher said to me, "Okay Nelson, get down and wipe that up." "No!" I said, "I'm not wiping that up," he said, "I'm telling you to get down and wipe." I said, "I'm not!" So, I went into the classroom, and he went into the classroom, and he brings out this big cane and bend over and he gave me 6 cuts on the back [hits with the cane - corporal punishment]. It was pretty hard and pretty sore so I went and sat on the desk. You know,

24:00 I don't know whether they have it now, but the desks had hole with a little white ink-well, filled with ink, a little porcelain thing, I picked that up and threw it at him, and he got it all down the front of his white shirt. So before the headmaster, Frew, Mr Frew the headmaster, and he said, "It wasn't acceptable in that school." Next minute he was down at the family home with Dad, he said, "I don't think your son's suitable in our school. I think you're best to take him away to another school." So, although I left, I was virtually expelled,

24:30 and then I went back up to Lakemba school. From there I went to Bankstown Commercial. I didn't like the commercial work because I was mechanically minded, and I got transferred to Belmore Tech High, and I finished my school there, but because I got transferred I had to go back and start Year 1 again, I lost the year and I never got through to my leaving [final year at school], because I was a year behind everybody else,

25:00 but I left there with good mechanical skills. I always seemed to have been told by teachers like that because I'm a very docile, conservative sort of chap really. I've always seemed to be in some sort of trouble. Wonder I still have got the marks on my hands where I was always getting cuts of six?

If you can just talk me through now how you came

25:30 **to join the navy 'cause you had that early influence with your dad's mate?**

Yeah, Wally, Uncle Wally, but with him always talking about the navy tales and everything, I asked my parents if I could join the naval cadets at Rushcutters Bay, HMAS Rushcutters, [naval reserve depot] and they said, "No." So I went down to Rushcutters, and joined the navy cadets, and I got along well there. That was before my 18th birthday because

26:00 I was in the cadets. Up to 18 you're a cadet, and then war broke out on September the 5th, and I didn't turn - I'd just turned 18. And I slept on the veranda like this at home, we only had a two bedroom cottage which we rented, and in the middle of the night a bloke shaking me, he woke me up he said, "Are you Jimmy Nelson?" I said, "Yeah", he said, "Able Seaman Nelson of the Royal Naval Reserve?" I said, "Yes" he said, "Right, get up son, you're

26:30 in the navy now." He went and he knocked on the door, and Dad come out he said, "Mr Nelson?" he said, "Yes" he said, "I'm Chief Petty Officer Gilmour," he said, "I'm collecting all the reserves, war has been declared," on September the 3rd this was, "war has been declared and we are rounding up and mobilising all the reservists." So, I hopped in, put on my uniform, got my toothbrush, toothpaste and down to HMAS Rushcutters.

Was it a

27:00 **shock to you and your family?**

No, it was a shock to the parents they weren't very happy, but no, I expected it. I knew I was in the reserves, and I knew what I was in for, signed up for to go to war if necessary, so it didn't worry me. The funny thing was, that on the parade ground next day, I'm in uniform, in the reservist uniform, they're detailing all these blokes that are in civvies [civilian clothes] and that to get them in, and because I - I was

27:30 considered as a trained man they put me in charge of 4 fellows. These 4, "Able Seaman Nelson will look after you," and they put us in a pimeson and took us across to Clifton Gardens. Do you know it in Sydney? I forget the name of the Bay now,... but there's a hotel and it was called, Clifton Garden. Their oil well was up the top of the gardens, and engineer met us on the wharf and he said, "What's this?" and

28:00 the petty officer said, "This is Able Seamen Nelson with 4 seamen, to guard your oil well." So he wasn't very happy about that. He led us up to oil wells, and I put a guard on each corner of the oil system, and they all promptly laid down and went to sleep for the night and we guarded - guarded the oil wells with our eyes shut and in the morning we had no food, nothing at all, we didn't even have ammunition for our rifles that we had, and

28:30 the engineer's wife was quite a decent sort of a lady, and she cooked us a lot of breakfast, and we stayed there for about 3 or 4 days. I rang Rushcutters from a phone there, and they knew nothing of us. We weren't recorded or anything, we weren't even in the navy as far as they were concerned. So, I just

said to them go home and then later on when you're ready come back and report back to Rushcutter. I reported back to Rushcutter, and then I went on to car duty

- 29:00 there up on the Newington armaments depot up there. Big mounds of dirt with underground storage there for all the naval ammunition, and we were stationed, each one of us stationed at the entrance of this every night with rifle but no ammunition, and supposedly guarding the ammunition dump. And the officers used to come around of a night to try
- 29:30 and catch us asleep and what have you, but we were awake to them and we put our rifle upside down with a bayonet attached to it and put the bayonet under your chin and just lay there. There's no way you'd go to sleep like that because you'd go down and the bayonet and you'd jerk yourself up. Then we rigged some lines around on the outside with a tin can on them back to us, and the officers would sneak through the bush coming down, hit the trip wire, and rattled the cans, and we'd
- 30:00 come round and suddenly jump them, and file bayonet at them, and say, "Who goes - halt, who goes there?" and frighten the daylights out of them. As I said, I was rather a rebellious sort of fellow and we used to catch the officers at their own game that was fun. Then, another chap who became friendly, Bertie Dennis and I, we applied for sea duty we didn't like this, and then I got drafted from there, to Flinders naval depot for full
- 30:30 training. I did 9 months at Flinders, and a notice came on the noticeboard one day, 'anybody who could play a wind instrument to report to the band master.' I thought, "this is good, I can play a cornet, I played in the band, so this might be a nice job in the band." So I went down and I reported to the band master what did he do, he gave me bugle [brass wind instrument without valves, used for military calls and fanfares] and he said, "Blow into that," and I blew into that and he said, "Right, now you're the depot bugler. Here's the bugle - the bugle song
- 31:00 book, go over the other side of the drill hall and practice that, because you're on duty tonight as a bugler." Then I became the depot bugler.

What was your impression of the bugle as an instrument?

It's a beautiful instrument, got a lovely tone. When you hear the Last Post - lovely tone. Then, I was the depot bugler there for another few months and then, the Perth came in, hanging in the bay, and would you believe, they wanted a bugler, so I was draughted to the Perth as a

- 31:30 Perth bugler. So now I was seagoing able seaman bugler, and I went away on the Perth and did Sydney to Cape York patrols, and then round to West Australia, Fremantle to do Arafura sea, South China sea patrols, submarine patrols and that, because we had a lot of shipping being sunk on the coast that time. People didn't know of it but ships were being torpedoed just outside Sydney harbour.
- 32:00 There was 27 ships sunk of New South Wales by torpedo by Japanese torpedo - Japanese submarines during that period, and we kept busy chasing them. Then the Perth went overseas to the Med [Mediterranean]. So I went overseas with her then.

Can I just take you back a little bit to your initial training in the navy, what did that involve?

Quite a lot, everything. I did

- 32:30 seamanship naturally, ropes and knots and splices, navigation and general seamanship, flags, signalling. I got a 100% in signalling, Morse code [a communications system consisting of letters coded into dots and dashes and used in telegraphs] and flags, rifle drill, bayonet drill all that sort of thing, full - full training and gymnastics. We'd go down to the big drill hall which had about a 30 foot
- 33:00 ceiling and ropes hanging from a ceiling and we had to climb up the ropes and all that sort of thing. And there I got in trouble with a fella a Chief Petty Officer Saltmarsh, and he - he got on to me a bit. We went down to the swimming pool in our white ducks, which a virtually canvass, the white uniforms, and gum boots on and he put a rope around me, around my shoulders and he said "Jump into the swimming pool" I said "What with all
- 33:30 this on, I'll sink?" he said "That's the idea of it jump" so I said "I'm not going to" so he shoved me. The gums filled up and straight to the bottom and anchored to the bottom with these gum boots full of water and when I was just about at drowning point he was looking at his stopwatch and he pulled it up, and pulled up half drowned and he said to the class, "Now you can see what happens, so don't wear your gum boots on board, on deck in heavy seas or anything because if you fall overboard that's what happens to you and it's impossible to swim in that white duck once it gets wet."
- 34:00 So I had a go at him about that and then down the gymnasium he ordered me up this rope and form a crucifix which is an exercise where you wind your leg around a rope and put your hands out like that and put your head back and you hang there. And he left me hanging and my legs started to get tight and I called him and he didn't answer me. I called him again then I started to slide and I
- 34:30 got two beautiful rope burns and I started to slide down the rope. Anyway I went to the sickbay and the commander surgeon wanted to know how I got them and I told him and of course he got into a bit of trouble over that and from thereon in physical culture he used to punish me a bit and I back - back answered him during one session and he said, "Right, put your rifle above your head and double around

the parade

- 35:00 ground," the running track right around the parade ground. I run round - if you've ever held a 9 ½ pound rifle above your head and double round the track like that you know it's heavy - and got back to him, and said, "Reporting back chief," "oh," he said, "I didn't see you," he said, "Do it again, I'll watch you this time." So I went round again and I came back and I said, "You're a pig of a man," he said, "Don't talk to your senior officer like that," and I said, "Well, whoever you are,
- 35:30 you're still a pig of a man," so then he said, "Right, climb up the flagpole," so I had to climb up the top of the flagpole then, and during the PT [physical training] exercise he gave me some of the hardest vaulting over the horse and all that sort of thing you know, and on the rings he gave me a hell of a time, and then the Perth, came in and they wanted a bugler so I said to the Perth,... I thought at last I got away from Saltmarsh, but
- 36:00 what happened? Saltmarsh was drafted on the same draft as a PTI [physical training instructor] so I still had him, but he turned out to be a wonderful man and great friend. And he said to me, "Course I was hard on you down there," he said because he always used to say, "You'll never know when you'll need it lads," and many a time I did need it, the training he gave me. And he was a different man on board deck, but he used to set us some hard
- 36:30 exercises. He'd run around ship in top form, and climb up ladders and down through mess decks and up ladders again, and up the marsh rigging and down the marsh riggings, up the march rigging and then slide down the guide lines and all that sort of - the guide lines, and up and over gun turrets and what have you, and those of us who dropped behind had to report to him again at 4 o'clock for extra exercise to get condition up, but he turned out to be a great fella. Unfortunately he went
- 37:00 down with the ship when it was sunk. That was great training down there, I enjoyed that.

Any kind of training with ships, did that like, only occur like, on the job when you were posted to a ship?

No, no, you did your training in depots. Being

- 37:30 a reservist and being in the reserves for 18 months before the war, I was pretty well up with everything and in no time I got my able seaman's rank, I went for the exam and got the able seaman's rank, and I was posted to the Perth as an able seaman, and then we have seamanship classes on board the Perth too. All us young fellows would get together and the chief would instruct us in seamanship and train us in gunnery and what have you, on the big guns - the proper guns - not the dummy guns
- 38:00 we used to train on at the depot.

Was that a step up for you in terms of your training?

Yeah, I became a qualified gunner, 6-inch gunner, not 'gunna do it,' but a gunner, 'g.u. double n. e.r.' A qualified gunner, and in on action on the Perth, I had a station in one of the 6-inch gun turrets, wide turret down the back actually, and one action stations -

- 38:30 sound action stations and hop down into the turret but that was great fun.

That was great fun too, sound action stations you mean?

Yeah great fun to be in action in the Battle of Mattapan [Battle of Cape Mattapan, 28th March 1941, Mediterranean] and what have you. We were steaming along quite peacefully minding our own business not looking for trouble and we steamed straight into the Italian fleet. They come

- 39:00 across the horizon and we belted along straight into them. We turned and made a run for it because there was three battle ships, 8 cruisers and about 10 destroyers all out, the whole fleet was out on exercise and we run straight into them so they started firing shots at us so put a signal back to the navy headquarters at Alexandria to Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham [commander-in-chief of the Mediterranean fleet] that we were
- 39:30 engaging with the Italian fleet could he come and help us. And he brought our eastern Mediterranean fleet out, and he kept on signalling, "keep on - get them to follow you, and trace them because you're bringing them closer to us and we're coming closer to you." So we had to keep on turning around and go back, cheeky little 6-inch gun against 8-inch battle ships, stream up within range, fire a few shots at them, they'd fire back at us and then get the hell out of it heading
- 40:00 back towards Alexandria. All the time they kept on following us, trying to get us, but they didn't get us. Then,... our fleet come across the horizon that was just off the Cape Mattapan at the bottom of Greece, and Cunningham sent a signal, "all ships not actually in engagement please retire because I intend to sink
- 40:30 every ship that crosses my gun sights," so we did about turn, and got the hell out of it. And he just steamed to the fleet, and he sunk half of them that day. That was the Battle of Cape Mattapan.

Great we might just stop there the tapes about to end.

Tape 2

00:34 **Jim, I'm interested in your very first experience on HMAS Perth, can you tell me about walking down to the gangway with your kitbag [knapsack] and sort of walk me through that very first experience?**

Oh a great thrill, imagine a young fella just turned 18 or nearly 19 by this stage, 18 ½ to get out and to climb up the gangway and walk onto a real live battleship, thrilling. You looked around,

01:00 you'd come up off the gangplank and look around in the middle of the ship and you'd see these big turrets and guns and things – a thrill of a lifetime. But when she headed out of Western Port Bay, do you know Western Port in Melbourne? Well you've got Port Phillip with Melbourne on it and the entrance there and the next one up there's a bay, and it enters into a big bay, a port really and that's the western port of Melbourne, and it's called Western Port. And the navy depot's on, in

01:30 that port and the Perth anchored in there and went out - but when we took off and left there, nobody had ever told us about the 'mal de mer' thing [seasickness] and even if I had been able to speak French, I wouldn't have known what they meant but as soon as we got out of Western Port Bay into Bass Strait, we were headed into the most horrendous storm you could ever hit. And the Perth did everything a cruiser should never do. She acted like a destroyer, she pigrooted, pitched and tossed and rolled, gunners were washed from side to side

02:00 and Bertie Dennis and I got horribly seasick and she headed down Bass Strait, and Bass Strait believe you me can be very rough particularly between Tasmania and Melbourne where the currents all come to a head and get all what they call a, 'confused sea.' Not so much 'mountain,' waves which can go up and down, but, 'confused' makes you yore and pitch and toss and pigroot. Stern come up, bow down,... the stern come out of the water and

02:30 then down, oh... That was alright we got to Wilson Prom [Wilson's Promontory] then, and come up to Sydney but gee we were sick.

So that was really your first experience of the ocean?

Yeah. Yes.

You'd learnt a bunch of stuff around the navy that was your basic training but that was your first trial by fire of the sea?

Yeah. Trial by fire is right.

Can you describe for me what seasickness is like?

No. Well try this, you think of

03:00 seasickness and then imagine what it could be like, what you think it could be like then double that and think harder than that, that's what it really is like, something you can't imagine. Your imagination won't go that far. All I wanted to do was pull the plug out the ship and sink the ship. That's a terrible feeling.

And how could they treat seasickness?

They can't really. Oh well actually there's a hard, 'do and die' method with my sailsmen –

03:30 when I got my own ship – with my sailsmen, I get them to scrub the decks with a holey stone and a bucket beside them, scrubbing decks and they're on their hands and knees scrubbing. Of course you're vomiting all the time and you put the bucket beside them with water in it get the job scrubbing and they get that sense of well being that they've got a bucket beside them and they seem to get better but we've had some – I've had some funny cases of seasickness. One case on the Perth,

04:00 one fellow got so seasick it became a proper illness with him, he had to be airlifted off the Perth, sent ashore, and discharged he got near death, he was very sick, it can get that bad.

So what did they do with you when you fell seasick on your first trip out of Melbourne? Were you sent to your hammock or what...?

No, no you just go up on deck and hang out over

04:30 the side and stay there, you can't do anything else. Some of the other sailors would come up and they'd say, "Hey, breakfast is being served, there's pork chops and eggs on, do you want any or can I have yours?" And of course you hang over further over the side then. No you just get – you go green, greenish colour and your stomach just revolts and you just get continuous vomiting.

So did you wonder at that point,

05:00 **if you done the right - made the right decision in joining the navy?**

No.

Did you question what you'd done?

You're too sick to think about anything like that all you want to do is go down below and punch a hole in the ship so the darn thing'll sink. But no, I didn't think anything like that. I was just sick, and after that first time from thereon it doesn't seem to worry you. You seem to get immune to it. I never got sick after that.

And did you mention your mate Bernie was with you on board?

05:30 My mate... Bertie - Bertie Dennis - yeah we both got to a draft to the Perth, when we applied for seagoing duty.

So you'd gone to Flinders together, and you both got sent to...

We'd been through Flinders together, did our training and become firm friends and then...

What was his speciality? What area did he work in?

He was still seaman, able seaman, the same as me, special seaman, but I took on - I

06:00 went on the gunnery. After he'd been on the Perth for a while, and sleeping on the steel deck, up top on the steel deck, he developed kidney trouble, and they took a kidney out and discharged him. Poor old Bertie he was a good bloke.

Were you able to stay in contact with Bertie once he left?

After the war, I

06:30 did yes, he had 5 children. He married a nurse, a nursing sister, which was funny. We were both sent on guard duties at the Newington armament depot, and across the road from us was a big wire-chain fence and a hospital, and some girls were there, so Bertie and I went across and we were chatting-up the girls through the fence, and the matron come along

07:00 and told us to clear off, and it turned out it was the girls - the Women's Venereal Disease Detention Centre and we promptly chuffed off from there, but he got the sister's name and then naturally invited her out and they got going together and he married her and ended up having 5 children with her. He lived at Newcastle. Then the next time I met him he was in

07:30 Concord hospital. I was sent to Concord hospital with this back trouble I've got, and I met him there, and he died then from kidney failure - Bertie Dennis.

Jim, I'd like to go back to that first morning when you boarded the Perth for the first time. Where were you assigned to? What part of the ship were you sent to, and what did you do?

Forecastle, the ship's divided into what they call divisions, that's divided,

08:00 divisions naturally, there's a forecastle division, main top division which is the centre part, quarter deck division, what's the other one, forecastle, main top, quarter deck and there's some other division,... miscellaneous division, that's for cooks and riders and stokers all go into and I was put in the forecastle division, which meant I worked on the forecastle and the cable parties and the anchor parties and all that sort of thing and

08:30 by working who is on board the ship all along the forecastle, maintaining the forecastle. But then my bugling duties were such that I was then stationed on the bridge [upper deck from where the ship is steered and the captain stands] at sea, and then in harbour I was stationed on the quarter deck in the quarter master's party. I worked in a quarter deck and when the captain or the senior officers approached, the quarter master would give the sign two pips a lieutenant, or four pips or

09:00 big broadband an admiral coming, and so you'd sound off the admiral's welcome call, and his pinnacle come alongside and salute the admiral aboard, and I was on the quarter on those periods, and at sea I was on the bridge. Up there with the captain on the bridge, that's how I was able to keep a diary of what happened.

Did you, was there a bugler that was your mentor when you went on board

09:30 **or did you just have to pick it up as you went along?**

No, no, there was a fellow Elmo Gee who became a firm friend and his daughter now. He died - when the Perth went down he was rescued by Japanese and went to the what's that horrible road? - the Burma Road camps, came back a wreck of a man through beltings and bashings. He came back blind, and 'beri beri' [tropical disease] or something, and

10:00 very weak, and he died after that, but his daughter found my name amongst his bags and then she rang me, and been firm friends every since with her, and she's a great author. And, when back again here in Melbourne, she became the launching lady for the new Perth, [second HMAS Perth, commissioned into the Royal Australian Navy in 1965] and she launched the Perth, and

10:30 she's the launching lady and the patron of the Perth. We met all our old mates down there then.

So, other than I guess, dealing with seasickness what was the most difficult thing to adapt to with life at sea?

Nothing really, I adapted it quite well, I liked it, I loved it, I loved the ship, we were all very proud and loyal of our ships and we're in the Perth

- 11:00 Cap Tally [ribbons which decorated a sailor's cap] and I loved the work on board. The hardest things of course if anything, is like working anywhere else, your boss. If you happen to get a chief petty officer who is a sadistic sort of bloke, he can make life hard for you on board ship, but I forget who I had now, but the petty officer we had in the forecandle division, was a very nice sort of a fellow, and treated us well, and
- 11:30 he was good to work for. Life on board is very exciting, you've got various drills to do. Abandon ship and fire parties, and action stations, and anti-aircraft stations, anti-submarine stations, all those sort of drills to do and you'd constantly be scrubbing decks up on the forecandle, and the... anti-aircraft would go off, Morse code, 'A de dah de dah de dah,' for aircraft, so
- 12:00 you'd drop what you were doing, and run to your action station for aircraft, be it a gun, or wherever you might be, and you always had drills and things to do. Then abandon ship drills got very realistic. You'd be at sea, "For exercise only, for exercise only," would come over the PA system, [public address system]. "Abandon for exercise only. All personnel over the side." And you'd be at sea, no matter where you were, you'd all have
- 12:30 to dive over the side and abandon ship, and then swim back to the ship and then be picked up again.

You actually leapt over the side during exercises?

Yeah to simulate action, abandon ship, yeah.

Wow!

Actually, I've swum in the centre of nearly every ocean, the Arafura sea, the South China sea, the Timor sea. When I was on my own craft, we used to pull up 5 o'clock every night on the Fairmiles [motor launch - small fighting ship], which were similar to these patrol boats.

- 13:00 And we pull up, they had no washing facilities on board, they were too small to carry showers or bathrooms or anything, so every night at 5 o'clock the skipper [ship's captain] would shut-down motors and all over the side, and swim alongside the drifting boat and take our salt water soap and wash over the side. Sharks and all it never worried us, but that was good.

So you were part of the forecandle division which meant

- 13:30 **that you were responsible for dropping anchor and pulling up anchor...**

All that sort of work.

What else, what other sort of duties were part of the forecandle duties?

Oh, rust proofing, chipping all the steel work and root leading it, and painting it with steel grey, battleship grey - anchor cables, checking the anchor cables and the anchor, and generally maintenance of the front end in the front yard. General maintenance, that's all. And then,

- 14:00 entering harbour, "The forecandle party standby," and the forecandle party will all standby to lay anchor, and then at the skipper's command, our officer would give us the order to undo the shackles so they could mechanically drop the anchor from electric motors. That was mainly our duties, and then the rest of it was keeping it rust free. You know chipping
- 14:30 root leading, with chipping hammers and chipping all the rust off, and polishing it, and root leading it, and painting it with battleship grey.

And was your mess in the forecandle as well?

Yeah.

On what level?

First deck, down in the pointy end of the ship, the bow, the first mess deck was mess deck P1 - P2 and P5 only held about 6 of us

- 15:00 owing to the contour of the ship. P1 only had two in it because it was only little too, the next one was a bit wider. Well, P5 I was in, was port side number 5 table, and that's where we would have all our meals and also I slung my hammock there in that section.

You'd actually hang it over the tables where you'd eat?

Yeah, you'd climb up the

- 15:30 tables to get into your hammock which was quite funny at times at sea with the ship rolling and the

hammocks swaying and everything going and you'd go to dive up and you'd dive up one side and you'd fall over, the hammock would swing, and it would drop you down on the other side.

Is the hammock a nice way to sleep?

Yeah, wonderful sleep in the hammocks. They've got what you call the clues you know, all the strings that go down the front of them. If you adjust them properly and get the right contours, you can have a comfortable sleep in the hammock. Get in

- 16:00 and they close around you like a cocoon and you wrap a blanket around you and as soon as your weight gets in it pulls the hammock together and it closes around you like a cocoon and keeps you warm. Not so good in the tropics but in the winter in the southern oceans it's good.

And you were, in your mess deck there were also other able seamen, and seamen?

Yeah, able seamen and ordinary seamen. I forget how many were in our table, I think we had about 6 or 7

- 16:30 at our table, P5. And then you'd elect a cook, what they call a cook of the mess. One of them, you'd take a week about turn as cook of the mess. And that... obligated you to pick up what they called a fanny, a big, four gallon bucket I suppose you'd call it stainless steel bucket,

- 17:00 and as cook of the mess, you would be responsible to go up to the galley to get this filled with whatever the meal was, and bring it back and serve it and wash the plates up, and things, and stow them in our locker and scrub the table down, and keep it nice and white, and you'd all take a turn about a week each as cook of the mess, to be responsible to get the meals, and what have you. You'd go to the galley and present yourself, 'P5,' they'd fill

- 17:30 it up with whatever goo they were giving you, supposed to be food.

Was the food worse than Flinders.

No, Flinders they had proper - proper galleys, proper kitchens and chefs, and the food there was quite good. But the stuff on board well, it wasn't bad, it didn't do me any harm, I didn't loose any weight.

And did the group of you all in P5 together form a

- 18:00 **special bond or were you quite close to the people who you lived with in P5?**

No, really, I don't remember any of them. No, as I say, Bertie Dennis came on board with me, he was in another part of the ship, and he and I used to stay - stick together pretty closely you know. We'd sit up on deck and talk, and go ashore together, and what have you. In Brisbane,

- 18:30 Melbourne, and Perth, it was always Bertie Dennis and I. Until I got in with the quiet four. Can you see that photograph over there? There's four sailors, oh it's behind the screen. There's four, four of us - a photo taken in Alexandria in Egypt, and we never looked for trouble but we always seemed to get into it. And we got into a fight, we went into the Arab

- 19:00 quarter where - which was out-of-bounds, we weren't supposed to go there, and then we got into a fight with some Arabs, and it started to get serious, and they pulled knives out and come at us with knives, but this four, we were pretty well trained in unarmed combat and fighting, we were all good fighters, brawls we were not fighters, and we were having a great old time with about a dozen natives - a John Wayne [American actor, starred in Westerns] sort of affair you know.

- 19:30 The Egyptian police came round and broke us all up, put us in the 'gowrie', horse drawn chariot, and took us back and put us in the detention dock which we didn't agree to, and Jacky said, "I'm out of here" and he said, "Are you ready?" I said, "Yeah," so he said, "Right let's go overside and

- 20:00 break for the door." It was like a boxing room. We were in there with all these Egyptian prostitutes and Egyptian thieves and beggars and sticking lot, and the place smelt like urine and got on our nose what, and Jacky said, "I'm out of here, let's go." So we're over the side and we rush for the door and I was the last man and they got through the door and just as I got there the sergeant in charge there had a

- 20:30 rifle, and chopped me under the chin there, and I've still got a scar under there where he broke my chin open. That was the end of me, and, Jacky and the boys got away, and the Egyptian police their mobile patrol gowrie came around, and picked us up again, and took us back to the ship and said to the quarter master on deck, "These bods of yours - take them, we don't want them on shore again." So we went on board the ship

- 21:00 and that's when we were put on charge what they call, 'commander's report.' It fronts up in the morning, the commander sets up a table on the quarter deck, the fellers line up, and the sergeant - sergeant at arms, "Able seamen step forward,... Able Seaman Nelson step forward in front of the commander," and he said, "Off caps," so you take your cap off and the commander

- 21:30 asks the sergeant at arms to read out the charge, and he read the charge out, "Brawling and fighting ashore, disrespect of laying of the ship, and not only, conduct unbecoming in naval waiting," and what have you, so the four of us - he said, "These four are all on the same charge sir," so they brought the

four of us all up to the table at the same time, and then he worked out his punishment

22:00 and he said to the marshal at arms, "What is their conduct like on board?" He said, "They're very quiet sir," he said, "We call then the quiet four." He said, "They're never ever any trouble on board ship." "But," he said, "Apparently they get into trouble ashore." So the Commander said, "Alright, I'll give you 14 days stoppage leave and see you keep up your name from now on as the quiet four." And from thereon we were named the quiet four.

22:30 We were, until we got to a pub ashore, a taverna ashore, or somewhere where we could have a brawl, but our main people we'd brawl were French naval men. If we went to a taverna in Greece, there was a French ship and they came into our section, and we didn't want them, we'd tell them to, "Get out," and of course a fight would start. A real John

23:00 brawl - John Wayne bar brawl scene. Smashed tables and chairs and what have you, and a good punch-up, and then we'd all end up having a drink with each other.

So was fighting a strong part of the culture, the naval culture?

Yeah, you had to learn to fight.

Did you do that as part of your initial training?

Yeah, we did boxing in the gymnasium, yeah. I wasn't too bad, I was a brawler - brawler, not a boxer. I was a

23:30 brawler.

Was that from growing, up you learnt to be a brawler?

Yeah, yeah, growing up at school. Fights at school and brawls and things and locally with local gangs. Particularly through the Depression there was local gangs around and if they came to your territory your gang would challenge them, then a brawl would be on you know.

It sounds like you actually enjoyed the brawling?

Yeah I did. I enjoyed fighting.

Why, did you like...

Oh the thrill of it. The adrenalin

24:00 rush you'd get and a lot of good fun. I enjoyed it. Jacky Cox, one of the four of us in that photo, he went down in the Perth and was killed. He had done a bit of boxing, he was trained in boxing, he was pretty good. But boxing is not good to you in a street brawl, you've got to be a brawler. To stand back, Queensbury rules [the rules that apply in a fair stand-up boxing match - no wrestling, hugging etc] they don't follow in a street brawl like, they kick and pull hair and

24:30 scratch - do everything. That was more my fault, I worked, Jack could stand off and follow Marcus, Marcus' Queensbury Rules, that was not for my style, but we managed to get by and we looked after each other pretty well in the fights we got into.

Was drinking also a strong part of the naval culture at that time?

Yeah, yeah, very strong part.

25:00 Yes, you'd go - you'd go ashore in Sydney, you'd do a pub crawl, you'd start at the Quay [Circular Quay] at the 'Ship Arms' and work your way up town up Pitt Street or George Street and have a drink in every pub and then come back down the other side and then have a drink at the bottom one, at the bottom end of George Street that was - the first one was the 'Ship Inn,' on the Quay and the last one coming back was -

25:30 what was that - the last - the 'First and Last' they called. Down at the bottom end of George Street where the Overseas Terminal [Overseas Passenger Terminal is where some of the large ships berth during their stay in Sydney, situated in the Rocks] is, there's a pub there on the Rocks, there was the 'First and Last' and we'd end up there and go back on board merrily full.

Were there beer rations on board?

No, no dry ships [alcohol-free ships] no beer was allowed on board, no. But, and

26:00 particularly at sea, even the officers at sea weren't allowed to drink and their ward room was closed, the bar was closed at sea. No, you weren't allowed beer on board.

What about smoking, was there a smoking ration?

No, no, you could buy custom free cigarettes. You get a back of '50 Craven A,' 50 in a Craven A Tin, and buy a packet of those for 2 and 6 pence, but they were

26:30 customs free. Customs and duty free to the navy, and they'd sell them straight out from our canteen at

the customs prices. But I never smoked, I never smoked in my life. I used to buy them and take them home for Dad. I was home or away in Perth I'd parcel them up, parcel the tins up, or get the parcels of tobacco and post them back to Dad from Perth or Brisbane wherever I was. But I never smoked,

27:00 thankfully, it's a wonder I didn't get into it in the navy.

So what would you do for recreation on board if you weren't working what did you spend your time doing?

Studying, me I took to studying and I advanced right through the ranks from able seamen to leading seaman to petty officer pretty quickly. Then I did my coxswain's course, petty officer coxswain, which is a high rating. I did my gunnery, 6-inch gunnery courses. We

27:30 had both a school master and two chaplains on board. A catholic chaplain and a protestant chaplain on board. There used to be prayer meetings down in the... oh... what was there - there was a room down below, a recreation room, and they used to hold prayer meetings. I used to go to them because I... I...

28:00 participating member of the Salvation Army when war broke out. I was playing in the Salvation Army band, and of course when war broke out I went to sea I still followed my religion in the Salvation Army, and I used to go to their prayer meetings. Then we had on board, deck hockey, and deck quoits, and played deck up and down, what they called the well deck - the sides of the ship where all the main

28:30 super structures played deck hockey up and down there. Get a soul recharge, and over the side into the drink. And deck hockey, and chess, and backgammon. We used to - and PT, physical training, and we had shooting teams, and we used to go ashore and have shoots

29:00 at the rifle ranges against other ships and what have you and...

Were you trained in small arms fire?

Yeah, I did a full training small arms course yeah, stick fighting, what have you, I done all that. I don't know how I'd go now, but I think if I got into trouble now I could handle myself even though I'm aged and infirm. Stick fighting is very good. Didn't do much in martial arts, I did a little

29:30 bit but mainly I concentrated on boxing and weight lifting and all that sort of thing, physical training.

Would there be fights on board as competition fights?

Contests, not fights, but contests - yeah. They put a - established a ring up on the quarter deck, and we'd go up there in our divisions.

30:00 I thought I was pretty good and I went into the boxing team and there was 70 of us in the boxing team and we went ashore at Alexandria in Egypt to have a contest against the local Egyptian police team and I didn't do too badly in that, but then in the Med [Mediterranean], we used to have inter-ship contests and

30:30 big aircraft carrier, what was the name of the damn thing, and the Eastern fleet would challenge the Western fleet, we'd pull up would you believe, in the centre of the Mediterranean wartime, with Harliestone on decks, with Stukas [Junkers Stuka Ju-87 dive bomber] above dropping bombs, and the whole - stop the fleet in the middle of the sea to have a boxing contest. And we had a team of 70, and I

31:00 went across on that. I went as a 'four-rounder featherweight.' I come up against this big marine, and boy did he give me a lesson, biff bang bing bow out - that was it, they carried me out. I found out I wasn't so good. I might've been alright street brawling but not boxing. This big marine, he came at me like a hurricane.

It sounds like there were a lot activities to keep you busy, was boredom ever a

31:30 **problem for you?**

No never. If you got bored on board ship it was your own fault. I never got bored because I studied and I kept in with Saltmarsh the PTI, and did PT and all that sort of thing.

Was there a culture on board of helping people to study to move through the ranks?

Yeah we had...

Was that something that was supported?

... we had a school master. I passed my what do you call it?...

32:00 HSC something, exam on board. I didn't do it at school, and before I become a petty officer I had to have an HSC grading. H - yes that's right H - Higher School Certificate isn't it. And I attended the classes there, and studied on board, and passed for that, and then I went for my petty officer's exam which I passed, and I was only 19 when

32:30 I become a petty officer and I stuck to my studies and that was quite good.

Did you remain on the forecastle duties as you advanced in your instruction?

No, I remained on forecastle duties. I passed, but I was never activated as a petty officer or leading seamen on board, it was only when I transferred to another ship I was transferred to petty officer. That was when I went to the Fairmiles as coxswain of the Fairmiles,

33:00 and I had my petty officer's rank then as coxswain. I'd done my coxswain exams and tests and I passed that fair enough. But, I went to my first Fairmile ML [Motor Launch] 813 as coxswain, and that's the man in the middle, the football, the officers there, the coxswain there, and the crew there. The crew got a gripe they kick the

33:30 coxswain, the officers got a gripe, they kick the coxswain - you take it both ways. But, I had good times on the ML as coxswain. 811, 813 and 815 - 814, I was on three of them at different times. And... that was a good life.

I'll bring you back to Perth mate, when - how did you juggle your duties between

34:00 **your responsibilities on the forecastle, your responsibilities as the bugler...?**

I had certain calls throughout the day at certain days, and the quarter master, if he wanted to "ssssshhhhh" he'd have a public address system and he'd send the bugler system over, and I just rush down to the quarter deck, pick up the bugle, a senior officer's come aboard, to sound him on board, or captain leaving, sound him off, and on again, and all that sort of thing. But that was the officer of the

34:30 watch's responsibility to call me from where - they just couldn't have me standing around, that was the navy way of doing it. They couldn't have anybody standing around idle, put a chip some red lead off somewhere. But no, I used to work on the forecastle doing my normal seamanship duties, and then the bugle piping would come over the public address system and I'd just double down and pick up the bugle and make the call.

Did you also have to learn the ship's pipe?

Yeah,

35:00 I've still got mine in there somewhere. Yeah.

Was that what was used for most of the internal ship pipes?

Pipes are still used on board, yeah. Not so much now on these new ships with all these electronic devices, but when a senior officer's coming on board, or the captain's come back, you still pipe the captain on and off, or a senior officer visiting.

So, what were the circumstances under which you'd use your bugle as opposed

35:30 **to the pipe?**

Well, a captain of senior rank was coming aboard as his barge would approach the coxswain of the barge, would put up his hand and signal a two-ringer or a four-ringer, or broad band an admiral or vice admiral or somewhere, then you'd give your appropriate call as the barge pulled alongside and he came up the gangway. And again as he was leaving.

And when you were at sea and calling action stations and that sort of thing would that be done on the pipe?

No,

36:00 on the bugle. You just pushed - clipped down the action on the loud hail [loud speaker] on the quarter deck, and sound, 'action stations,' over the loud hailer system, or whatever they had. The sound, 'start of watch,' or, 'end of watch,' or something like that. Then, burials at sea, play the Last - First and Last Post. They were hard events, but I had quite a few of them over a period of time. We had

36:30 6 or 8 killed when we were hit by a bomb and we had to bury them at sea. They just put them on a plank and you sound the Last Post, and they tip the plank up and slide them over with weights in the bottom of the canvass bags you sew them up in. Yeah, 'stand easy,' and, 'liberty men' - 'liberty men

37:00 to dress,' and all that sort of thing you'd sound, and they'd knock off work, and then go and get washed and dressed up, and pipe, 'liberty men' - the sound, 'liberty men ashore,' and then they'd come and muster on the gangplank and be inspected by the officer and then allowed to board the pimeson and go ashore. Fingernails and all they'd check, turn round and check the backs of shoes were clean. Always reckon you didn't have to clean the front of your shoes you always have to clean the back, look behind you.

37:30 Then fingernails, hands out fingernails cut and clean but...

What circumstances would have you on the bridge with the captain?

At action stations.

That was after your...

You sound, 'action stations' and my action station was, for a while I was in the gunnery in "Y" turret [gun enclosure] down aft [at or toward the stern or tail of ship], there's 4 turrets as you know on a ship and

38:00 "I and B" turret forward, and "X and Y" turret, aft, and I was in "Y" turret - the bottom one aft, after I did my gunnery course, but they had more need for me as a bugler up on top, and during the action station which we had plenty, there's another midshipman and myself, we were given note book and pen and pencil and we had to keep notes of all the action like, "Ship Juno next door hit by 6 bombs,"...top watch time,...time

38:30 it was hit and then sunk 5 minutes later, or 1 minute later, and we entered all this into our notebooks and then of a night time the sub [sub-lieutenant] and I would get together and compare out notes, and then he'd write up the war diary. And that was it, entered then into the war diary and also in my diary.

That must have been a much coveted job, I imagine it was a really a great job to have on board?

Yeah, everybody was happy with their jobs except one

39:00 stoker [labourer who tends fires/furnaces] down below was unhappy being down below and hearing the bombs drop alongside and thunder against the hull, [frame or body of a ship] and he put in a request to be given an, 'action station job' up on deck during actions, and so they gave him a job and trained him to be an ammunition loader, get the ammunition out of the allotment, and help load the gun - the anti-aircraft gun, and after the first air-raid, he was taken below again, he couldn't stomach it. Sam

39:30 was funny.

In the early days you must've had quite a distance to cover from the forecastle to the wide gun at the back, when, 'action stations' are called?

Yeah, it didn't take long to scuttle, scuttle your way down there but... they weren't always at work when, 'action stations' were sound. Usually the sea post, like we had lookouts on the bridge and the helmsman, I was a

40:00 helmsman actually in the wheel house. All buglers were helmsman. We were trained in helmsmanship and we were in the wheel house so if you wanted - on the bridge, it was just a matter to duck up the ladder, onto the bridge, and I was a helmsman in, 'action station.'

Does that mean you're actually controlling the ship, you're turning wheel to steer the ship?

Yeah, yeah, the ship under telegraphs, and then when,

40:30 'action stations' were sounded, there was 4 of us in the wheelhouse, and if I was up on the bridge, they'd call down the voice pipe, "Bugler report to the bridge." I'd report to the bridge, and the spare hand would take over my position in the wheelhouse.

Tape 3

00:33 **So Jim, if you could just talk me through when you sailed for the Mediterranean and what happened from then on?**

Well, when we left for the Mediterranean, we arrived back home at Fremantle, or 'Free Mantle' as they like it to be called, and it was August the 6th, I had my 20th birthday I think it was, on August the 6th

01:00 at Fremantle, and Uncle Wally had put his age back and rejoined the navy, and his ship came in too HMAS Bathurst, and Wally saw the Perth, in and so he came across and contacted me, then we both went out for my birthday, and had a few drinks together - with Uncle Wal. And he then left and we cruised home to

01:30 Sydney, and we were all given 28 days leave. And actually my mother, father and two sisters and aunties and uncles were all waiting on the wharf to welcome the hero back who had won - won the war on his own, and,... but Jean wasn't there, she had a dental appointment she had to keep that morning,

02:00 but later on I caught up with her and went home with her and then we just took up normal relationships again as a boy and girl going out together and what have you, whenever my ship was in port, and as I said, I proposed to her then and said, "What do you want to do, do you want to have 28 days leave and we go out and go around and go to places and what have you, or would you rather get

02:30 married?" she said, "I'd rather get married." So we officially made arrangements to get married, which we did, and we were married in the... catholic church at Lewisham oh... the Priest's name, just Father somebody, just slipped off my tongue then, we were married, and being wartime, there was no

- 03:00 holiday resorts or anything open, and we got a train down to Wollongong, and we had a couple days honeymoon in a hotel at Wollongong, and then came back and resumed normal life – pictures and what have you, and back on board ship, and on and off whenever I could. And eventually we got married... I'm starting to stagger a bit now, trying to put things in
- 03:30 perspective... oh the Perth sailed away, I was drafted off the Perth, then onto Rushcutters Naval Depot, HMAS Rushcutter, to do a special coxswain's course, oh and Fairmiles were coming out then, a new patrol ship like the patrol boats you've got now from Darwin, and they wanted experienced seaman and that, and of course I was an experienced petty officer
- 04:00 and my name came up for selection, and I started training crews for the Fairmiles, and then commissioned the first Fairmile, ML813, and train as crews, and then kept on training crews for the rest of the Fairmiles, as they were built. And then went on patrol on 813, up and down the coast anti-submarine
- 04:30 surveillance patrols from Wilsons Promontary, up to Cape York, and stationed down at Eden for quite a while, working out of Eden down to Wilsons Promontary, anti-submarine patrols, and escorting convoys through to Sydney, to and from, from Sydney to Melbourne, Melbourne to Sydney. And then the 813 was sent to Darwin,
- 05:00 so we sailed her up round Cape York across the Torres Strait to Darwin, and we did patrols on her, up to Timor and the Honiaras [Solomon Islands] – not the Honiaras, sorry Halmaheras Islands once again on surveillance, 'seek and destroy' missions, and keeping tabs on the Japanese boomers [missile submarines] between the Islands up there,
- 05:30 and shadowing Jap patrols and what have you, and then... when the Perth came back, on the way back, there was a signal on the noticeboard experienced seaman wanted for, "Covert and dangerous missions, must be good qualified in seamanship," so me, being a nice peaceful home loving
- 06:00 boy, I thought this sounds nice and peaceful, and I put in for that, and then I was on ML811 in Brisbane when the signal came for me to go to Darwin, and I had a special transit pass and flew to Darwin, and joined what was called the MFV2046
- 06:30 motor fishing vessel 2046, was its cover name which was a Z Special Unit boat [crew made up of highly trained members of the armed forces, who took part in top secret missions] in... operations to Timor and Borneo. I was now a member of the Z Special Unit, which was an operative, worked behind enemy lines and dropped people off, and picked them up, and
- 07:00 put parading parties ashore at Timor, and sneaking into Japanese harbours and do all sorts of funny things and get out again. You'll remember the HMAS Krait, I'm sure, on the Singapore Road, because the Krait got a lot of publicity here in blowing up a few boats at Singapore. She was a Z Special boat also. And I served with that for quite a while, and
- 07:30 I was transferred to MFV2046 as coxswain, and then served on her, and then brought back to Sydney to serve on GPV's which are general purpose vessels, they don't have a name. GPV956?... I'm saying GPV965 I think it was,
- 08:00 from memory. A general purpose vessel is like a small cargo ship transporting stores and things backwards and forwards for the navy, and I worked on her then and was actually on board her when war – the cessation of war was announced, and had a party on board, and
- 08:30 being an English ship a RN [Royal navy] vessel, HMS [His Majesty's Ship], we had rum on board, so we got a cask of rum out of the store room and rum all round, and copious amounts to the crew resulting in getting a little bit icky ticky, bluh bluh bluh, and the skipper came back on board and he'd had a few beers too, and he joined in the fun with us, and the crew decided he need a
- 09:00 swim so we grabbed and chucked him over the side for a swim and that was quite good, but being stationed in Brisbane at that time, by this time Jean and I had a little son, Kenneth, as a babe in arms, and I got a flat up in Brisbane at the waterfront, and Jean came up and stayed in the flat in Brisbane and came down to the ship
- 09:30 everyday. While what is now the South Bank section at Brisbane, the wharf, there is the wharf that we used to moor [berth or dock the boat] at, and our job then was to go down out Moreton Bay, and escort ships, cargo ships, pilot them in through Moreton Bay through the channel up to Brisbane. So she and Ken stayed up there.
- 10:00 **Can I just take you back to the time in Sydney when you were looking out for the submarines, that period of time?**

Yeah.

Can you describe in more detail what your everyday sort of routine was, what a patrol involved?

Well, in Sydney at that time, the Fairmiles were coming into operation, but the harbour defence was reliant on what

- 10:30 was first known as the NAP, Naval Auxiliary Patrol, where men who had yachts and boats of their own and volunteered them for use for service, or they were requisitioned and they were given a naval rank, officers rank or lieutenant or something or other sub-lieutenant, and they did the harbour patrols, but when things started to get a bit serious, they put naval ranks on board and I went as coxswain
- 11:00 with a sub-lieutenant Tubby Anderson on board HMAS Lolita [channel patrol boat], and we used to go and patrol the submarine net, patrol the harbour for submarines and what have you, then one night we got a call there was something suspicious in the net and that was vibrating so we went across to have a look, and there's this midget sub [midget submarine] caught in the net. Japanese midget sub. So we
- 11:30 made a - Tubby being a yachtsman, not a naval man really, but a yachtsman with a naval rank, didn't know what to do, he said, "What do you reckon we should do Jim?" I said, "Well I reckon we should back up and drop a depth charge under it and get the hell out of it before it goes off." So we backed up, the bow was up out of the water through the net and had its stern going trying to pull itself out of the net and we backed back up underneath the stern and dropped the depth charge and then got the hell out, but the depth charge
- 12:00 didn't go off because of the shallow water they need at least 50 foot of water before enough pressure gets enough in the water to fire the plunger to fire the detonator to fire the depth charge, 500 pound depth charge. So we made three runs like that, we dropped three depth charges after it - under it as we - as we came astern to it because the depth charges were on the stern, roll them over the stern. We could see the periscope
- 12:30 angling on us as we were coming in. On the third run when we came in, when we were right underneath him, he blew himself up, self-destructed, and we nearly went with him. We were blown over in the water and heeled over and cover with debris and everything and we got out of it. That was a submarine raid on Sydney harbour. Three subs got in, two were caught, and they third one was never found, didn't know whether it got out or not.
- 13:00 There was what was called the 'boom net' across the harbour, with two gates on it. On each channel on the west channel, were two gates to allow the Manly ferries and that to come in and out, cargo ships and underneath those gates were electric loops connected to a Port War Signal Station up on South Head, and anything that crossed that loop was registered up in the signal station. They registered three coming in
- 13:30 and only one ever going out, so we assume the third one got back out. That was Sub-Lieutenant Ban's machine I-21, he got out, and the other one self-destructed. That's the one down on Garden Island, or Canberra, wherever it is now, the big one, and the bow section of it was attached to the stern section of the one that it got in Taylor Bay, by
- 14:00 Lieutenant Athol Townley, on HMAS Sea Mist [armed yacht], another patrol boat, and he got that one in Stanley Bay and when they dragged them up they reassembled them on Clarke Island and the bow of ours the back half of ours was destructed but the bow was okay and on the other one, the front end of it was blown off by the depth charge so they just put the two halves together the
- 14:30 bow of ours and the stern of the other one and made a full submarine of it which is now on display - oh no I think its in Canberra War Memorial [actually Australian War Memorial] now, in Canberra War Memorial yes, you can see it down there. That's right last time I went to Canberra I poked fun at it and said, "You were mine, baby."

So before you actually saw the sub you know vulnerable caught in the net how aware of their presence were you?

We weren't aware of it at all. We

- 15:00 were only told that there was something suspicious had been caught in the net to go and investigate. So we just went over and investigated. And it was obvious we could see the bow part stand up with a serrated edge on the front of the bow cutter, for cutting its way through nets, and Tubby said to me, "What is it Jim?" I said, "It's a submarine of some sort but it's so small it can only be one of those new type Japanese midget subs." I said, "Let's get the hell out of it."
- 15:30 So we got out of it and he said, "What will we do now?" and I said, "We go up and depth charge it." So we sent a signal to Port War Service Signal Station, "Have suspicious object identified in net as a midget Japanese sub. Request permission from admiralty to attack." But no permission came back, no answer - the only signal that came back was, "Okay," which is acknowledged. "Okay" flashed in Morse code, is, "Signal acknowledged,"
- 16:00 but no other answer come back, and the pennant [small triangular or tapering flag] looked like it was starting to pull itself, out I said to Tubby, "Let's go in and have another go." So we dropped, all toll we dropped three but none of the charges went off. The harbour was alerted then, and another had followed Manly ferry through the gate, the Manly ferry come through the gate, the other one got in its wake and crossed over the loop [closed circuit], and it wasn't detected because it come under the loop of the
- 16:30 sub - of the Manly ferry, and that was Lieutenant Ban, sorry, and he got in line up at harbour, USS

[United States ship] Chicago was awarded number one blown in Farm Cove as she was swinging, and he fired two torpedos at her but she just swung at that time and hung back on the cable, the torpedos went in front of her and both went up on Garden

17:00 Island. One exploded and the other went up the boat ramp, just slid up the boat ramp, and then all hell broke loose on the harbour and the navy took, and all the patrol boats were running up and down. Nobody knew what was going on, and the Chicago and the Perkins, USS Perkins in harbour, they were firing anti-aircraft

17:30 just firing up in the sky not firing at anything they were just firing because they thought something was going on, that it was an aircraft attack, but it was a submarine attack. And then the fun started, we all started searching the harbour. Athol Townley, on the Sea Mist went into...

Sorry Jim, we'll just have to stop... So just talk us through that

18:00 **night that the midget submarines came in. Where were you when you got the call? Was it a typical night like any other till that moment?**

Typical night, we were on patrol duties on these boats, the naval patrol boats which were requisitioned pleasure craft from - the wealthy owners had them at their moorings and

18:30 the navy just went round and took them and left them a note to say that their boat had been requisitioned into the navy. Or else, they volunteered their boat for their services and got a naval rank. And, I was on the Lolita, HMAS Lolita, and we had a skipper warrant officer - Warrant Officer Tubby Anderson. He actually got the name Tubby because he was a little, short,

19:00 rotund fellow. And we all loved him and called him Tubby, except when other officers and people were around we called him Sir. But, Tubby was a master mariner he'd been born on a ketch [two-masted sailboat] in - a schooner [ship with two or more masts, with fore and aft-rigging] actually in Adelaide. One of the schooners that supplied between Tasmania and Adelaide, and his mother and father owned the fleet, and she went on board when she was pregnant

19:30 and he was born on board one of their schooners, steel schooners, and what he didn't know about the ocean wasn't worth learning. And, he was a fantastic man, down to earth man, and we had five in the crew and he taught me a lot about navigation. When we'd leave the berth in Farm Cove he'd say, "Righto Jim, get in the wheelhouse

20:00 and chart the course down to the bay," and he'd make me chart the course on naval chart as if we were conning an actual ship down to the water - down the Harbour. He gave me every opportunity at handling the ship to get used to handling a twin cruise vessel, and we were just on normal patrol when a call came through, a signal for us to investigate a suspicious

20:30 object caught in the net. The nightwatchman on the net, they were still building the boom it wasn't completely finished from Watson's Bay across to George's Head. This big cable was laid or hanging from steel buoys right across the harbour and the gate at the Eastern and a gate at the Western end for ships to enter and pass through and on board the pontoon

21:00 that was building the net was a nightwatchman, Patrick, Mr Patrick and he reported that it was shaking and he got the row boat and he rowed over and he saw this strange object caught in the net and came back and reported to the navy and in turn told us to go and investigate. So we went over and investigated and proved that it was a midget submarine and

21:30 I got on to the Aldis Signal Lamp, and signalled Port War Service Signal Station that we'd identified the object in the net as a Japanese midget submarine and requested permission to attack because we knew we wanted to drop depth charges in the harbour that would cause problems. So we didn't get any permission and we went back and looked again and he was a little bit further getting out of the net. So Tubby said to me, "What do you reckon we do?" and I said, "I reckon we go in and drop a charge

22:00 under it," pardon me, so we went back in stern to backed up and rolled a charge off underneath the bow and got out before it went off, but it didn't go off because they were deep-sea charges. The depth charge is operated by a pistol which inside is a circular tube which has holes in it and this one was set, the minimum setting was 50 feet,

22:30 and water pressure gets heavier and it gets lower, deeper and it was set to the pressure of 50 foot and because the water wasn't 50 foot deep there wasn't enough pressure to spring the trigger to set the detonator off so the charge would go off. So we went in three times and we dropped three charges under it. The third time we went in we saw the periscope rotating on us as we backed upward and Tubby said

23:00 "He's on to us Jim." I said, "I know he's on to us but he can't do nothing about it," but what we didn't expect was that he self-destructed and they all carried a destruction charge in their little conning tower [submarine's attack centre] to self-destruct and what we learnt later on is what they call, they commit suicide, oh, what's the name of it now, they commit... I forget

23:30 the term of it now 'tellbarky' or something where they embrace each other and a revolver at the back of each other's head and on the count of three or whatever the pull the trigger and they'd kill each other.

They knew they were going to get caught and they weren't going to re - weren't going to surrender so they settled for charge and blew it up hoping they'd take us with it, they nearly did. We were just getting away from them when it lifted our stern keeled us over covered us with

24:00 debris and thick orange flames and black smoke went up and we got out of it. Then we reported back by Aldus Lamp which is the light signalling lamp to Port War Service Signal Station, that the sub had self destructed. Then later on, the barge came down the harbour, it was the admiral's barge, Rear Admiral Muirhead-Gould [harbour's naval chief] came on board, he was rather belligerent.

24:30 He was at a party with Captain Boad I think his name is, he's the captain of the USS Chicago in the harbour, they were having a party at the admiral's quarters, and they were a little bit 'icky ticky,' and he was a little bit under the weather, and he came up and first said - the first thing he said, "What are you? What are you yachties playing at, running around dropping depth charges in the harbour?" And

25:00 we said, "We saw a submarine Sir, and we reported it." And he apparently very belligerently said, "Did the captain of the submarine have a black beard?" he said, "I've been told all the Japanese submariners have got black beards?" And Tubby said, "No sir," at that moment a big bang went off up town that was the torpedo that Ban had fired, missed the Chicago, and went off when it hit Garden Island

25:30 wharf. And Tubby said to him, "But Sir," he said "If you hurry back up town, you might be able to find that captain yourself, he's evidently working up town." And Muirhead-Gould said to Tubby, "That's an insolent way to talk to a senior officer," he said, "Place yourself on report, report to my office tomorrow morning." "Okay Sir, yes Sir," says Tubby and the admiral got back on his barge and went up the harbour and we never heard any more of it. But then patrol boats and everybody were running around the harbour all night

26:00 then looking for submarines and Athol Townley, Lieutenant Athol Townley on HMAS Sea Mist, no HMAS Steady Hour [armed yacht], and Reg Andrews on HMS - HMAS Sea Mist were tailed by, and caught two of them on the surface talking to each other, they immediately went into attack, they dived and

26:30 Athol got in front of one of them just as it was diving and he dropped a depth charge and somehow or another it went off and it got the sub which we later pulled up out of the harbour with a big titan crane they had. And Reg Andrews claimed the kill, but from where we were looking we - we were sure Townley got the kill, and we

27:00 reported it as such. But the harbour was a mad scene all night, the Manly ferry coming out from the Quay, coming across where we were all operating around, looking for the other sub, we pulled up alongside the Manly ferry and told him to go back into Circular Quay. He said, "I'm not going back to Circular Quay," he said, "I have a schedule to keep," he said, "I'm proceeding on to Manly," and

27:30 Tubby said, "What do we do now coxswain?" and I said to Reg Drewry one of the lads on my boat, I said, "Put a couple of short machine gun shots across his bow." Reg went up, fired up the machine gun and, 'rat a tat tat' across his bow, and he immediately pulled up, turned round and went back into Circular Quay.

28:00 **So you had an encounter with the Manly ferry, you put a couple of shots across his bow...**

... across his bow and he soon discovered we weren't joking. He was ordered to go back if there's a midget sub running around in there, then we didn't want the sub blowing up the Manly ferry and he was in our road. So he turned around and went back to Circular Quay. But all my life since then,

28:30 every person I've met, was on board that Manly ferry, remembers it. I was just waiting for you to say yes, I was on that and my mother that night. If ever I tell the story anywhere little old ladies always speak up and say, "Yes I was on the ferry that night, I remember that."

Okay, so that was one incident, were there other boats just, just causing chaos generally on the harbour?

No, no, the chaos was all the naval patrol boats running round not

29:00 knowing what they were doing. They were running around like WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s with their heads cut off, all trying to make themselves look busy but all getting instructions from one or the other that we were looking for submarines. And they were going in and out of the bay, following the coastline of the harbour up and down in all the little bays, Watson's Bay, Neutral Bay, and Rose Bay, and all those places, looking for submarines, because we'd caught two in... what's the other bay,

29:30 we caught the two in, I forget that bay now, so we knew there was one more somewhere, running around, had to be found, but they never found him. Later on proved after talks with Japanese and everybody else, that it was Lieutenant Ban on I-21. So he's either, they've searched the harbour for years the divers to try and find it, pardon me, if there's a submarine upon the harbour somewhere but they've never found it,

30:00 so we've got to assume that he got back out again.

So who was directing you after that night, like where were you directed to go? Who was giving you the orders?

We were freelance, go anywhere, go all over the place, look for a submarine, find it and destroy it. We didn't, we just had a general directive, everyone searched the harbour. The submarine was loose, search the harbour, seek and destroy.

30:30 **What had you been told about the midget submarines prior to actually coming...?**

Nothing by the navy but just by general information on nautical books and magazines and that we'd seen, photographs of them, and we knew about them, but we never had any direct instructions – but I knew what a submarine was from my Mediterranean experience, and I'd been on board HMS

31:00 Rover, a British sub, as a guest of the crew, come and have a look on board, so I was well – that's what Muirhead-Gould said to me, he said to Tubby actually, "What made you decide as a yachtie – what made you decide it was a submarine?" He said, "I didn't," he said, "My coxswain, Jim Nelson advised me on it." He looked at me he said, "And what would a young boy like you know about it – a submarine?" and I said, "Well Sir, I might be a young boy, but a just served a tour of duty in the

31:30 Mediterranean chasing submarines and being shot at by submarines," I said, "I think I'm well qualified naval wise, to identify a submarine," and he let it go at that.

How big were these midget subs, can you describe for me what they actually look like?

They're not midgets really, they're 80 foot long, if you take this lounge room is 35 then double the length of this and add a bit more, that's the length of them and as far as now –

32:00 they're very small inside, they've only got a very small conning tower, and the Japanese submariners had to be very small Japanese – and they were based at Kure and they had made raids over in South America which were not successful and then they decided to make a raid on Sydney and the

32:30 main submarine the Horsizer A size A1 submarines had a task force, and they were saddled to their deck and they were clamped to the deck of the sub, and they were brought off Sydney harbour by sub, and about 2 to 5 mile off North Head, the sub released them and then they took off under their own power to come through the heads.

33:00 And although that was wartime, our Hornby light on the lighthouse, South Head was still operating flashing out signals, 'here I am come straight through,' so much for our wartime defence.

Did you - you talked about the subs getting pulled out of the harbour, where you there that day when they were pulled out?

When they lifted them out of the harbour bed, no,

33:30 we were on patrol somewhere, back on duty. The navy had a big tug – a big crane which was the largest I believe in the world and it was called the titan, and it had terrific – terrific big crane, and it had a tremendous haulage rate, and they just lowered that over and divers went round fast and sealed cables to the sub and the titan just lifted her up and put her on a barge and they took her over to Clarke Island, or took the both of them to Clarke Island where

34:00 they dismantled then and reassembled one sub out of the two wrecked subs.

Did you receive recognition for what you'd done?

Not a bit. We never even got a mention in the navy – the navy news.

How did you feel about that?

We didn't do anything, there was nothing we could do, but Patrick the nightwatchman, he got paid a royal sum of 50 pounds for his diligence.

34:30 We never got a lot of thanks, Tubby from Admiral Muirhead-Gould, mainly because Muirhead-Gould didn't like the yachties having naval ratings. He didn't like us yachties, or the yachtie naval personnel.

Was there a fair bit of politics as far as that was concerned?

Yeah, yeah.

Can you talk a little bit more about why there was that - that animosity?

35:00 Well, Muirhead-Gould openly displayed his contempt for... yachties who had naval rankings bestowed on them because they own a boat and came into the navy and he deleted all – all reports from us from – were deleted from his report, as a matter of fact he put a big cover up job for himself really

35:30 because he left out the fact of the report the Port War there's a sub in the net none of those signals ever were recognised and as a matter of fact they were denied that they were ever sent but I know they were sent because I sent them.

So, just continuing on with some of that animosity between the yachties and some of the real navy guys...

36:00 Yeah,

Just generally speaking, what was the vibe between you know, just normal sailors and yachties?

Well the naval officers who were fulltime navy RAN [Royal Australian Navy] had done their course at Flinders Naval College, and passed their exams and everything to become midshipmen or sub-lieutenants, and lieutenants were jealous of these yachties just being given – given a command by

36:30 joining their boat and themselves to the navy. And they had wavy stripes whereas a naval officer had straight stripes. They had two straight rings for a lieutenant but the others, the 'rockies' as they call them, had wavy stripes which denoted they were reservists and the genuine RAN naval officers looked down on them. But generally speaking they

37:00 got along well with the boys and the crews and everything because on the whole they were gentlemen. Not that the naval officers weren't, but the reservist officers were more pally [friendly], they didn't stick to naval routine.

What did you call them? What was their name that you called them?

Their nickname was the 'rockies,' don't know where they got it from but, "Oh he's only a rockie," he was a reservist, but the

37:30 others with the straight band, was a genuine Royal Australian Naval officer by examinations and learnings at Flinders Naval College.

Do you know if they had nicknames for navy personnel?

Pigs. Pigs, mm... P.I.G.S. that was it, "Look out, watch out, here comes a Pig." Like in jail the 'Screws' were the criminals, "Watch out, here comes

38:00 the Screw," when one of the jail, what do they call them?...

The wardens...

The jail wardens or somebody's coming around, but the navy officers got the term 'pigs.' I never used it, and my crews never used it because normally the officers we got on these small boats were good guys. They fitted with the crew, they realised that

38:30 on small boats such as when there are only five of you, and two officers, that they – no standing on naval routine and I as a coxswain wouldn't allow it in any case. I only had one lieutenant named Smith, Lieutenant L.K. Smith came on board as skipper and it was a demotion for him really, or a sideways move, he'd been a destroyer

39:00 captain in England, and there were stories around that he fouled up somewhere and they brought him back to Australia and put him on the Fairmiles. Whether that was true or not I don't know, and I shouldn't really broadcast it, but he came on board and he wanted real naval routine – as soon as I came on board as coxswain, he took me down and I reported to his cabin and I had to stand to attention while I was in his presence and he outlined to me what he wanted that done everyday. He wanted the ship

39:30 run proper like a naval vessel. Six o'clock wakie wake for crew – up and swab decks and clean decks the holey stone decks, and this that and all the rest of it, and I was to report to him every morning at 6 o'clock for daily orders and give me the daily orders for the day and we didn't get along too well but

40:00 I didn't take too much notice of him and I ran the ship the way I wanted it run as a coxswain and he made the booboo one day we were in port and it was Saturday and I told the crew to live in men to clean, live in men ashore at 12 o'clock which was our normal Saturday routine. And when he saw the crew cover go ashore he called up and said "What's this

40:30 crew going ashore there's no leave today" he said "The ship looks like a" – well I'll say it he said "The ship looks like a brothel" he said "I want it tidied up, I wanted it painted. So all hands to paint ship, no leave." And we had a lieutenant on board, was the XO [EO, executive officer], he was a barrister of law. He later became a Judge in civilian life, George Ampburg.

41:00 And George and I conferred and he got out the King's rules and regulations and what have you and he went up and tackled Smith and said, "You can't do that, the men are entitled to their leave," he said, so he went back and said to the men, "Carry on ashore," and the men went ashore for their leave and then he and Smithy had words down in the boardroom, and then later on a signal came through from Brisbane,

41:30 a signal came through for Smithy for a draft to Darwin, so he went ashore and none of us said goodbye to him, didn't shake his hand just all turned our backs when he went ashore. He went ashore and the next minute the courier was down giving a signal to me for a draft to Darwin. So I went off down to the naval depot and got a transit order for a plane from Brisbane to Darwin, arrived at Darwin and usually a draft tells you what ship you're to report to,

42:00 but it didn't have any, it was just a draft to report to....

Tape 4

00:35 **Okay Jim, you were telling us about being posted to Darwin and not knowing where you were headed...**

Yeah...

Can you pick us up at that point in the story...

Oh I thought you were going back to the Mediterranean? No, we're going back to 811? Yeah well, Smithy got a draught off the 811, and he left the wharf, he got a drafted to Darwin and then we -

01:00 none of us said goodbye to him, he wasn't that popular because he was too much of a 'dye in the wool' naval man and wanted a little, a tiny little boat run like a naval ship and you can't do that, as coxswain, I wouldn't do it. I wouldn't get the men up at 6 o'clock in the morning and start hosing decks and everything because Smith wanted to run like a destroyer and he went and all the boys went to deck none of them said goodbye to him. They all said,

01:30 "Thank heavens he's gone," because on those little ships you had to be compatible and work together and live together and that was alright. The next thing, the courier was down again in the car, and he had a draft for me to Darwin, and I had a letter, draft for me to proceed to Darwin. And normally they have on that, on the draft, the ship you are to go to report to, and all it had on it was to report to NOIC

02:00 Darwin, which is Naval Officer In Charge, Darwin. So I got on a plane and arrived in Darwin and went up to naval headquarters in Darwin, and reported to NOIC, "Oh" he said, "you're Jim Nelson?" and I said, "Yeah," and he said, "Z Special?" I said, "No, I'm still navy," he said, "You're not now," he said, "You're in Z Special." He said, "Your ship's out in the harbour," so he arranged for a pinnace to take me out to the ship and was the MFE2046

02:30 which was a converted North sea fishing trawler, and carried one-man, two-man subs in the holds, and I reported on board to that, and a sailor welcomed me aboard and escorted me to the skipper's cabin to present my papers and report, so I walked in and reported to him and low and behold who was it but Smithy who I'd just got away from so I thought this is nice. So he and I hadn't got on too well on the 811, so I said

03:00 to him, "Very sorry Sir I got transferred here, I'll put in for an immediate transfer." He said, "No reason to do that," he said, "You're here because I requested to be here." He said, "I was given my chance to select my own coxswain and," he said, "When they presented me the list," he said, "Your name was on it," he said, "I wanted you because I think you're the best coxswain in the fleet," so I said, "Alright," he said, "We'll let bygones be bygones," and I said, "Well as long as

03:30 you don't interfere with me running the ship as a coxswain, I won't interfere with you running the ship as the skipper. You keep to your side and I'll keep to my side," and that was the start of a good friendship from thereon.

Jim did you have any idea what Z Special Unit was at that point?

No. I'd never heard of it.

Did you know what the ship was capable of when you went aboard this trawler, what were you thinking as you were taken up to it?

No, I just looked when they were ferrying me up to it, as the dirtiest, filthiest, ugliest

04:00 contemptible scow that ever set on the water. It was an old fishing trawler, North sea fishing trawler that had been done over a wooden boat, but a good one. No, I had no idea what it was, I thought, "What the heck am I going to here?" when I was being ferried out to it.

Did you think you had done something wrong you were being punished or...?

No, no well I was looking at it and thinking, "What have I deserved to be put on this?" They had specialists there, and they had a crew of all

04:30 Z Special Unit men, navy men, and we all had special code numbers AK, an AK number. We weren't known by names, all known by codes.

What was your name?

AK - AK145 I think it was, I couldn't track it down afterwards. Everything was so secret you couldn't get information from anybody but the cessation of hostilities all Z Special Unit [Services Reconnaissance Department] files

05:00 were destroyed immediately the day after the cessation of hostilities. Z Special Unit was the Unit for

Covert and Dangerous Exercises Sabotage and - like SIS [Special Intelligence Service] and worked behind enemy lines, intelligence gathering and all that sort of work but my side was naval, maritime side on board, both ferrying operatives to and from Darwin to Timor

05:30 and Borneo.

So, did they not have ship commanders and coxswains as part of their special operations team?

No, no.

That's why you and Smith were brought in?

Yeah, that's why I was selected. They didn't have any - they didn't have any coxswains all of us were volunteers.

At what point were you briefed about the nature of the work you'd be doing?

Only when I got on board with Smithy and he told us what we would be doing.

In the

06:00 **initial meeting with him?**

In the initial meeting yeah. But, it wasn't hard to fit into it. We just had to run a ship that's all it was, and wait for orders to go to where we had to go, and then plot a course, then go there.

What were your thoughts or your concerns about the dangerous nature of the work you'd be doing?

Danger never entered my head in those days. Danger, or thoughts of being killed or anything, it was just one great big adventure which I got

06:30 through alright. What can I say, I was there because, not because I followed a flag and for, 'King and Country,' and I'd die for my, 'King and Country,' or die for my country, Australia, I was there because I was a young lad and there's a bloke called Hitler who was doing the wrong thing and had to be stopped, and I was there to stop Hitler. I wasn't

07:00 looking for glory or anything like that, it was just that Hitler had to be stopped and I was part of it. So that was it, but danger never enters your head in those circumstances. As young blokes you just went in willingly.

So did Smith show you around the ship?

No. One of the senior sailors took me around.

Can you take me on that walk? Can you walk us back through that and share with us a bit of

07:30 **your thoughts as you saw what was capable and what was hidden beneath the hull?**

Yeah. It was a trawler type ship and the after quarter deck part had a big hold, a fish hold where they used to run a crane to bring the fish nets up and drop the fish into the hold and the after part of it was a stateroom, the captain's boardroom-cabin, sort of thing. Then come up the side passage alongside the side of the ship, alongside the super structure,

08:00 was another cabin which the executive officer had. Then, there was a doorway which led down to the engine room, and then there was another doorway which led to stairway up to the wheel house upstairs, and the bottom wheel house, and there was a top wheel and a bunk in it for the skipper to have a sleep at sea, and then a bit of deck up there. And then there was the forward welldock, the foredeck had a big fish hold in it again,

08:30 and that's where the crew had their quarters down there, and then the forecastle were the crew's quarters, the bunks and everything. And the crews were in there. And the whole of the crew was English RN [Royal Navy] Special Servicemen, and they were a real bad bunch of pirates. They'd kill you for a cigarette. But, they were all SIS men who could fight, trained in martial arts,

09:00 and a lot of them had 14 or more jumps in Europe before they came on MFV2046 to Australia. This is a crew who had a - you had to be in command of, all the time. You couldn't let anyone of them get on top of you. You had to be the boss all the time and there's one stage where we went out - went down to Kuching in Borneo, and we dropped some

09:30 operatives off up the river in Kuching to go and look for Japs and one of our destroyers was waiting outside and we had to go out and escort him, pilot him up the river to the Kuching town and the jetty. And I was on wheel, I was the coxswain, when you're crossing bars or entering rivers the coxswain's always got to be on the wheel, and I was on the wheel, and I called

10:00 one of the lads I forget his name now, "Come up and take the wheel," he said, "It's not my duty to take the wheel, I don't want to be it," so I just whacked him, and down he went, and I said to another bloke,

"Chuck a bucket of water on him and when he gets up tell him to get on the wheel, coxswain said so." So then I went aboard the destroyer and there was a petty officer, oh what was his name, who knew me, we'd been together in the navy before,

- 10:30 and he said, "What sort of a ship are you on?" he said, "If you deserted the navy," he said, "You'll be court martialled," I said, "Yeah," anyway that was just the way it worked. The moment he back answered me or defied one of my orders, I just had to be strong, had to be on top of them all the time.

Could you explain to me in more detail the power structure or the hierarchy within the ship?

Yeah, there's the captain or commander,

- 11:00 CO actually, commanding officer, he might be a lieutenant depending on the size of the ship. He could be sub-lieutenant, lieutenant or on board bigger ships...

On your particular - on the trawler I meant? You had Smith, who was CO...?

He was a lieutenant, Lieutenant Smith, lieutenant. Then we had another lieutenant who was an executive officer, XO [EO], and then I came next as the petty officer coxswain.

And the three of you were charged with the vessel's safety

- 11:30 **and were responsible for the vessel itself?**

That's right.

And then you had this Z Special Force group of Royal Navy Special Forces?

Yeah, Royal Navy Beach Commandos they were.

And did they have an officer with them?

No. Not this crew, they had when they come out I forget his name also, warrant officer - I forget his name now. No, lieutenant - no he'd been sent back to England. That was just -

- 12:00 that's why we were put on it, the three Australians put on it because it was an all English crew and they had no idea of Australian waters or anything like that, so they put an Australian skipper a commanding officer, executive officer, and myself on to command the boat and the crew.

And did either Smith or the XO [EO] have any special forces training or any experience?

No, no.

That was a challenging position you were put in?

Yeah we

- 12:30 were, but... it all worked out alright. Smithy was an excellent navigator, and the... lieutenant was a good navigator, and I was reasonably good at it. I had to take the part of an officer on board for a free watch system. The first watch, the skipper, was 8 to midnight, the second watch, the

- 13:00 XO [EO] took the second watch, midnight to 4, and I as coxswain took the third watch, 4 o'clock in the morning till 8. Because I wasn't a commissioned navigating officer they had to give me the morning watch because I couldn't take the first or the middle, and I had navigational training, and Smithy, and Jeff Sanders (was the executive

- 13:30 officer) and they brushed my navigation up, and I could navigate in the morning watch because in the tropics the morning watch is usually daylight watches, not in a dark watch.

Now with the RN beach commandos there to stay with the trawler, or were they there to be deployed at any point?

No, they stayed with us, they did all the trips on the MFV2046, until the cessation of hostilities.

So how was their jobs split

- 14:00 **up?**

Oh, just as seaman and workman, and they had - had two petty officers with them, and a Sam Small and Billy Barker. Petty Officer Billy Barker and Petty Officer Sam Small, and I've since tried London by email and everything to try and locate them through all the naval sources, and my son's tried extensively through his computer what it is?

- 14:30 **Internet?**

What do you call when you're trying to contact someone through the computer?

Email or Internet?

Internet - internet, he's put questions on the internet for any naval associations in England that know of

a Sammy Small or Billy Barker to get in touch with him.

When they split up though, was there anyone specifically responsible for the engine room or?

15:00 No they were in charge of their sailors. They were beach commandos, naval beach commandos.

Who on board was responsible for the engine room?

We had a chief mechanic, and a leading stoker, and a stoker. It was a, 'Perkins Diesel.'

Were they Royal Australian Navy?

Yeah, they were Australian navy, yeah.

Okay, so there was the CO the XO [EO] yourself,

Yeah.

3 Royal Australian Navy

15:30 **seamen...**

Engine room, yeah.

...who were in charge with looking after that, and then the 6 British commandos, beach commandos who were responsible for the general seaman around the trawler?

That's it, that's how it worked out, yeah.

And obviously they had their special forces training should you come into combat?

Any trouble, yeah. They were good. Sammy Small the petty officer, yeah, his mother and father must've been gorillas. He was a big man, he had no -

16:00 no forearm, he had two great big hands on his elbows, and he stood like that. He looked like a gorilla, and if he ever grabbed hold of you, you knew it and he could work his toes. He was a North sea fisherman, used to trawlers and boats, and they used their toes for hauling in their fishing nets. They big toe and little toe they can use like fingers and he had the habit of pinching you with them. You'd be sitting down and all of a sudden you'd get a pinch on the bottom you know. He'd put his foot and he'd pinch your bottom and boy he was powerful.

16:30 If he ever held you he was a very powerful man. He was built like - he stood like a gorilla a very big man and he was in charge of the men, and if they couldn't get a fight anywhere in the navy, they'd fight amongst themselves in the forecastle. I had a night there one night, they'd got on to the rum they'd save up that I dished out two tots - a tot of rum everyday, and they'd put it away in bottles and save it up, and then they'd get down in the forecastle and get on the rum,

17:00 and they were down there having a great old fight down there, in the forecastle the fore peat, there was a photograph of the Queen up on there and God help if you walked into their quarters and didn't salute the Queen, or was it the King then, I just forget now, but it was a Royal photo and anyway a fight started in there, and they were really playing up, and I went down and as coxswain said, "Righto boys, cool it into your bunks,"

17:30 and the fight started so we all had our revolver equip [equipment], I had a colt 6-shooter hand gun, and I just pulled it out and put a shot up through the bulkhead, I said, "Right the next one doesn't go into the bulkhead the next one goes to the bloke who's making the most noise, now get into your bunks," and boy they got into their bunks quickly then. So you had to be on top of them all the time. So I sheathed my colt, and went back inside. Again, the skipper came down and said, "What was that all about coxswain?" I said, "Oh the boys were having a bit of fun up there and I had to quieten

18:00 them down." But they were a good crew, you'd go anywhere with them and you knew you had a group of men behind you. If you got into trouble you had a real good group of men. They were all - all volunteers with a - what do you call it, a chip on your shoulder, they all had stories to tell. Billy Barker was a hotelier on the Guernsey Island in the

18:30 Channel there, the English Channel, and when the Japs [actually means Germans] overrun the Guernsey - overrun Guernsey, he had the privilege of being tied to a tree while the Germans raped his wife and two daughters, and he was tied to a tree. All he wanted to do was get in somewhere where he could fight back at the Germans. Sammy Small, Sammy Small was on a trawler owned by his mother and father when it was strafed [an attack of machine-gun fire or cannon fire from a low flying airplane] by the German

19:00 Luftwaffe [German air force], and his mother and father were killed, and he just wanted to get back at the Germans, and everybody on there had a story why they had volunteered for beach commandos, they wanted to get back at the Germans somewhere or somehow.

Were they then frustrated that they were caught in the Pacific fighting the Japanese? Would they have preferred to have been back fighting the Germans?

No, no they were quite happy that they were in a war somewhere with us. We operated up off Timor and Borneo on surveillance work,

19:30 on landing our operatives in the various places.

So you would land the beach commandos?

Yeah - no we'd land our own Z Special men. We'd take a group up in darkness, sneak into a bay somewhere, and then land our shore party with their equipment radars and everything, and they'd dive up in the hills then they'd do their sabotage or whatever they had to

20:00 do, and then they'd wireless back the Japanese movements and whatever information they could get.

And there would be a set place rendezvous point in which to pick them up at a later time?

Yeah, when we'd get a radio call and we'd go back on a Z, on a special time to, on a special day somewhere to pick them up, usually around about midnight to give us from midnight to dawn to get far enough back out to sea to miss their dawn patrol, plane patrol.

As

20:30 **coxswain, were you kept in the dark as to what the purpose or the locations of the various...**

No, I was never privy to it, I was kept in the dark, the skipper would just tell me, "Prepare the ship for sea," and that would entail getting crew up and around and ready, and preparing to leave the jetty, and then as soon as we cleared the jetty, would be

21:00 to prepare guns and ammunition for sea was a procedure that you'd go to your guns, take the covers off, oil them and grease them and load them up with the belts of ammunition or whatever put on, get your ammunition lockers open and check your ammunition and everything was right, and right away you'd go to sea. And then as soon as you'd cleared the harbour you would have a test pattern shoot to test your guns.

21:30 **What weaponry were you equipped with?**

Bofors [40mm light anti-aircraft gun], Bofors and alligans [anti-aircraft gun] and twin Vickers machine guns [machine guns mounted on the side of planes / naval ships]. We had two pair of twin Vickers machine guns on each side of the bridge, and alligans just on aft of the bridge. An alligan which was a good anti-aircraft gun, and another one just behind the funnel

22:00 to the engine room, and one up forward on the fore deck. No - up on fore deck, was the big bofors,... I forget now I think that was 50 calibre which is about a half-inch shell anti-aircraft gun, and a damn good one at that too. Then we were all armed, we had rifles .303 rifles and we all had our choice of hand guns. I liked the

22:30 6 gun colt the cylinder, 6 cylinder colt, that was a good one, that was my anti-weapon, and some of the boys had smith and wesson's [hand guns] , smith and wesson's 45's and others had American automatic colts, whatever you wanted it was your choice. We had Owen guns [Australian sub-machine gun], Sten guns [British sub-machine gun] and what was the other... Austins for close in shore

23:00 work. I went on a couple of landing parties into Timor. One we took up a chap who was a plantation owner on Timor, we went into this bay at night time, landed with him, and I had my landing party of four sailors with me, and he - we landed him at the beach that he and his wife and kids used to swim at and then he took us up the track up the cliff where his plantation -

23:30 plantation homestead was, and the Japs were using his homestead as a headquarters and we had to get information as to who they were and how many were there and what - what was going on and if possible bring one of them back with us. So we give them a gilt-edged initiation card to come back with us for a holiday visit to Australia which was a whack over the head from behind and a bag over his head and bundle him down the track

24:00 onto the ship and took him back. One of the guards on the edge of the plantation. Boys just went up - snuck up on him, clobbered him and put a sack over his head and pulled him back down the track onto the boat and then when we got back to sea, halfway back to Darwin a Catalina landed beside us and he was transported onto that and taken down to Melbourne for interrogation. What they wanted to find out was his colour patch, what unit what Japanese unit

24:30 was there. How many was there, what the morale was, and how their armaments were, and what food was like and foodstuffs, and were they happy, or malcontent or what, but they got all that information out of him back in Melbourne headquarters. One night he's peacefully standing up there on guard and the next night he's getting hell bashed out of him down at intelligence headquarters, to find out all about him.

25:00 **So you didn't actually get up to the homestead itself?**

Yeah we did, this captain, he had an army commission as captain. All he was interested, he wanted to sneak around and get round the back to see how they were looking after his Timorese ponies. We had to

stop him from that, he said he wanted to see how his ponies were, it's no use staying here with us. But a funny thing happened up, George Constable just died here in Tweed Hospital this year -

25:30 and Tommy Towecky, Tommy Toweck two of my men in the landing party as we were going up through the jungle we carried a little ball the size of a field ball it was fluorescent and as you walked through the jungle, you carried that in your hand behind, and they just had to keep track of that fluorescent going through the jungle. If they wandered off, that was too bad. So, we were going

26:00 up through the jungle and Georgy Constable leant over Tommy's Towecky's shoulder and said, "You know we'll never get off this bloody Island alive," and Tommy said, "If you don't take that machine gun out of my back I know I won't," we always laughed over that you know.

How was it that you came to be on landing parties when you hadn't had any specialist training?

No well, I had to take the landing party to the beach for

26:30 a start, and Tommy Towecky and Georgy Constable had to row the damn thing, but we put boots on and captain, oh I forget his name now, invited us to join him to go up the track so we said, "Yeah righto, we'd go," so we pulled the boat up. As you know, in the tropics the jungle's right down to the edge of the water - pulled the boat up amongst the palm trees and covered some palm leaves and that over it and

27:00 went up with him as a rear guard for him, and he was the scout the - around the plantation to find what the Japanese were doing, and the other Z Special man, we had our trained man, was with him also, and they were to bring back whatever information they could bring back. That was our mission and that was quite good, quite funny.

How do your nerves stand up against something like that?

27:30 **It's not something you've been trained for specifically you're just a seaman and all of a sudden you're travelling through the jungle...**

Yeah, but all of your experiences at war at sea and all the rest of it at that time,... we were trained, efficient soldiers or servicemen any distraction. I was used to combat in, navy combat in the Mediterranean, and nerves and all that settled down. We were young, youthful enthusiasm, excitement and adventure, it was all fun. Other parts

28:00 didn't come into it.

While you were involved with the Z Special Unit were you able to notify Jean, were you in contact with family?

No, I came through to Sydney once on a mission, and we were not allowed to contact her or anyone in Sydney that I knew. No.

What did you tell you family you were doing?

Well I was just on a boat in Darwin as far as they were concerned.

Did that put stain on your

28:30 **relationships, not being able - because they would've expected you to be contact, in fact I'm sure you were while you were on the Perth?**

No it was just our letters were sent backwards and forwards to each other, just normal letters that we wrote when we were away in the navy, write a letter and put a number, letter number 13, letter number 14 on the back, and post it whenever you were in port. And that's another story about my son, as I just told, we prepared guns for sea - prepare armament for sea

29:00 and then coming back, we'd reverse the position, prepare armament for entering harbour, and that would be to do disarm make sure there's no cartridges up the spout or anything, pull all back, secure and lock the ammunition lockers, oil and clean the gun and put the covers on it and secure it before we enter harbour so there'd be no accidental shooting of guns in harbour, and as I told you, going out to sea, we'd do the

29:30 opposite, uncover them, oil and clean them again, then shove a couple up the spout and put the ammunition belts back in position ready for an aircraft attack or something, and I had my overalls in an ammunition locker and I had my overalls on, preparing the gun for sea, and just as we were going down the harbour a post boat came flying down the harbour tooting its horn at us and just stopped us before we went out

30:00 the harbour and hoisted two bags of mail on board so I ended up gave all the mail out and there was a letter there for me I just shoved it into my hip pocket and we got out to sea and I took my overalls off and put it in the ammunition locker and it wasn't until I came back in about a month or so later that I put the overalls on to close - secure the guns for harbour and this bit of paper in my pocket, and I pulled it out and it was a letter for me from my brother-in-law telling me I'd had a baby son. Two

months before that the letter had take a

30:30 month to get to me and it had been in my pocket for a month so it was about 4 to 5 months after, I was told I had a son, a baby son. So that was my first news of my son.

Was it frustrating to be stuck there that at that point? Was that the moment that you wanted to get away?

Oh definitely, yeah, I put in a request for compassionate leave but it didn't go over well with the navy, they said, "Not sufficient ground." All the grandmothers and

31:00 grandfathers, and mothers and fathers had died, all compassionate leave had been used up, but wanting to go to the birth of a baby wasn't a good enough excuse, so the CO ashore, the commanding officer of the naval depot, naval base Darwin, no he wouldn't wear that, so I couldn't come home.

Must've been an extra reason to stay alive though, for those last few months?

No, funny, those sort of thoughts never - life and

31:30 death - I think it applies to the majority of servicemen, it doesn't enter your head. Oh it might be some might've been a bit weaker, might've worried about it, but us that were reasonably strong and well trained, you never thought of life or death or going into action or going into dangerous situations, you just carried out the duties you'd been trained for you know.

Were there operations you engaged in where that did concern you, even for a - you know even for a short few moments?

That I was concerned?

Yeah, where

32:00 **you were confronted in such a way that you thought...**

No, I was never confronted in hand to hand combat, no. The closest I come to,... I had one shore party, we took ashore and sent them off into the jungle and we remained on the beach as rear guard. I had a sailor with me, Don Davis, and we both had our machine guns, and we were in the palm trees, and

32:30 this bay we landed in, there was a Japanese outpost on each headland, and we'd come in the middle of it and on the hour every hour the two guards would come one post to the other back and pass each other on the beach and we were there in the palm trees and these two guards came down and stood in front us and lit a cigarette and started to talk in Japanese and we were there about 6 to 8 feet away from them and Don Davis said we can take these and clicked

33:00 his bolt back and it went, 'clang,' and it was like a gun going off in the middle of the night, and neither of them turned around, and I grabbed him and I said to him, "That's the worse moment I've ever had, if he'd open fire then," he said, "We can take these two coxswain," or 'swain, as we used to be called, "We take these two swains" we would've had a host of Japanese from each headland come down on us, plus the party trapped up - so when I got back on board I

33:30 reported to the skipper and said I wanted him transferred, I said to the skipper, "He's better off back in the navy, not in special forces," so he suddenly got a draft back to sea on a ship, a naval ship, yeah, Don Davis - 'clunk' went the bolt, ohh...

Did you ever come across Japanese naval vessels that you were able to get past?

No, we managed to dodge

34:00 them all the time, our plans were pretty well worked out. When we'd go into a bay usually we'd have a Timorese guide with us, and the one we had was a fella by the name of Balthasar and he was a local fisherman from that area, and he'd come with us, and the skipper had put us near enough to the bay and if it was

34:30 Smithy he was spot on, then we had another boat, we had Tony Horden and Chips Wood. I don't know why he got called Chips, but his name was Lieutenant Wood, but they called him Chips, and they were spot on. They would land you within 500 metres of any spot they navigated you to, spot on. They'd tell the lookout keeper, "Keeper, lookout ahead, an island peak should be coming

35:00 up, or a headland peak should shorn up, lookout headland peak on the port bow boom red one 'O,'" or something, you know they'd be spot on, right on then, this Timorese guide fisherman, that's where he'd fished, he'd guide us into the bay, and then we'd ease up and anchor about 400 yards off shore, outside the first line of breakers,

35:30 and then put the boat over and take the landing party ashore.

Were your guides paid or did they simply want the Japanese out of their homes?

No, they were - yeah, they were just more or less press gang volunteers [a press gang was a detachment empowered to force civilians to serve in the army or navy] I think. No, we had a lot of

Japanese – a lot of Balinese – sorry I'll get it in a minute Timorese guides, or mostly fishermen from those areas,

36:00 and they seemed to be there quite willing, I don't know if they were given any commissions or anything, or in the army or anything, but they worked with us quite well.

So, was there an opportunity to develop relationships with them or was it pretty formal?

Oh no, just personal relationships on board, friendly relationships when you come aboard introduce him to the crew, although Balthasar had been with us on a few trips and they all knew him and he was a big happy Timorese native,

36:30 and he – he was just on board with us as a guest more than anything else. And the skipper would land us half a mile offshore, pilot us there, and then Balthasar would take over and guide us round into the bay.

Was enemy surveillance aircraft ever a problem?

Yeah, the aircraft used to come round on surveillance at daybreak, at dawn, at first light. We had to be out of there

37:00 by midnight. We'd usually get there about 10 o'clock at night, take our landing parties ashore, get back to ship, and then scuttle back at full speed to get back out, at least try and get outside the 100 mile limit because their surveillance plane would go up a 100 mile limit. At dawn he'd fly up and fly back, and we had to be outside of that limit so he wouldn't spot us and every now and then a destroyer would come up, a Japanese destroyer would come up and

37:30 go up and down there too. But we had them from - we had ashore - the radio contact from Sparrow Force [code name for war garrison on Timor] ashore kept us pretty well informed of wherever he was going on, or what was happening.

Was there any special equipment on board that you hadn't seen before that was special to the special forces?

Yes, night vision glasses that they've got now, first time I'd ever seen them or used them. Put them up and they're green and heat sensor I

38:00 don't know how they work those night vision glasses, but the objects sure come up green like your screen was there. And, first time I ever used them and they calibrate, they were in pairs, if I was signalling to somebody ashore with a douse light, they had binoculars which were paired to mine, they came in pairs, and they were night-visioned, and were

38:30 non-glare, and gave no reflections. That was the special equipment. Other than that, the special equipment was our machine guns, our killing daggers and choke straps and coshes [type of club / bludgeoning instrument]. A cosh is like – have you ever seen a 50 calibre shell? A cosh was like a 50 calibre shell with a knob on the end of it, went in there and when you flicked it, the knob

39:00 sprung out and had a big heavy spring, coil spring on it, and when you flicked it up and down, the pressure exerted was terrific, would smash a man's skull with one blow. So that was special equipment. Then the choke straps was a piano wire - a U-shaped cradle of a handle with a hole through the middle, and a toggle, and a piano wire went out in a loop, and you dropped over a man's head from behind and just pulled

39:30 it – sands head from there on. I never ever had to use one, but I know they'd been used there on guards. Next war breaks out, I don't ever want to be a guard, I want to be a cook in the galley. And a cosh, one hit with a cosh that was the end of it.

Did you mention that there were submersibles on board?

Yeah, we had two twin submarines in the forward hold, and in the after hold we had two also. And

40:00 we had pressure diving gear, deep-sea diving gear, but the majority of our divers were skin divers. We had a couple trained with pressure suits, but submersibles were chariots, they were like a torpedo with a saddle on them, and you sat on top of them. They'd just go along underneath the water, just your head above

40:30 water and the equipment there. They call them 'sleeping beauties' I don't know why but that was their name. If you ever get to Perth, they're on show at Rockingham in a museum, in the naval museum down there, the sleeping beauties, and the kayak canoes we had. That book I brought out, I think there's a photo of one of them in there.

Tape 5

00:48 **Jim, I'd like you to just continue describing for us the submersibles how they were stored in**

the hold, how you'd launched them, how they operated, what sort of operations they were used for?...

01:00 Well no doubt you heard about the Singapore Road by our men, where they went up there into...

Jaywick... [Operation Jaywick, Z Special Force raid on Singapore Harbour in the MV Krait]?

... they went in on two submersibles. They ride them charioteers, chariots they call them, charioteers,... they rode them in, they come up along the merchant ships in Singapore harbour, and then they'd attach limpet bombs to the sides of the hull, and then got out again and they

01:30 were steel, they were just like a torpedo, nothing much to them. No conning towers or anything like, they were an outside job, they just rode them, and they had propellers at the back.

And some sort of scuba gear?

No, that's all you had. Oh actually what they called Davis gear, a canvass pack on your back with tin cans in with - what's the powder now,

02:00 deadly powder... and you put on masks and you breathe through that and your breath goes through the can of powder and comes back purified.

Was it asbestos was it?

No not asbestos, you'd have got asbestosis from that. No... I can't think of the name of it. Remember that commander that disappeared in England supposedly taken prisoner

02:30 by the Russians, he was riding one, and he had it on this day, this gear and he went down underneath one of the Russian ships in harbour that time, and they reckon he was sabotaging the ship and the story is he disappeared, oh I forget his name now, but...

03:00 oh it's a very common name you'd know it, any rate, he disappeared and they assume that the Russians caught him and took him prisoner but he's never seen or heard of since.

How were the submersibles held within the hold? How were they stored within the hold of the trawler?

Oh, we just lifted them up with our derricks [lifting equipment on board a vessel for loading and discharging cargo] on the ship, just lowered them into the holds onto beds, V-shaped beds, lower them in.

And they were covered by?

03:30 Canvass, just covered them over to keep them dust free and clean.

And then there was decking over the top?

No, only the hold the top hatch covers, the hatch decking over the top and then canvass cover of that to stop water getting in and whatever. It was a fish hold actually, and that's where they used - the trawler used to dump all their fish in there.

Were they ever used with your time on board to be - to penetrate harbours or to...?

No not in my

04:00 time, we carried them, but we never used them. Then we had the pressure diving suits and then the rest of the divers in the party were usually skin divers, trained skin divers.

What were the pressurised diving suits used for?

You know the big helmets and that the deep sea, deep diving, where the skin divers couldn't get down. Skin divers can only really go to 40 metres I think

04:30 after that the pressure's too - too great, but the pressure divers can go down, and you pump air from up top.

What might be a circumstance where you'd use a deep sea diver?

When you're offshore looking for entanglements to stop landing parties, when we'd go and we'd survey a beach the purpose of that was to survey it for crossed railway lines welded together with spikes

05:00 up to rip the bottoms out of your landing craft. Like when they were landing at Iwo-Jima and all the rest of it. They were taken out, and spread out along the first line of breakers just outside. As the landing craft would come in, they'd rip the bottoms out of landing craft and they were - pressure divers would go down and scout along and look for those you know.

Were mines a constant concern for you?

On the big ships they were, yeah.

05:30 **Not so much on the trawlers around the islands?**

No, as a matter of fact, when we went up to the Halmaheras to Macassar, when the Japanese surrendered, we were the first one into Macassar to take the Japanese surrender, but we – it was heavily mine fielded – heavily mined, and we, because we were a wooden boat, we had to go in, and cruise over the mines, and find a channel through the mines

06:00 to let the Gascoigne Corvette another one come in with the, not the landing party, the... party Red Cross, and officers and that, to take the surrender of the island – what do they call them?... but we had to go in and that's not nice, just cruising in and seeing mines underneath you. They're usually moored

06:30 about 12 feet with horns on them and we weren't – we didn't have a 12 foot draft, we were a wooden boat so magnetic mines didn't worry us, but the horn ones – they did, you touch one of those horns and away you go.

Were the beach commandos on board, explosives experts?

Yeah.

Did they have explosive ordinance disposable skills?

Yeah, yeah. They were good at setting explosives and blowing up bridges and all that sort of thing.

Were they

07:00 **capable mine disposals as well? Capable of mine disposal?**

No, the only way you had mine disposal was put it on the shore somewhere or hit them, we used to fire a machine gun at them and if you were lucky enough to hit one of the horns they'd go off but we made sure we kept a good distance away. And if, if we ever cut them loose we had what they call 'para lanes,' they stream out from the bow, attached to our bow and they stream out they've got

07:30 buoys attached to them with adjustable arms which take them down to a depth and on the line it goes down it goes into a V-shaped cutter, and as the ship goes through and separates a couple of mines they go down those cables till they get caught at the end and the drag of the ship cuts them off in the cutter and they float to the surface and then you just machine gun them from a

08:00 distance and blow them up.

They still use that technology with the minesweepers, I don't know whether that's...

Do they, I don't know.

They do, they do, so you actually had that capability on the trawler?

Yeah, well, we had the machine guns or we had a good rifleman there, good marksman which all of us were, and I still belong to rifle clubs, and then they just put a couple of 303 bullets in, enough to let water into and sink it, but the main problem was, you didn't want them to float away

08:30 and hit some poor innocent ship coming up. We had to make sure that they were sunk, and if they were pulled up, they cut loose and floated up, you had to either machine gun them, or marksmanship and sink them.

Now, when you were performing landing parties, did you say you had the collapsible canoes that you'd use?

Yeah, we had kayak canoes, yeah. Wooden frame with canvass outside, and as I say, if you ever get

09:00 to Perth you'll see them on show in Rockingham Museum, naval museum there. They're setting up a naval museum on Garden Island now, and quite a lot of those things might be shown there. Any rate, the New South Wales First Commando Group Reservists used them too, in Sydney. If they ever put on a display, often you'd hear of them putting on a display in the harbour. They are worthwhile attending, you see all those sort of gadgets there.

I haven't actually seen the kayaks could you

09:30 **describe them in a little more detail?**

They're just like an ordinary kayak/canoe, except they're canvass with a wooden frame. When you get in, you open up the wooden frame and it forms a framework, fit the canvass over it, tie the canvass down.

So it compacts quite tightly?

Mm, yeah very.

Were they two person kayaks?

Two, yeah but...

And how many were you equipped with?

We carried four on board but never ever used them.

10:00 How would you get ashore during your landing parties?

On our standard boat equipment, our standard lifeboat on board like an oversize, you could carry 6 to 8 men in that with 4 rowing and...

So it was like a 4-oared whaler or something?

Yeah, 4 oars yeah, 2 forward, 2 aft.

What type of runabout was it, or what type of dinghy

10:30 was it?

No, a naval whaler they call them. Oh they call them whalers, or cutters, they call them all sorts of things. Good surf boats, you'd surf them through the surf and when we beached them, the landing parties - you'd drop your landing party off, and there'd be a party on the beach ready to meet you to get radios. Do you know the most item wanted by the

11:00 commandos sparrow force that were left behind on Timor, were boots. It'd take dozens of pairs of boots out, all sizes, and they'd grab them and that was their main wish, for boots, then radio gear, then food, and then ammo [ammunition] was the order of priority.

So you were quite frequently doing replenishment drops?

Yeah, that's the drops we were doing. Keeping in mind on each headland were Japanese

11:30 outposts, and we'd come in in the night, sneak in as silently as we could with the motor barely ticking over, stopping motors about 4 or 5 kilometres out, and just have a little kick to keep her going and then come in, then anchor outside the first line of breakers, then send out boats ashore.

What was your experience or your - I guess - in meeting the special operations, Australian

12:00 special operations people, was there a culture or personality type that you observed about them?

No, except they were ordinary men, brave men, and very intelligent men, and well trained men, but you could go ashore and know you could rely on them to protect your back or whatever. They are men you'd go to hell with.

So were there quite

12:30 close relationships formed given the short period of time you were together?

Yes just normal - just normal mates yeah, just normal mates. Z Special men were all picked, handpicked, and when you went ashore on an operation if you went on a 2-man operation, you were always told who your fellow operative was, and you were only known as Jack and Jim or Jack and Joe, or whatever, and you were given the option of not to go if you didn't like that fellow, or you weren't happy with him.

13:00 Once you were paired off, you could either say no, or yes, and if I didn't like the cutter Jim, or I'd heard something about him, I'd say no, I wouldn't go with you, but I never went on one of those single operations, I was always on boat parties, and landing parties and what have you.

Where there ever any times when you were meant to rendezvous who didn't show up?

No. We always - our rendezvous always

13:30 showed up on time, we did any rate, and the landing party always showed up. It was always in our mind when we rowed that boat to the beach what rendezvous group would it be, a Japanese group, or an Australian group. We went into one bay once, and John Dowry down in Sydney, Lieutenant John Dowry, I see him now and then, and Tony Horden, Tony told us once when we went into

14:00 Vavoukie Bay and the Japanese knew we were coming, and we went into the bay, dropped our party, this is all recorded in history, dropped out party, and slunk out again, the Japs didn't touch us, and Tony said, "For which my wife and children are eternally thankful." But the party was caught half an hour later, and the whole lot were beheaded. That was Sergeant Ellis a very good operative and a very good

14:30 decoder and coder and a good wireless man, and he'd sent back signals from the shore where the Japanese parties were, what they were doing, but he got caught eventually, and I'm told that he had a tree trunk between his knees in a sitting position and he was rocked backwards and forwards under torture, and he never gave anything out, and his knees broke, and then he was beheaded.

15:00 Sergeant Ellis, his story might be - I know it's in the Z - Z Manuals but I don't know if it's on the internet or anything, perhaps you can pull it down, Sergeant Ellis of Z Special Unit.

Would special unit operatives ever discuss their missions once back on the boat?

No, you were

15:30 a very secretive crowd but you would discuss what you were doing, yes they would discuss it amongst themselves because once it was over there was nothing secret about it. You discuss what you did and what you brought back and what have you. It was mainly only intelligence work, to get up in the mountains and find Japs, and to find where the headquarters were and find where their main groups were so we could send the bombers in to bomb them, and then they'd stay there as OP's [observations posts]

16:00 up in the mountain, and direct our bombers in to bomb them, and that was their main work - gathering intelligence, and a bit of sabotage work.

Can I ask you about your own secrecy obligations or confidentiality agreements that you needed to sign?

My what?

Did you have confidentiality agreements or secrecy agreements that you had to enter into?

Secrecy - yeah we signed Secrecy Act documents, which we were sworn to secrecy

16:30 to never discuss any of this we used - equipment we used, or missions we were on or what happened on those missions and even the flippers that the kids use now were on the 'secret list,' you couldn't discuss if you used flippers, and I put my John monocle [eyeglass] onto that for 50 years, that was all I had to do. There was never any recognition that there was a Z Special Unit. It was so secretive, consisted

17:00 of about a thousand men of all nationalities and women, men and women. We had women cipher experts and decoders and coders in our radio stations to take our messages from ashore from the island, and Sergeant Ellis, we had a precluder word if you were ashore and you were captured and you were forced like Sergeant Ellis was

17:30 forced, to send back false material that the Japanese dictated, he could put an excluder word in the message. It was just a secret word and Sergeant Ellis' word he was sending back a Japanese dictated message, was a false message, and the stupid radio operator in Darwin didn't pick the excluder word up. It was just an odd word, could be anything

18:00 that you work into the message somewhere, and when they got that message that had that word in it, it was disregarded - disregarded the message it'd say, 'forced a message under sufferance,' but this operative in Darwin missed the word, and of course Ellis after that was executed by the Japs. That's all recorded in history. I've got it all written down in books in there somewhere.

18:30 **I asked you earlier about your family whether it was difficult to not be telling them what you were doing, was it difficult immediately post war and the years that followed with your naval friends who...**

That was just general...

Sorry mate... yeah, no the question I was wanting to put to you

19:00 **was, that I asked you earlier about your family whether it was difficult to keep your secret operations secret from them?**

Oh definitely, yeah.

Was it also difficult with your naval friends and you naval comrades who you'd spent a lot of the war with, to then have to be secretive about where the last period of your war service was?

Yeah, we all had codes, signals, and you'd write a letter and you'd drop a word in, and your mate would know where you were.

But you wouldn't have been able to say around the bar like you know, where have you been for the last year Jim?

19:30 No, no.

What did you say?

Oh I just tell them I was stationed in Darwin on MFV2046, on northern patrol duties, that's all I used to say. One young mate of mine died about 2 or 3 months ago of a heart attack, Peter Maurie, he was ML813 when we commissioned it in Sydney, he went to Darwin with it. He served on it and stayed on it in Darwin on that right to the end of war till

20:00 cessation of hostilities, and it was discharged, and it was the only ship he'd ever been on, and the only service he'd only ever seen, was sitting on ML in Darwin harbour - little Peter Maurie. He died of a heart attack earlier in the year.

I'd like to ask you now about the cessation of hostilities?

Yeah.

You mentioned before that you were the first to land at Macassar?

We were at Macassar yeah in the Halmaheras and

20:30 we came back from there into Darwin.

I just want to interrupt, sorry Jim, could you tell me about you hearing about the end of hostilities and how people on board reacted?

Oh high jinx, we opened up the rum, and we all got full on rum. 70% O.P. [over proof] English naval rum, and it gurgled as you poured it. 'Flop flop,' it was like syrup but boy did it have a kick.

21:00 'Slurrrpp,...' beautiful.

How did the message come through to you?

On our radio.

Do you remember the words?

No, but I've got the actual signal somewhere in there, I forget what's on it now... oh just a cryptic message, nothing exciting, something to the effect that the primus or something has been notified

21:30 that Japan has signed an armistice agreement [ceasefire / peace agreement], signalling the cessation of hostilities, all ships revert back to normal peacetime role. That's all just a little succinct message nothing, nothing out of the ordinary. No cheers and beers and ice cream or anything.

And there was the normal crew on board? Did you have special forces?

We had our normal crew on board,

22:00 and the boys reckoned they could have a bit of a turn of the skipper now and get some back on him, so after they had a few rums, they just grabbed him over the side for a dunk, and two air force officers' come down on board to see him, two of his mates, and when they stepped on board they said they wanted to see the skipper and the boys said, "Glad to oblige," and grabbed the two of them, and chucked them over, the two uniforms and all. "He's down there," they said, and over they went and they had a swim too.

And did you drop the

22:30 **anchor and bust out the rum?**

No we were alongside the jetty.

Whereabouts?

At Darwin.

At Darwin?

Mmm. And I had twenty-two gallon demijohns [rum containers] of English royal navy rum stowed in the storeroom down below in the hold, and I just unlocked the - I used to give the boys, being an English ship, they were entitled to a tot of rum a day and under 18's were entitled to a glass of lemon juice

23:00 a day, and strictly wasn't allowed for them to save it, and I allowed them to save it, and they kept their beer bottles, and when I give them a tot they put it in the beer bottle and they got enough to have a drink party you know.

And was Darwin harbour - did Darwin harbour have a lot of watercraft there? Where there other...

Yeah, they whole - navy, the northern command was operating from Darwin. There were all our ships, American ships used to come in, American subs come in and base

23:30 there. We had a secret camp called the Lyger Maintenance Section, for secrecy reasons up in mangroves [small tropical tree / plant formations on river beds and coastlines in tropical areas; the plants attach their roots where mud and silt settle] up a river. Up the mangroves they had the workshop anywhere, and we used to steam up and anchor up there a secret location, and all our workshop and everything was done up there.

So did Darwin harbour go up in celebrations that evening when cessation of hostilities were announced?

Pretty much yeah, every ship was celebrating and everybody had beer and everyone up town went mad, and

24:00 the service barracks up there, all the soldiers and everything got their grog out.

Did you hear about the bomb? Did you hear about the nuclear bomb that had been dropped?

Yeah, it all filtered through to us bit by bit.

What were you first impressions?

I forget now it was all low key, just that it filtered through that - that they'd bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but we never got much particulars.

And when were

24:30 **you ordered to head to Macassar?**

Macassar? We went up there early in the piece to Macassar and was stationed up there doing patrols and after the war finished we went back up there again, then we were ferrying these Japanese troops that were on Macassar Island over to Borneo for repatriation back to Japan. That's prisoners of war. We had to ferry them across. We put them all down in the

25:00 hold, and put a couple of sheets of galvanised iron down with a big mission boiler you know those big mission pots, put that down there and gave them bags of rice and they boiled their own rice and food up in the big boiler and then we - it took us about three days to sail from Macassar across to Borneo to Balikpapan, and there we off loaded them and then, they were repatriated there back to

25:30 Japan.

Can you tell me about going ashore in Macassar? Confronting the defeated enemy, what the Japanese were like? What conditions were like there?

We never, we never come in contact with them at Macassar they were up in the mountains and neither did we come in much contact with them in Timor or Borneo.

I thought you were the first people to land at Macassar after the cessation of hostilities? Did you go ashore to have them sign the surrender, I thought you said earlier?

Yeah

26:00 we went ashore and they set up trestle tables and...

Could you explain that circumstances?

It was just trestle tables set up and the surrender gear and the group we took in to accept the surrender of top army officials, Red Cross to check out our prisoners of war that were there, and general staff. We put them ashore and they conducted all the operations. The Japanese commander came over, and he sat at the table and countersigned their

26:30 various documents - pretty low key really. But we went around to release our prisoners of war from the prisoner of war camps, and they weren't in really bad shape. They weren't in good shape but they weren't like the Burma Road prisoners of war, but we were told not to let them out. We had orders to go around and dismiss the Japanese - to keep the Japanese guards there but not let the prisoners of war out. They thought -

27:00 they were concerned that the prisoners of war would go berserk and go and kill every Japanese that they could find, but we stationed the Japanese guard on - in their normal post and then we put our men around the perimeter so I went and saw the commander of prisoner of war, the Australian commander and gave him his signals that he was keeping his men under guard they were not allowed to be outside the compound. And they stayed there until our repatriation

27:30 people came in and took all their names and numbers, and the Red Cross and medicals, examined them and what have you, then we ferried them back.

Do you remember any particular reactions from any of prisoners of war that stick in your mind, to being liberated?

No, they were quiet and subdued lot and very well controlled lot, and they were only too relieved that it was over and they were being released and we just

28:00 marched them back to the boat and ferried them back to Darwin.

Do you recall any angry outbursts from any of the Australians either in discovering the state of the prisoners of war, or the prisoners of war reacting?

No, no, never anything.

Extraordinary isn't it?

They were all - well not really they were all just a happy bunch at being released and the war was over, and they were going home. I mean if you were in that situation and you were suddenly released and you knew you were going home, would you want to be jumping up and down

28:30 and causing any tantrums?

I guess not, but I just would've imagined that there would've been people there who were so keen for vengeance against the Japanese?

No they weren't. The Government expected that, and we were told to keep them under close guard both in the compound and back to the ship but none of them I talked to wanted to go berserk and attack any Japanese.

Which of the prisoner of war camps did you visit?

The...

- 29:00 wait until I think of it again now, Macassar - Macassar - went into the Macassar camp and released them there and they were quite a happy bunch naturally, they weren't in bad shape not like the Burma Road men they weren't skeletons, they were a bit thin and weak, but they were not starved or beaten or anything like that. They were generally in good condition. They were glad to get back home and
- 29:30 they put them on aircraft, the big transport aircraft flew them back to Australia repatriation home, the Red Cross and medical officers checked them all first. Refitted them with new clothing and boots and everything then flew them back home.

Can you tell me how the crew of the trawler was disbanded?

Yeah, from Macassar. We sailed back up to Macassar

- 30:00 and we got a signal aboard that I was drafted back home, Smithy and I and subie what the heck was his name? We were all - no, no sorry that's another story. I was drafted to another little vessel the Alatna, HMAS Alatna [auxiliary fighting ship] only carried 5 men an officer and a coxswain, and I was drafted on to that
- 30:30 to take it back to Australia, and the HMAS Quickmatch [Q class destroyer / anti-submarine frigate] was in a destroyer and seeing we couldn't get aviation fuel she had two V-Scott, V12 horse Scott motors, which run on 100% high octane aviation fuel. We couldn't get any aviation fuel there and we hitched a ride on the Quickmatch and they threw out a tow line, and she was going back to
- 31:00 - to... what's the capital of - oh God, my memory - I can't think - back to Borneo, any rate, and we hitched a ride, give us a tow rope and on Christmas day 1942 we were under tow by the Quickmatch, and an American
- 31:30 10,000 tonner cargo ship came across the horizon and the skipper and I plotted it, it was on a course, which was a collision course with the Quickmatch or us. The Quickmatch plotted it also and realised she was on a collision course, but she kept on coming but being New Year's Day we all thought she was going to come and swing alongside us and say Happy New Year but instead of that she kept on coming the Quickmatch couldn't put on speed because the tow would've took us under water
- 32:00 or snapped the tow and left us in the path and we couldn't start motors because we couldn't slip the tow, it was a fixed tow to the Quickmatch, and she ploughed straight through the middle of us and sunk us. The USS Marine Runner, and she sunk us, and I lost one of my crew young fella able seaman, I can't think of his name, Donaldson, from South Australia.
- 32:30 Had to write to his parents and tell them we'd lost him at sea. He went down with her, and we were in the water for a few hours till the Quickmatch was able to - the ship was cut in half and the foreward section sunk, and was hanging on the tow line, and they had to get all that up and get the tow line off before the Quickmatch could come back and pick us up. We were in the water for quite a few hours before we were pick up,

- 33:00 then we got back to Darwin on the Quickmatch.

The Quickmatch was an American destroyer?

No Australian, HMAS Quickmatch destroyer.

And she - the US cargo ship...?

She kept on going and the Quickmatch went after her as soon as she got the tow cleared she went after her to stop her, and it appeared being New Year's Day, they were all down below having a party and no one was on watch on the bridge.

And they ran over the tow line or actually

- 33:30 **struck your vessel?**

They struck us, cut us in half right in the middle. Went straight through the middle of us and she went on. She was on auto pilot and just kept on going. The Quickmatch went after her and couldn't get anyone to hear to stop her so they put a fore warning shot across her bow port and brought them up to the Bridge pretty quickly and stopped and they told her what they'd done. There was a marine inquiry but I don't know whatever happened.

Were

34:00 **you on deck as the ship...?**

Yeah I was on the bridge on the wheel, although under tow, you still had to keep the wheel to keep in line...

What did you do when realised there was going to be a collision?

When she was about 20 foot away and still heading out, Vic said, "It's time we left don't you reckon?" and I said, "For sure," and we just went over the side and swum away but we got caught in a wave - got caught in a bow wave, and swept alongside, churned over by the screws and spewed out over the back.

So you could've quite easily been sucked into the screws?

Yes.

34:30 **Was that your concern when you hit the water?**

Yes. I'll tell you what, it's a nasty feeling I must admit that was one time during the war I was frightened going down alongside that ship I knew we were going back and went past and saw the screw, click click just turning over and just missed the screws and went out with the wave, and Vic came out behind me and that was a scary moment that one.

And the other four were in the water?

35:00 Yeah, we'd told them to abandon ship long before that when we knew she was on a collision course, I gave the order to abandon ship and they all went over. Tommy Toweek and the rest of them.

And the young AB [able seaman] drowned when he went overboard or he got trapped?

Yeah Donaldson, yeah, the last I saw of him he couldn't swim and he was standing at the guard rail on the After Deck and he was hanging onto the guard rail with his fists and I raced down. When Vic went over the side I raced down and told him

35:30 to go over and he wouldn't go over and I said, "We'll look after you, just jump over," "No," and I punched him as hard as I could and somehow I couldn't release his grip on the wires so I had to dive over, she was almost ready to hit. I reckon she was only about 10 feet away when I went over. I went over and got caught in the bow wave and down the side of the bow wave. I think that was one of my scariest moments during the war.

Sorry

36:00 **Jim what the name of the vessel that you were on, that sank?**

Alatna -A.L.A.T.N.A.

Alatna...

HMAS Alatna, a small 80 foot motor launch, patrol launch. You could turn that up in the archives or something when you get back and read that story.

Thank you, that's an amazing story. So you were then picked up and taken back to Darwin?

Picked up by the Quickmatch.

36:30 I lost all my gear and everything. I landed on the Quick Match with a pair of shorts on, that's all. And their clothing officer fitted me out with shirts and short, khaki and then we were transported back to Darwin on the

37:00 MFV - MV Merkur, [Dutch merchant navy ship - involved in supplying ships preparing for recapture of the Philippine Islands] a Dutch merchantman gave us passage back to Darwin, and we were flown home for 28 days survivor's leave, so I got home very quickly out of that. And that was a novel experience. I'm starting - just starting to write another book with all these in it.

So you returned for your 28 days survivor's leave?

Yeah,

37:30 came home.

What was it like to see Jean and your baby who you hadn't seen?

Oh fantastic, he wouldn't have anything to do with me. I always annoy Jean by saying, "He'd always run out to the gate to say good morning to the milkman, but he'd never come to me." She doesn't like me saying that for some reason.

Was it difficult, was there a separation, something that you'd missed...

He wouldn't have anything to do with me. I was a stranger to him. He'd never run to me as a dad sort of

thing. But...

38:00 **How hard was that for you to cope with?**

Oh a bit hard to try and get a rapport with him of some description, which came after about 12 or 18 months. Really, Ken had nothing to do with me until he was about 3 years of age. He suddenly started to take to me then, he suddenly started to realise that I was somebody around the place, not just a good looking guy. And, from then on, we've been very close. Number one son,

38:30 oh I had two sons, Peter, and Peter died at 29 - 31 with cancer we lost him, and then Ken and Pam are the only two I've got left.

Can you tell me about your first motorbike ride once you returned home and the war was over?

First motorbike what?

Ride?

Oh, that was - oh I had ridden while I was away because you'd got army dispatch bikes to ride on and

39:00 we had one army BSA [motorbike created by Birmingham Small Arms company] on board actually, which we used to hoist over the side and go for rides back up to naval headquarters and what have you. Detailed officer courier bike on board, on the asset sheet one BSA four and a quarter side valve courier bike, and that was to drop over side for the skipper to run up to

39:30 naval officer in charge for his orders and what have you, and ride back. And we'd just ride up to town ordering supplies at supply depot and all that sort of thing for general use ashore. That was quite good - get the motorbike, and have a ride around.

When did you decide when you would leave the navy?

Jean decided that, not me. When I got back home, the day I got back home she said, "Right you're out.

40:00 I've been 6 years without you," she said, "You're out now, and you're not coming home with that beard on. Shave that off and get your discharge and come home." So...

How quickly, how soon after returning did you get your discharge?

I was kept on board for instructional duties as a petty officer instructor in seamanship, and gunner instructor, and I served on a few more

40:30 ships and then I was stationed up there in Brisbane, in Moreton Bay on the GPV's [General Purpose Vessels] for quite a while and Jean came up and lived at Moreton Bay, lived in Brisbane, and then I put in for discharge and we had a point system for the number of combat days you had and of course I had a good lot up. The Mediterranean served me well and I had something, I know I had a good number of days up which put me high on the discharge list

41:00 as far as men that had been stationed at short depots all through the war were the last out, but us that had come back from combat duties had sea time up, were high up the totem pole, and my name came up pretty fast and I fronted up and all we got was a long trestle table and we went along the line come along and stated your name, Petty Officer Nelson, S3545, and stamped right discharged, and

41:30 I got a discharge paper and out. No counselling nothing, no goodbye, good luck or anything and yet a policeman now, some crim fires a bullet near somewhere and a policeman can get six months off on sick leave, on counselling for his distress. We've been through all that and discharged on a line on a trestle table. Nelson your service number he pulled out your paper and stamped it 'discharged,' gave you paper and out the door that's all we got.

Tape 6

00:33 **Okay I just wanted to move now to 1941 and the operations that HMAS Perth was performing around the Mediterranean and in January and February you were doing a lot of patrolling and then in March you actually took a whole bunch of Australian troops up to Greece.**

Yeah, oh British and Australian. BEF, British

01:00 Expeditionary Force I think they called it BEF, Scots and New Zealanders as well as Australians.

Can you describe the scene for me as they were all loading onto the ship?

Yeah, well we pulled up to 'number 16' wharf, boarded on there, and they all marched in. They came in in their various groups and various battalions. The New Zealanders were very sparked, very well organised and very military like in their operations, and come on board very

01:30 nicely but the British was a laugh. Anybody would've thought they were joining a PO Cruise [luxury cruise company] to go for a cruise to go the Greek Islands, and they come on board and would you believe they had 7 dogs and they had their big cabin cases you know you see them - pitch hats, golf clubs, tennis rackets and everything all come up on board, it was a joke,

02:00 it was real laughter, had all this equipment.

You on the forecastle at this point?

On what...

Were you up on the forecastle or up on the bridge?

No, I was down aft the quarter deck, and that helping them come over the gangplank, come aboard. Then we got a couple of thousand of them on board I suppose, between a thousand and a couple of thousand I suppose, and they were stacked everywhere. In the passageways, in

02:30 cabins, on the bridge on the decks in the gun turrets everywhere we got fit a bod we'd put them in as they come on board. As I say, the New Zealanders were a very happy, a wonderful bunch of fellas [fellows]. The Brits were too, but we just had a laugh at the batman carrying the officers golf clubs and tennis rackets and bringing their dogs aboard, we laughed at that.

Were most of those troops fresh recruits or were they - had they been fighting in North

03:00 **Africa?**

They most probably had been fighting in North Africa and England, no they were very - they seemed to be very well organised they were alright. And the New Zealanders, the Scots and the New Zealanders come on. Then we took off to Greece and made...

I just want to ask you one more question about the troops. Upon embarkation was morale quite high given the success in North

03:30 **Africa?**

Yeah, they were laughing and singing and yeah, morale was very high. They didn't know they were being expended at that time, Churchill had just sent them up there... 'expendable,' was the word, we all knew, everybody knew that they were going up there that they weren't going to come back. The Germans had broken through at... the Pass [Thermopylae Pass] up north

04:00 God my memory's terrible, the Pass up north, and were rapidly overriding Greece. Germany had over a million men amassed on the border just ready to flood, and were flooding into Greece, and Churchill knew that Greece was lost and we couldn't hold it, but he had to send this force up.

And you said you were aware of this predicament?

We were aware of that.

And you couldn't say anything obviously?

No.

How did you feel

04:30 **about that?**

Terrible. We didn't like unloading them all up there, and going away knowing that they were not going to come back.

What was your source of information? Where you getting this?

Just rumours and talk of in the town from Greek troops that we were friendly with, saying that Greece was lost, and various sources we had information about the big German masses on the borders that we ready to flood into Greece.

05:00 And... Hitler gave the Greek... Prime Minister till 4 o'clock in the morning to surrender Greece to him, and he refused, and then they flooded over the border at 4 o'clock the next morning and that was the end of Greece. They just came straight through, and our troops were hopelessly outnumbered, and they had to retreat.

05:30 And back to various embarkation ports we had Lominvasia, Sparta, and another one, we had a few evacuation points where we picked up as many as we could and got them back out. There's a line of ships, the Glen Line, Glenmore or Glen something else,... three 'Glen' ships went up, big transport ships, they went up and they took thousands

06:00 aboard and then we escorted them back to Alexandria.

So there was about a month between you having disembarked them in Greece, and then actually going back to evacuate them?

We had to go back to Crete to get them. They left - when we took them from Greece, we took them back to Crete where they were supposed to hold on and the German Luftwaffe come over, thousands and thousands of paratroopers dropping down to Greece,

06:30 the Greeks, the Cretians, and our Australian troops, and the New Zealand troops on Crete, were hopelessly outnumbered, and when the paratroopers landed at... the main airport I forget - I can't think of the name to mind now main airport the Malayan airport took the airport that gave them landings space and then the

07:00 paratroopers and their Junkers 88's [German bomber] and that all came over loaded with troops and had free landing on the island, and then that was the end of it. Then...

Did you witness the paratroop landing?

Yeah, I've got photos of it - photos of the paratroopers landing, we were firing 4-inch and 6-inch shells up amongst them, shooting them out of the sky.

Where was the ship at that point?

We were between Greece and Crete, and as the planes were going over, we were just offshore the parachuters

07:30 dropping, and we were just sending anything we could fire, star shells, 4-inch, 5-inch, 4-inch and 6-inch guns amongst them as much as we could.

Where was your action stations at that point?

At that time I was on the bridge.

So you could really see it all happening?

Mmm.

What was going on, on the bridge around you?

A lot of activity, skipper shouting orders up and down the bow's voice pipe, and the gunnery officer shouting orders, the

08:00 navigating officer shouting orders because we were in dicey situation just not far off shore we didn't know about the reefs or shoals we had no navigational maps on it we were just running along at high speed in virtually shallow water just a mile offshore and we didn't know what was on.

And you personally were recording what was going on around you?

Mmm, I'll just take that out,

08:30 it won't take me a minute and I'll get my little book...

We'll have a look at it afterwards mate, it's not much good for the camera at this point - so you were making notes of all the chaos that was going around you?

Yeah, yeah.

Was it difficult not to be actively involved in something like...?

No, well we were actively involved we had the stopwatch and the fleet around us, and people and the guns going off, and everything - we were involved alright

09:00 but we had to record everything we saw. The USS Juneau for instance was just off our port bow, she was hit a direct hit down the funnel, and she was hit, and she sank in a minute and a half just blew in half and sunk the Journo, and the HMS Gloucester, and other ships I saw go down, we just recorded it in the notebook and the time, it took for them to sink, and then that was all entered up in our ship's war diary

09:30 that night.

The sky was full of paratroopers coming in, but you were also being bombed by Stukas as well?

Yeah. We were firing our pompoms [automatic machine guns which fired shells] and anything that would fire up in the air amongst the paratroopers, they'd drop out of the sky like stones.

Did you experience a fear amongst that, or were you too busy?

No, no too busy and just the excitement of the battle and the adrenalin pumping.

10:00 **Can you describe what the ship felt like when it was firing all its guns like that?**

She shudders and she screams her protest when the skipper made her at like a destroyer doing U-turns at high speed, and that which cruisers don't normally do, he was throwing around like a destroyer hard at port, full head both - full ahead all engines, hard

10:30 a port, full head engines, both engines port, both engines starboard, and the screws'd scream helm and port, and she'd heel over on the side and he'd make a U-turn then mid ship straight up on the course steady at that and you'd look behind and you'd see, I've got photos in the book I've written, you'd see our weight going up there, and then you'd see the turn, and then you see where we should've been where we were going 6 black holes of the bombs going off where we should've been, and the skipper's expertise

11:00 getting us out of it.

It must've been thrilling?

Mmm, it was, as I say fear, fear never actually come in, it was more adventure and excitement more than anything and our training we were never really frightened except when one went down the funnel, it gave us a shake, all of us on the bridge were covered in black smoke and soot, and everybody when the bomb went

11:30 down it went through the - down the funnel down through the engine room, down into the bottom 'A' boiler room but didn't get to the hull and exploded in 'A' boiler room and killed about 17 on board I think. And there was a young Dutchman in the crew Able Seaman Coverhousan, or something, a Dutch name, he was the mast lookout 145 feet up. He said he felt the

12:00 bomb go past him and the heat of it burnt his legs he reckoned, and he said when he looked down all he could see was the white mushroom, white and black mushroom smoke came up and he said he was sitting up there up the top of the mast. he said he felt, "Like a witch riding a broomstick," was his comments. When he came to, the skipper ordered him to come down and give a report, and he said he heard the bomb screaming down, and he said he actually felt it pass him in front of the mast and the galley and the blacksmith shop was just

12:30 on the deck in front of them mast the foremast went through the blacksmith's shop, through the galley and down to 'A' boiler room where it exploded and it only had one more flight to go and it was through the hull of the ship at the bottom.

Was that the only direct hit you sustained?

Yeah, oh no we had strafing hits from the machine guns, and the planes strafing us. Captain was most annoyed his cabin was strafed and his curtains had point 5 bullet

13:00 holes through his - cannon holes through his curtain, he was most upset about that, Sir Phillip, wasn't happy about his cabin being strafed.

How long was that sustained period of attack?

Oh for hours at one stage, we had 500 bombers over us for 13 hours in continuous waves we were just off Trieste off Italy, between Malta and Italy, and we were only about 50 mile from their air base,

13:30 they just come across in droves, dropped bombs, and went back and loaded up and come again in continuous waves. It was estimated by Hevrington the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] reporter, they had a Sydney Morning Herald, reporter in his article, that he estimated that we had 500 bombers over us for 13 hours throwing bombs all round us.

And at what point were you then able to settle and take stock of what had happened, and focus on getting the ship ready to evacuate?

14:00 Only when the bombing stopped, when the aeroplanes didn't come over and we got out of their way and headed on another course and then got back into our convoy guarding our convoys into Malta, and then the bombing would start again on the Maltese convoys. Malta was literally besieged, and we were - we had three ships we had to get to Malta. One had

14:30 food stuffs, pardon me, ammunition I forgot what the third one, the HMS Essex [Monmouth class armoured cruiser] had ammunition and the Italians were determined that those three ships weren't going to get through, they attacked us, the USS Ryan [taskforce alpha flagship; Intrepid class heavy explorer] the HMS Ajax [Leander class cruiser] and ourself. Managed to beat them off, and then the formidable aircraft came up later, and she had

15:00 the naval air wing on board, and they come up on, and took the fighters on, and were able to fight them off. The Essex was moored behind us at the wharf, and she got a bomb in her, and she was loaded with ammunition all hulls full of ammunition, and our ship's crew went down as fighting party to put the fire out in the Essex, and one of my mates, Jack Mackway, Leading Stoker Jack Mackway

15:30 led the party, and he got a distinguished service medal for his actions in fire fighting and saving he ship from blowing up. She'd taken half of them if she'd gone. She was moored, her bow was almost touching ours turned behind us, if she'd went we'd have gone and every other ship there. That like the night in Port Pirius [port at Athens] in Greece, when the harbour went up, 28 ships sunk in the harbour in the one night.

16:00 They got a direct hit on one of the naval vessels and the ammunition ship went, and all the ships moors turned to, not moored alongside but Grecian moors, turn to, and you went ashore over stern, and the

ships side by side the fire leapt from one ship to the other ship as each went up and the ammunition went up the ship blew up and created havoc in the harbour about 28 ships went up that night.

- 16:30 I was called ashore in that. I was up at the Black Cat Café – Black Cat Cabaret, and Jack and I had the two resident singers there, Nicky and Fife, and we were sitting at a table with them in between their songs having a drink with them when the air raid siren went off, and then they were announcing all sailors get back to their ships however possible as quick as possible.
- 17:00 We got outside and managed to get an army truck going back to Pirius which is 12 miles away from Athens. We got to Pirius but the Perth had already shoved off and got out to sea where it was safer out of the harbour, and we saw a Greek officer we told him who we were and could we be any assistance to him and a breeder gun post on top of one the buildings had been strafed
- 17:30 he took us up there and he said “Can you fire a breeder?” and both Jack and I were both competent breeder operators so we said, “Yes,” he said, “Well take this, but don’t fire it at the aircraft. Wherever you see a light in the city, fire at the lights the 5th columnist lighting, lights around the village to guide the aircraft in.” So we weren’t fighting the aeroplanes, we were fighting the 5th columnists. The light would come on over the tall building and, ‘rat a tat tat’ through the window, but
- 18:00 I bent down to pick up the ammunition glove for ammunition, and the guns get hot, and I picked the glove up and the former gunner’s hand was still in it and I had to get rid of that before I could use the glove. And Jackie was firing and we put up a good show for a while. Then the harbour caught on fire, then we stayed there for the night, the next day we marched across the headlines
- 18:30 of Greek guides marched us down to a bay down the coast and the Perth come into that bay and sent boats ashore to pick us and take us aboard, and we both got fined for being adrift without leave.

Jim excuse my ignorance when did this incident at Pirius how did that fit into the Crete evacuation in terms of time?

I forget now.

Was it amongst the same period of time

- 19:00 **or was it before or after?**

It all seemed to me to be simultaneous I think we were taking to Crete the same time we were taking from Greece. Some we took from Greece and took to Crete, and landed on Crete, and then we picked up others at Crete, then and took them back to Alex [Alexandria].

So when, between the paratrooper assault on Crete, and the 13 hours of bombardment that you sustained, when did you go back and evacuate troops from Crete, how long

- 19:30 **after that?**

Well immediately, we were doing it all the time the action was on. As soon as we picked up troops, then we were being aircraft attacked all the time. Ships were sunk half the Med – nearly all the Mediterranean eastern fleet was sunk at that stage. Churchill sent an order out to Cunningham [commander in chief of the Mediterranean fleet] to send more ships up, Cunningham sent an order back I ain’t got no more. He said, “We suffered such damages up there,

- 20:00 half our fleet’s already been sunk,” and he said, “The few I’ve got left,” he said, “I can’t risk sending them up just to be sunk.” Their supremacy was too much.

So can you describe for me getting alongside to embark troops to evacuate them from Crete when you were under that sort of sustained bombing?

Well, that was horrendous, they were coming out in boats whatever they could get, we were sending our boats ashore to pick them up, and army landing barges were bringing them out,

- 20:30 and there were lots swimming out. They were all in a bad way, and we had the sling nets overside and they were clambering up those, that had swum out and I grabbed one fella by the arm and hand to help him out, and he was exhausted, and he let go and just went back and drowned went straight under. I pulled another fella up and he had 7 machine gun bullets in his shoulder and they’d been there for a week and gangrene was starting to set in, and they hadn’t been treated.
- 21:00 I got him down to sickbay for the medical orderlies to get on to him and try and fix him I never heard what happened to him later, he was in the sick bay when we got back I suppose. He was a hole – half his shoulder was shot away with these bullets, machine bullets still in there and it was just all starting to go black and smelly.

So you had about 1,200 on board was it when you were heading

- 21:30 **back to Alex?**

Oh I’d say more than that. We – they took counts when we went ashore but the counts were all varied – the counts varied between 1,000 to 2,000 and I don’t know what the actual counts were.

And it was between Crete and Alex that you got the bomb down the - down the funnel?

Yeah, yeah, between Crete and Alex we limped back to - no wait on...

22:00 no that was on Malta Convoys when we got the bomb we got hit with the bomb outside of Malta. When we got the three ships in they didn't sink them. We got the three ships in.

So were you hit evacuating Crete?

No, no that one we got hit I'm sure was off Malta, on the Malta Convoys.

22:30 They were - that's where I got hit with the bomb in Malta. I got hit, not the ship. We were very cheeky, the captain used to manoeuvre the ship out of the way of the bombs, he was quite good at that. He had a habit of stuffing his handkerchief up his sleeve pocket here and look out a report aircraft bearing such a such, one coming up the stern, aircraft bearing the stern, and the skipper would look around

23:00 and he'd take his sunglasses off, take his handkerchief out blow on his sunglasses, wipe his sunglasses and put them on and sight the aircraft and we'd all be saying, "For god's sake pass an order now," then he'd pass the order down, "hard to port, full ahead port and starboard motors, and sling away," and then we'd see where the bombs landed, where we should've been, that was quite exciting waiting for the skipper to make up his mind. Tantalising,

23:30 could you imagine standing there watching aircraft coming along and waiting to come up to you knowing it was going to drop a stick of 6 on you. But we weren't there when he got there skip had moved the ship sideways. Nice experience for a 19 year old kid wasn't it. Look at these 19 year olds down here on skateboards running around the village on skateboards often wonder about them. If I would say if they'd be there if we blew a

24:00 bugle they'd be there, they'd be alright. They get a bad name, their drugs, their abusing and everything else, but I'm sure if we blew a bugle another war started, they'd be down at the recruiting centre, they'd be there ready.

Do you think you were less innocent at that age, before the war? Before the war broke do you think you were less innocent

24:30 **than kids are at that same age today?**

Yeah, we lived a very secure comfortable life, a good families, no drugs or no drinks, we were all belong to sporting clubs. I belonged to a tennis club, and were well occupied in sports and whatever, either football or tennis and youth clubs,

25:00 and we had no idea what war was or any of those sort of things until we got there we learnt very quickly. I saw some horrible experiences as an 18 year old 19. When the bomb hit us there was about

25:30 6 of our boys and 17 of the Army we were evacuating were killed and a fellow by the name of Able Seaman Crousie [?] was detailed off with me, offside to put the bodies in canvass bags and stitch them up and put the name tag on the body for burial at sea. That wasn't a nice a job for 18 ½ years old kid.

26:00 **What did the burial at sea ceremony involve? Did the Chaplain say a particular verse?**

Yeah, all the crew are lined up, all hands on deck, all lined up round the quarter deck, a swivel planks put up with a flag tied to it, and the bodies along the line on the

26:30 deck, then the Parson [person authorised to conduct religious worship] says the words, then the body's put on this slab, then me as the bugler sounds the Last Post, the slab swivels up, and he slides up and off down in the canvass bags you've sewed them up in, the body bags. There's lead weights put in the bottom of the bag to take them straight down. They're very traumatic turnouts, particularly if the moon's out, puts an eerie taste to

27:00 it.

Was that required to be done on the evacuation from Crete on the way back to Alex?

No, no, no, the only time we had to do that when we come from Malta and we hit by the bomb when the men were killed on board that was the only time we had the burial at sea. No, there was no burials from Greece and Crete. No, a lot of very sick boys though, wounded boys.

27:30 **After you'd been hit in Malta, the Maltese conflict you had to return to Alex to for...?**

We came back, we were a quadruple cruise ship two on each side, four motors and we - our port motors were put out of action and we limped back on the starboard motors at slow speed and a couple of destroyers came with us to defend us from air attacks.

28:00 We limped back and then they put us up the dock and got our tail shafts and that all fixed up and then back out to sea again.

Was there any period of respite where you had time to settle back down after you know the

actions you been in and the intensive adrenalin and?

Oh yeah, when you got back to port, you were usually in port for a few days and back into routine scrubbing decks and painting ship and all that routine soon brought you back to earth.

28:30 Did you experience any sort of battle shock or troubles re-adjusting?

Oh yes, I have been for years, I still have occasional nightmares, yes, I wake up in the night in the middle of a dream not so much a nightmare but a dream, and I'll wake up covered in sweat and shout out a couple of things, and wake Jeanie up. I still have them occasionally, bad dreams.

Were you noticeably shaken up in the short

29:00 term period after evacuation...?

Yes, short term period yes, yeah. DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] and Concord Repatriation Hospital, put it down to... what do they call it...

Post traumatic stress?

Oh I forget now, I was in there for treatment for a while...

29:30 of what did they put it down to?

Was it post traumatic stress disorder?

No that terms wasn't heard that's all the new modern day slang they were just - 'shell shock' was the first know, for the First World War was, 'shell shock,' but I went to Concord and they treated me, oh I forget now.

Were you treated between your service in the Mediterranean

30:00 before you went to the small ships?

No.

This was after the war?

After the war. After the war I had a few breakdowns and they put me into Concord Repat Hospital then treatment started then. There's another name for that age of, 'shell shock,' but not post traumatic order, or whatever it is now, it was just another name, I forget what it was.

30:30 I don't actually forget, but this stroke what I had has just closed my brain off I can't - I can't even open up the computer. I open up the computer and I don't know what keys to press to go any further. Can't remember how to use the computer.

How did the - did the crew talk amongst themselves about the discomfort and the stress or the trauma that they'd experienced after

31:00 the evacuation of Crete and the Battle of Malta?

Not really, when we were back on board we carried out our normal lives and mateships and friendships and when we were ashore it was a matter of going to the tavernas in Greece or the pubs in Egypt and having a few beers and a bit of excitement with a couple of brawls here and there and then it was back to normal - back to our normal abnormality.

31:30 No nobody talked much about and as you know and as you've heard on Anzac Day, we don't discuss it either. People think you go up to Anzac Day and get drunk and play two-up and discuss how you won the war, but we never do. We go up there, I meet my commando group, and we go to a pre-booked luncheon, have a few beers and luncheon, they all talk about is about the happy times, the funny things that happened.

32:00 Like Jackie Cox in that photo coming back on board one night in a blackout walking along the street and ran slap bang into a kerbside letterbox. What did Jack do, he started fighting it, punching it - the letterbox - he thought somebody had grabbed him, that was funny. Another time my sister was a champion dancer, she came 3rd in the 'Australian Ballroom Championships,' and

32:30 she was dancing at the Trocadero [Sydney entertainment venue] in Sydney, and Jackie and I had leave that night and we were going down to the Troc to watch her dancing in the comp [competition], that's when she come 3rd in the comp, and a couple of pros [prostitutes] come off the street. There's these two nice sailors were walking down, so they asked did we want their services, and Jackie said, "No, we're not interested," one of them swiped Jackie's coxswain's hat, and spat at it, so Jackie gave her a backhander and got his cap back.

33:00 Was that common when overseas and in the Mediterranean and in Alexandria or Ayden, the various ports...?

Yeah.

Was that part of the culture as well, the prostitutes?

Not in Greece so much. Greece was more moral, catholic, and Malta, not at all at Malta. Matter of fact Maltese girls were - it was against the law for Maltese girls to talk to foreign servicemen. Maltese girls would have nothing to do with us but

33:30 Alex and Colombo, Bombay and those places, as soon as you got ashore the little pimp would come up, "You come meet my sister, she very nice, she very sweet, she very..." tugging his hand. The little boys, 11 year old pimps for their big sister that was very common. And all along the waterfronts in all ports I've been to, are lined with street side brothels but not in Greece or Malta.

34:00 **Did you find in the period after you faced such intense battle conditions on Perth that that brought the crew together more closely?**

Yes.

Did she operate at a more professional level having been through that together?

Yes definitely, yeah all your training come into being then your guns crews worked more efficiently and quickly. You had aircraft attacking you, you couldn't be fumbling around saying, "Now where do we store the point 5 ammo?" you had to get it and get it quickly and

34:30 the helmsman had to act quickly, the helmsman, telegraphs man, the engine room fellas had to act quickly and do what they - and the signalmen had to act quickly for various flag and semaphore [flag signalling system] and all the flag signals between ships to change formations and all the rest of it. Quite a number of ships were rolled at sea in changing formations. HMS Queen Mary [Lion class battleship] rolled

35:00 one, or was it the Queen - QE2 [actually means HMS Queen Elizabeth; Dreadnought battleship] I think it was. No it was the Mary, the flag signal went up, 'change course 45 degrees to port,' of the attacks of everyone, and all ships when the flag was dropped the signal flags dropped, all turned hard to port and turned, the destroyer was a bit slow in turning and got in front of the Queen Elizabeth, and the Queen Elizabeth, she just rolled her over and, the HMS Cossack [Tribal class battleship] I think it was, she just went straight down.

35:30 And the HMAS Melbourne [aircraft carrier] did here to Melbourne, what was the one? The Melbourne our Melbourne aircraft carrier sank one of our destroyers, the same thing changing course, changing the position at sea and getting the wrong signals and getting the wrong course and a night time manoeuvre particularly.

Jim, what were the circumstances that led to you coming off the Perth?

I was just drafted,

36:00 because I'd volunteered for 'Hazardous Enterprises and Covert' - Covert Operations - 'Covert and Hazardous Enterprise,' so I put my name down as a volunteer and when I got back on - into Sydney, I was drafted off to depot, to take up duties on small ship training for small ship marine operations for Z Special Unit.

So you period on Sydney harbour with the small

36:30 **ships, was as a precursor to you going away to Darwin?**

Yeah. I had to go to Rushcutters and train there on small ships and do navigation, crew training and knocking my crew together.

How did you go adapting - adapting between such a large ship you know with 650 odd

37:00 **crew on the Perth, to the small ships, was it difficult?**

The Perth was 735 actually.

Was that a difficult shift for you?

Oh yeah, a friendly ship your Jim, Jack George and Bill and your all live together, messed together, ate together and slept together, I don't mean physically but figuratively. Your hammocks were all, had two bars across and you had 18 inches of space between each hammock hook so you swung with me on the ship, you bumped me and I come back and bumped you. So we

37:30 figuratively slept together so you on the big ships you did that but on the small ships some of them on the more luxurious pleasure craft were commandeered they had bunks, cabins and bunks, but generally the dockies [workers on the shipping docks] just had to put hooks in the bulkheads anywhere to sling a hammock up.

And as a coxswain, I guess you were more isolated, you didn't have the same...?

I had a cabin.

38:00 There's always a cabin on all those luxury cruisers, you see them at Bobbin Head, and those places

they've all got luxurious cabins for the owner and staterooms. The Lolita belonged to Herbert Small, have you ever heard of him? The Small's chocolate, Club chocolate, you've never eaten Club chocolate? You've never eaten chocolate then. Herbert Small was the owner of Small's Chocolates, Club Chocolates and when they took his

- 38:30 boat from Bobbin Head, the dockies came on board with their hobnail boots and drilling machines and what have you, and they come aboard and transferred it into a navy vessel all his beautiful stateroom with french polish wood all round and couches were all ripped out, and bunks were put in, and holes drilled all round his french polished walls. He came down to the depot one day and announced who he was, and the quarter master
- 39:00 brought him round to me, that he'd asked permission to come on board and see his ship, and I said, "Yeah come on board," he nearly cried. He even had two boxes at the gangway with sandals, new sandals in them men's and ladies so as you come on board you took your shoes off, and you got a size out of the box and put on the sandals so his lovely white decks were not marked, and when he come on board and seen what they'd done, they'd screwed gun racks in his wheel house,
- 39:30 drills in - put planks with - so you could guns, threes in them, then up on the bridge they had put all the signal halliards and signal flag boxes up, screwed on to his beautiful bridge, and all his bunks were ripped out and - bunks ripped out, and they put in the navy - navy bunks. It was a proper wreck, and they told him that his
- 40:00 boat would be given back to him after the war or he would be paid recompense. He said, "If they pay me recompense and give me the boat back," he said, "Or if they just give me the boat back," he said, "I'll just sail it out 12 miles off Sydney harbour, off the ridge, where you get the deep," he said, "Just pull the plug out and let it go to the bottom." He said, "I'll never try and refurbish her." He said, "Before I go, have a look at this," he pressed against the panel on the wall, you know those panels
- 40:30 with a framework, he pressed against the panel and click and there was a safe in there. He said, "There's a little secret for you to keep your secret papers." So I always used to carry a bottle of whiskey in there, but push the panel back, open the safe and put the whiskey in and close the panel. I always used to have a whiskey at sea it was quite good.

Tape 7

- 00:34 **Sorry Jim, you were going to tell me about the spud runs, what were they?**

The 'spud run,' got its name from the corvettes, destroyers and cruisers running up supplies to Tobruk and Mersa Matruh, and places like that, where the 9th Army was besieged, 'the Rats of Tobruk' as they're known, and they were besieged in Tobruk.

- 01:00 They took Tobruk, and then they couldn't get supplies through by land, and the navy were called upon to take them up supplies. So the corvettes run up supplies, and one of the main issues they sent of course was spuds, potatoes, bags and bags of potatoes were loaded on board and hence it got the name, 'the spud run'. We'd run up and get into

- 01:30 Tobruk harbour, unload the supplies and get out again. It was very tricky, and a few of our ships were sunk doing that procedure. Defender was one of them, we went up to try and save her, she got hit up there off Tobruk. We went up several times with supplies and go into Tobruk harbour, and when you threw the lines out to the jetty you didn't know whether Germans had

- 02:00 retaken Tobruk again, I think it changed hands about 9 times. British got in, then the Germans got the British out, and the Germans got in, then the Australians got in, 'The Rats of Tobruk,' they dug in, and the Germans never got them out. And, you'd never know whether it was Germans going to take your lines, or Australians. And then we dropped the supplies off the boat and that was a very dangerous run. Several of our ships, the HMAS Waterhen [destroyer] was one, HMS Defender [D class destroyer] was another, was sunk there on the Tobruk

- 02:30 'spud run,' and that was another dangerous run to feed the 9th Army that were besieged at Tobruk.

And you were going to speak a little bit about Syria - in Syria the actions?

Oh Syria, right... well we were stationed at Haifa

- 03:00 on the coast of Palestine, and we got a message to go up and bombard a river entrance up there called, 'Wadi de Moore.' Now 'Wadi,' is 'river,' 'River de Moore.' Our Australian troops were pinned down on one side of the valley, and the French Resistance were on the other side of the valley, and our troops couldn't get down to cross the river to get up to advance. And they got that far up, advancing on Beirut,

- 03:30 and they got pinned down and asked for naval assistance to come and bombard the French positions, so we went up with a couple of corvettes which cruised closely to the land, and they fired their 4-inch up on to the hillside where the French were, and we stayed a bit further out to sea and fired our 6-inch above the tops of them. And we were getting directed from an OP [observation post] post in our

Australian section on our gun fire,

04:00 up a hundred, or down a hundred, or east a hundred, or left a hundred, wherever our shells landed the were guiding us in the OP post, and we finally wiped out all the French gun positions there, and our troops were able to come down the valley, get across the river and come up and storm on to Beirut. We later learned that the fellow that was giving us the OP post directions was

04:30 Sergeant Roden Cutler and he eventually as you know became Sir Roden Cutler and that was our connection with him, and then after we done – after we had done that, we cruised up the coast with orders to take out the radio mast at Beirut, and when we got up to Beirut there was the radio mast, tall and straight in the air, and the captain gave our gun turret

05:00 captains open fire, free fire, self selection. The captains were allowed to select their target. He said, “I want that radio mast brought down.” Now, four turrets swung outwards and the radio captains took their own range findings and gun settings and away they all blast off, the tower come down in the first salvo [rapid discharge of firearms or release of bombs]. And that put the French resistance out of action, and the French

05:30 called an armistice next day. They signed up the next day after when we’d knocked their connections out, and they didn’t like being bombarded from sea with a naval bombardment. So that was a French armistice, that’s all I had to say about that, but Waddy de Moore was more important because our troops were held up there and couldn’t get across and couldn’t advance to take Beirut until we plastered them with

06:00 high explosive 6-inch shells from sea, and get the directions to drop our shells onto the correct targets knocked out all their gun emplacements.

How long did it take to do that?

Oh a couple of hours. Once we steamed off, we were only a mile off shore and once we steamed off and going in position up the coast, the army got in contact with us and then OP got connected up to us then

06:30 they gave us the position they wanted us to fire at, at the side of the valley on the mountain where the gun positions were, and our gunnery directives got sights on that and bearings, then they opened fire and wiped them out and that was good, that was our job over.

That must’ve been a great sense of

07:00 **achievement to know what impact that would have?**

Oh it was, oh when we got back into Haifa and the soldiers come down on leave, we didn’t have to buy a beer. The beers were on the army from thereon.

Can you talk generally about the comradery between the different services?

It was good. The soldiers or, ‘swatties,’ as they were known, and the, ‘matlows,’ as the navy was known. The sailors were matlows, the army servicemen are swaties, the

07:30 swaties and matlows got on very well together. It was the air force never got along too well because we were all calling the air force, and they were never there to protect us from the Luftwaffe attacks, and we had a bit of down on the air force, but army blokes were alright. My cousin Jackie Maxwell was killed there. My aunty

08:00 wrote me a letter saying Jackie was stationed at Haifa could I look him up. So I went ashore to the army and gave his number and rank and unit that my aunty had told me he was in. They told me he was just in camp – camp was just out of town a few miles, so Jackie and I, and the boys hired a car and we drove out to the camp. On the way we passed a, ‘blue orchid’ [members of air force], as we call them walking along the road,

08:30 but we wouldn’t give him a lift because he was an air boy, a fly boy, so we passed him, and went and found the camp to find that Jackie had been moved further up the front that day, and when we caught up with him eventually about a fortnight later, or caught up with his unit, he had been killed in action. So, I had to write back to the army – to the aunty, and tell her he had been killed in action, although she’d got the service letters but the boy I passed was a friend of Jean

09:00 and I’s from our work. Bottle, Bluey Bottle, he was in the air force and when we met after the war, he told me he didn’t like the navy and I said, “Why’s that?” he said, “I was walking back to my camp and four army guys – 4 navy guys went past in a car and refused to give me a lift,” he said, “I never like the navy after that.” I said, “Would you believe those 4 Army – 4 Navy guys could’ve been me and my mob?” yeah, that was Bluey Bottle.

09:30 **That must’ve been a very difficult letter that you had to write home?**

Yeah. But... young guy got... I just wrote a very simple letter to the effect that he was a very nice lad, a very good sailor, easy to teach and was a good asset to the crew and unfortunately was still on the upper deck when

10:00 the ship was rammed and he went down with the ship that was all. I didn't elaborate on the - just told his parents he was a good lad. Yeah, they were hard letters to write those.

And just moving now to hearing about the Perth being hit...?

Yes, I was going to work, I bought a newspaper at the top of the newsstand at the railway station at

10:30 Belmore. Went down and got on the train and opened up the paper and there's the headline, 'HMAS Perth sunk - 735 men believed missing at sea,' and I cried, burst out crying then... knowing Jackie and the other boys were on board, and that was how I found out about it.

11:00 Stark headlines, 'HMAS Perth sunk - 735 men missing at sea - list of the crew on the back page,' and I've still got the list in there, as a matter of fact I published it in the book there, but that was very traumatic.

How did you spend the rest of that day Jim? Like where did you go like having lost so many mates?

Yeah, I got to work and I wasn't very happy.

11:30 And the boss was a very thoughtful kind man and told me to take things easy and go back and do some stocktaking, we were getting near July and he said keep me away from the public today... which I did and I counted nuts and bolts

12:00 and spare parts in the motorcycle department all day. Kept out of sight, kept away from everybody, and then when I got home and quietened down in a couple of days I wrote a letter to Jackie Cox's mother... they're the parts of war you never want to talk about.

We can stop if you need to stop?

12:30 Mmm... sorry about that.

That's okay. I would feel the same way if I lost a lot of my mates like that, it's just normal.

Yeah. Yes...

Does thinking about the good times together help you?

Yeah, we only speak about the good times.

13:00 Who wants to remember the bad times? On Anzac Day all the boys seem to want to talk about, who can tell the tallest story of what happened during the war.

You had a reunion earlier this year didn't you?

A couple of months ago, that's where I had this stroke, yeah,

Yeah tell us...

HMAS Perth reunion - well it wasn't a reunion - well it was reunion

13:30 it was the launching of the new Perth, they've just built down at Tenaxe Ship Yards at Melbourne, [?] and being original, member of the original Perth crew, I got an invite to the official party. Jean and I had to go down so we went down, it was a great down and the Perth was up on the slips, a beautiful ship, and the naval bands played,

14:00 and the politicians gave the speech of how good the government was in building it and funding it, then they cut the horse that held and then she just slid down the slipway into the water and she went down stern first, the stern wobbled and the midship come down and she rolled a little backwards and forwards and then the stern came in and she shook herself and righted, and then everybody, about 2 ½ thousand of us yelled out, "She floats!"

14:30 But, then they had one of the big assembly sheds had been cleared out, and Tenaxe put on a marvellous afternoon of drinks, and they'd had special wines brewed, red and white wines with special labels on them. I just got a letter if I wanted some of the labels, and get a couple dozen each and put our Perth labels on the bottles.

15:00 But they put on food what do you call it, finger food, and beer and wine and champagne flowed all afternoon. I said to Jean, "I'm not feeling well, get me back to the hotel" so we got back to the hotel and I laid down on the bed and then I promptly collapsed back down and had that stroke. They called the ambulance and the paramedics came round and they put me into Wentworth

15:30 Private Hospital down there, paralysed down this side, couldn't talk, and they weren't doing much for me, I was just lying in bed and Jeanie being the organiser that she is, that didn't sit with her, so you got on to the DVA and said, "Do something I want him repatriated, transferred from Wentworth up to John Flynn," and she pummelled them, and they sent out a male nurse and organised an

16:00 ambulance and everything to do a transfer to Qantas, and Jean organised Qantas with a male nurse, and

then they picked me up in an ambulance, took me out to the airport, put me on a plane and dropped me at Coolangatta into John Flynn Hospital, and then they started to do some work on me and then I got going then, then back to Murwillumbah Hospital, to the Rehab Unit [rehabilitation unit.]

And three months later you're sitting here telling this story to us...

16:30 Yes, three months later. This leg's still wonky, still won't walk properly.

How does it sit with you personally, knowing that there is a new Perth now?

Oh wonderful, knowing the fact that when she's at sea and I hear reports we can say we saw aboard. Margaret Gee, the daughter of one of my

17:00 mates on the Perth, went down Alma Gee, Margaret because of a connection through her father was nominated by us all in the association as the, 'Launch Lady,' and she threw the bottle at the bow and launched it and, "I name thee Perth," she said, but that was very good too.

Was she a good looking ship?

Oh beautiful. I had the photos out, I could've showed

17:30 you the photos of us all on the slipway and the photos of her sliding down in the water. It was marvellous to walk under her and look up at the flair of her bow and all that. Jean was absolutely impressed she had never been to anything like that to see a ship out of the water like that you know and walk around underneath it.

What were your thoughts when you first laid eyes on her?

What a beautiful ship she was. I'd like to go back to sea on her.

18:00 And I'll most probably get an invitation but I won't be able to go. The navy indicated that a few of us originals would be contacted to sail on her first trip out of dockyard back to Sydney which is a common on all ships that are commissioned when they leave the dockyard they

18:30 send for about a dozen or so of the ex-members of the original to sail with her back to Sydney.

So Jim what about post-war life now, you leave the navy after 6 years...

Yeah.

Just briefly how's the rest of your working life and...

Not was good as navy life.

You missed the navy?

Yeah, navy life you're regimented, you know what you're doing, you know

19:00 the laws, you know the punishments, you know the rules, and you abide by them, and you've got your friends. When I went to Bennett and Wood where Jean and I met and worked, the boss was a nasty little man, the big boss, and the law was they had to take us back, ex-servicemen they'd go back to our original jobs, but when I left there I was 18 when I came back I was 24 or 25 or something and he wasn't going to

19:30 give me a job, and he had it in for me when I come back. He got me into his office and he told me that I come back he said, "Don't go parading your high-handed navy rules and regulations around here, a petty officer's nothing to me," he said, "You're just a salesman behind the counter," he said, "So put a dustcoat on and get behind the counter," he said, "And none of your high-handed navy stuff here, how you won the war and everything." And he was on to me every day, every

20:00 time something went wrong he picked me and one day we had a bit of a row and I decided this was where my navy high-handed day should come in. So went to his office and repeated a lot of the things he'd said to me, what he'd said about me, I said, "Well you can revert all that back to you only use your name instead of mine," and I said, "And I have not been fired I've resigned," and I just grabbed him by the tie and pulled him over and give him one a beauty

20:30 knocked him out, laid him back in his swivel seat and walked out. I wasn't fired, I resigned and five other of the boys walked out with me would you believe. They'd seen the treatment I'd got and they weren't happy about that, and two of them, Vince Reid and myself and another guy went over to the PMG [Postmaster General] and got jobs as motorcycle dispatch men, riding

21:00 Harleys because we were all Harley men, and come from the Harley, visitors and we had no trouble getting jobs there as riders. So I was riding around another year delivering telegrams on motorcycles. A mobile telegram boy.

Was that a good job for you to be mobile?

Yeah, yeah, we did the long distance, what they called 'the death run' strangely enough. You could

- 21:30 send, I think you still can... I don't know, but when you had a death in the family you could send up to 50 telegrams as a mass production death run, notify all the relatives. And we were stationed at the GPO [general post office] in the basement with our bikes, and then we'd be called to the desk and the dispatcher would give you about 50 telegrams, and I had the northern run because I knew that best. Up, we delivered telegrams all up through Chatswood,
- 22:00 through to St. Ives, through Mona Vale and up to Pittwater and around there, and delivered all these telegrams to relations, and that was quite good. And one job one night usually took up the whole night, that was good.
- What about, I'm interested for you and relationship with Jean like having been away for 6 years obviously you came and back and forth a couple of times...**
- Oh, she had a couple of boyfriends while
- 22:30 I was away, but she decided that when I came back that I was best looking out of the lot. I didn't give her much of a chance.
- Like, was it hard for you two like, you got married so young, and then you were away for a long time, it must've been like getting to know a new person again...**
- Yeah.
- Can you talk about that at all?**
- Oh we got together reasonably quickly, didn't take long.
- Did you have a lot of letters that kept you sort of connected that way or?**
- Yeah, yeah I've got one letter still in
- 23:00 there in the file number 13, that I'd sent her that she'd kept for various reasons, and I've got that in the file and it's emblazoned on the back letter number 13 you used to number each one so we could tell what went astray and what were never delivered, but no, I had no trouble. I met her when I come back, and I kissed and cuddled her, and we were back together again. Took her out, raced around,
- 23:30 and we made arrangements to get married which we did, and then 18 months after that young Ken was born and then we had a young baby and everything was going fine. Had a few arguments here and there along the way, but we got through them, we battled through them.
- Was there any sense that either your training or**
- 24:00 **just your war experience had an impact on how you related to people in your family and people close to you?**
- Oh yeah, I thought everyone were fools, they were all fools. No one was efficient, nobody knew how to do things properly, and they were all fools following their own little pursuits and egos and everything, but we were bred to discipline in the navy, every man knew his job perfectly, and he knew exactly what he had
- 24:30 to do at a certain time, and I knew exactly what he would do at a certain time, and you worked like clockwork machinery, but in civilian life that just didn't seem to happen, everybody seemed to go their own way. But I did like the regimentation of the navy. I liked to know what I had to do, when I had to do it. I liked the discipline and know the rules, and it was great.
- Do**
- 25:00 **those values stay with you to this day?**
- Yeah, I took them right through my business when I had a printing company my employees and everyone I treated them the same way. I made sure they knew what they had to do, always made sure they knew the house rules so if they ever broke them I jumped on them, and they knew that I was in the right, and I followed strict disciplinary measures and gave precise orders,
- 25:30 do this or do that. Not, "Johnny, later on when you're not busy, I would like you to do something or other," I didn't do that. "Johnny right now, or in ten minutes time I want you to do so and so," and he'd do it, and it was done properly. So we followed that same discipline. I brought Ken up my son the same way. He knew the house rules, he knew what happened if he broke the rules, he knew what was required of him, and responded to all that.
- 26:00 And he often says today, "My Dad was a strict disciplinarian, and he gave me hell when I was a kid, but do I appreciate it now in my business and bringing up my own children." He brought Todd up the same way. Todd never did back answer Ken or disobey him. Ken - Ken's a strict disciplinarian also, and he works to the same routine.
- 26:30 **Jim, would you say that you are also quite hard on yourself and strict on yourself as part of that training?**

No, no.

Like, that you ask a lot of yourself?

I do now occasionally but I still ask a lot of myself.

INTERVIEW ENDS