

Australians at War Film Archive

Frank Smith (Smithy) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Thank you very much for doing this today Frank. It's a pleasure to be here. Without your help we couldn't do it, so to begin with thanks very much.**

Well I hope we're doing it for posterity.

Exactly. Exactly. The first thing we need to do is just a summary of your service, a bit of a service record to begin with. So also beginning with

01:00 **where you grew up.**

I was born on Farm 796 Yenda, New South Wales. That's in the Riverina in the Murrumbidgee irrigation area, which was a soldier settlement area started after 1914-18 war [First World War] and my father decided to break the tradition of the family, and become a farmer, not a sailor. So he served in the

01:30 army during the 1914-18 war. I went to the local primary school at Yenda to sixth class. When I reached sixth class, they then had built a high school at Griffith, which was ten miles away and we would catch a bus each day to go to Griffith. I went to Griffith High School for something like three years.

02:00 I never ever thought of anything else in my... what was to happen to me in the future. I had a desire to join the navy from my earliest age and that was probably in my bloodline because my grandfather was a marine engineer in the 1800s.

02:30 I left school and went home. I worked for my Dad for about six months and then I got called up or my application was accepted to join the Royal Australian Navy permanent for 12 years from the age of 18. That was on the 6th of August 1940.

03:00 I was sworn in and they still had the old tradition of giving you a shilling, and we were sworn in on the deck of the [HMAS] Penguin alongside Garden Island on the evening of the 6th, and caught the train to Melbourne that night to go to Flinders naval

03:30 depot [Cerberus], where I spent the next six months. Being only 17 I wasn't allowed out of the depot unless I had a foster parent in Melbourne or someone to take care of me, so the only leave I got from there Christmas leave in seven days, in 1940. I finished the course there. I think it was in

04:00 April I think we finished course. The reserves were doing three months. We were doing twice that plus a bit extra and my first draft was to the HMAS Hobart, which was a modern six inch Leander class cruiser.

04:30 It was due into Sydney at some date and whilst it was waiting to come into Sydney I moved aboard the [HMAS] Kuttabul, which was later blown up by a torpedo. I think it was in early June I joined the [HMAS] Hobart. I did mark it and we went into dry dock in

05:00 Cockatoo Dock, and finished dock, came out, re-ammunitioned, stored, and supplied, and slipped out of Sydney on our way... that was in June, on our way to the Mediterranean. We left Sydney, fuelled at Fremantle, fuelled in the Seychelles Islands and arrived in Port

05:30 Tewfik. Port Tewfik for a young 17 year old, my eyes nearly popped out of his head when he saw the number of ships. There was battleships and there was troop ships. The harbour was absolutely crammed with ships because they'd mined the Suez Canal and the mines had to be cleared before so many ships were let through. So we were due to go through and we couldn't. We had to stay that night.

06:00 That night was my first night of actually punching a shell up a four inch valve. My action station was the four inch gun deck loading number on the left gun of B2 mounting. There was a very heavy air raid that night. They were very successful. They hit the ship called the

06:30 [USS] Georgie. It was loaded with troops and it was chaotic actually.

We'll come back and talk about that particular air raid and all those experiences.

Then we went into the Suez Canal, into the Mediterranean and we stayed in the Mediterranean until after Pearl Harbour. Two days after Pearl Harbour we were recalled back to Australia. We

- 07:00 arrived in Singapore about a couple of weeks before Christmas or something like that. Then we operated in that area, Fremantle, Singapore, Colombo,
- 07:30 Fremantle up until March 1941, no that would be '42 and in '42 we came back to Sydney, and
- 08:00 we were given seven days leave. After a very short refit we joined the cruiser HMAS Australia and went up, and took part in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Then back to Brisbane, then the next
- 08:30 action was the invasion of the Solomon Islands, the disaster of Savo Island [9 August 1942] and then back to Sydney, and I left the Hobart after serving on it for almost two years. I went up from an ordinary seaman second class to an ordinary seaman, to able seaman [AB]. I left as an able seaman and I went to Flinders naval depot to do
- 09:00 an anti-aircraft gunners course. I finished that course and I was drafted to the V&W [class] destroyer HMAS Vendetta. Now she was based in Brisbane at the time. It was funny joining a ship that you saw
- 09:30 about six months before being towed out of Singapore.

Where did you serve on the Vendetta?

The Vendetta we did the convoys from up the coast and then up all around New Guinea, up to Madang, Finschhafen, Hollandia,

- 10:00 all for all those actions that took place in New Guinea we were there. I spent about two years on Vendetta and then I was drafted back down to Flinders to do a higher anti-aircraft gunnery
- 10:30 course. I completed that course and I was drafted to a converted Adelaide Steamship Company [ship], which was converted into an ammunition ship. 5000 tons of ammunition we carried and I still don't know to this day how I ended up on there because I certainly didn't have a bad record.
- 11:00 The object of that ship was to take ammunition to the Australia and the [HMAS] Shropshire up in the Leyte Gulf, and that's where we were headed for, and then the Lingayen Gulf, we were tailing behind there, and
- 11:30 we'd expended all our cargo, and was on our way home, and the war ended.

You stayed in the navy?

I stayed in the navy permanent, yes.

And when the Korean War broke out where were you?

I was on the passenger ship [SS] Orion on the way home from England after being commissioned and the Korean War broke out.

- 12:00 Now I had no thoughts... I thought the thing would be over in 48 hours. I couldn't be more wrong could I. I didn't think I'd have to be deeply involved in it and after the Korean War I came back to Sydney. I got married when I came back
- 12:30 from the First World War ex then. [?]

Just to cover, you served on the [HMAS] Murchison in Korea?

Pardon?

The Murchison was the only ship you served during the Korean War.

The HMAS Murchison was during the Korean War. I served on another frigate after peace had been declared, the HMAS Condamine I served on.

13:00 When did you leave the navy?

In May 1955. In May 1955 I had had enough. I wasn't prepared to talk to anyone of my problems.

- 13:30 It looked as though I was never ever going to get ashore for any length of time because... If it was today I would probably have been taken off and counselled, and
- 14:00 probably stayed in the navy. I don't know. That's problematical but I thought, "Well I've had enough. I want to get away from killing people and that's it." And I got another appointment to another ship going back up to Japan and I thought, "No. This is it." I did what was considered impossible in the navy at the time,

- 14:30 I resigned but the point was I was an expert on King's Rules and Admiralty Instructions, and I knew damn well I could resign on three months notice, which I did, and I stuck out, and they left me on the ship. So actually I left the navy in Osaka in Japan,
- 15:00 went ashore and I was a civilian, flew home, and tried civilian life, and I knew nothing about civilian life, and I would prefer to forget the period I spent trying to be a civilian on the land because everything... even though whatever I took up I
- 15:30 achieved. I sold life assurance, got top figures, managed life assurance offices but never... no satisfaction whatsoever, good money, but still no satisfaction. In about '63... not only that, in between I'd had several trips to hospital and
- 16:00 things started to come back on me, which required treatment for mental disorders, which they call... they've got all different names of things these days. What do they call it... traumatic something syndrome or something [PTSD: post traumatic stress disorder]. I don't know what they call it now. It was called war neurosis when I had it and they gave
- 16:30 me electric shock treatment, and I was hospitalised for quite a few months over that period of five or six years, and I made many moves searching for something but it was no good searching for something because the something I was searching for wasn't there, because I
- 17:00 wanted to really be back at sea. So got the opportunity to go back to sea in the merchant marines as a deck officer and I grabbed it, and went back as a deck officer. A very old friend of mine came to me one day and said, "Frank would you like to come to one of my ships?" I said, "Well Gerald I'm not very
- 17:30 keen on your ships." I said, "They're very small and they're highly explosive." Because had the contract of carrying dynamite around the Australian coast and to New Zealand, and he said, "But I want you and I want your expertise on explosives. So let's make a deal." So we made a deal and I went mate
- 18:00 of one of his ketches, and we used to do our trip across to Western Australia, 180 tonnes it was. We used to carry 30 odd thousand cases of dynamite for the mines, across to New Zealand to down south, the south island of New Zealand, and
- 18:30 then a job came up in the paper. I was getting a bit chock of this and the job came up in the Victorian government for a marine inspector. So I went and had a talk to a chap I knew there. I said, "What's the job?" He told me the job. I said, "That sounds all right," fits both pictures, a little bit of shore time,
- 19:00 all the work involved was maritime. I said, "That's the job." So I went to the Victorian government. I've forgotten what year it was... '68 or something like that.
- 19:30 It was a good job. There was no doubt about that. It was laying harbour for small boats and things like that, real interesting work, lots of job satisfaction, and home every night because my family had grown. I had four children by this stage, two boys, two girls
- 20:00 and then the big chief sent for me one day and he said... Actually I missed one very important part. One part was that we went home on Friday and the Victorian government never had an anti-pollution or anti-environment protection society. It happened over the weekend.
- 20:30 They interviewed a chap called Murray Burn who was the minister for agriculture or something and we became the pollution authority, anti-pollution, anti-oil pollution, all because these high school kids' picnic got washed out at Williamstown. Someone let a burst of oil out but that started the big clean up of the oil pollution in Victoria, which I ran for about four years.
- 21:00 **I have to stop you there and we might come back to your post-war jobs at the end of the interview if we have time.**
- Yep.
- You mentioned your family. You married and had children.**
- Yes I married. I married the girl next door. Where I was born there were orchards in that area and each farmer was allocated
- 21:30 34 acres, I think it was from memory, and the chap next door, who was so badly shot up in the First World War that he couldn't go on with his farm, so they said to my father, "We'll chop that five acres off and leave the house up there for them, and you can take over the rest." Which he did, he took over. He ended up with a very big farm compared with all the other farms.
- 22:00 A family moved into that house, the Miller family and there were eight children in the family, and the second eldest was the daughter, which I married. I went off to the navy in the August and she went off to nurses training in the October at Leeton. We corresponded but
- 22:30 nothing serious until probably just towards the end of the war it got a bit serious. Perhaps I got a bit mellow I suppose. I don't know but that's what happened then. We got married in February 1946 and our son Peter was born in the April

23:00 1947. That's my eldest boy. He's here in Canberra, a senior public servant. Then along came two girls and then we thought that's the family but then nine years later an accident happened, and another one came along, and that's my youngest son. My youngest son is following in Dad's footsteps. He took to the

23:30 sea. He did his cadetship with the ANL [Australian National Line] and went to the Marine College in Launceston, and was with BHP [Broken Hill Proprietary Co Ltd]. He was senior captain of BHP until they... a couple of years ago they took him and a marine engineer, and said, "Here's 30 million [dollars], away you go. We want

24:00 you to go around and find an 120 thousand tonne tanker, which can be converted to an oil production platform, which can anchor over the top of a small oil field." And that was done 51% BHP, 50% Canadian Petroleum... 49% Canadian Petroleum.

So he's in the oil business now?

He's been in the oil business in a big

24:30 way and in big demand. He's now... BHP foolishly decided to sell their half share in what they thought was going to be something that turned about a normal little, reasonable profit into something that turned into an absolute goldmine but the conditions of the

25:00 takeover was that my son had to go be part of the takeover. He had to go with the deal and of course you can imagine what happened there, and he has been offshore facility's manager for Canadian Oil now for about four years I suppose now.

All right that gives us

25:30 **a good summary of your life.**

That's about it.

Yes well, we've covered a lot of stuff there. You grew up in Yenda on a soldier's settlement block?

Yes.

Were most of the farms around there run by ex-soldiers?

All ex-soldiers yes, 100% ex-soldiers when I was a kid, yes.

What did you learn from your father about the First World War?

Very little, very, very little. He would never

26:00 ever talk about the war.

What did he do?

He was a driver in the artillery carrying shells up to the guns. He was pretty badly wounded on one side. He never ever spoke about the war. He was very reluctant to sign the papers to let me go off. I think

26:30 affected my father a great deal was that I had a brother, he was about six years older than me, and he finished an apprentice as a carpenter, and at 21 he got a carbuncle on the neck, and it turned into spinal meningitis, and he died at 21.

27:00 I think that affected my father a great deal and certainly when I wanted to go I think it must have been pretty hard for him but I think he realised if he didn't sign it, I'd forge his signature, and go anyway.

How

27:30 **do you think he was affected by his war service?**

He got the shakes sometimes for no apparent reason. He might be picking fruit and all of a sudden he couldn't hold the fruit, things like that but

28:00 I think he grew old very quickly. He would have been about 45 when I joined the navy and he would have passed for 60, and that went for most of the diggers that had been in action in that area. There was a lot of them had to

28:30 give up their farms because of their ill health and the Italians bought them out. Eventually the Italians took over the area. I never ever... I didn't want to be a farmer of any description. When I came out of the navy I thought I might have another look at this.

29:00 I tried farming for about six months and I was a joke I reckon because I couldn't believe anyone could be so stupid to be on a bloody farm.

How was Anzac Day celebrated in that ex-soldier settlement area?

The biggest day of the year, a big turnout, a little town and their own little monument, and of course

- 29:30 big marches of probably two or three hundred, soldiers in a small town with a population of about 250 in the village, and the farms. I suppose 250 at least would march on Anzac Day. They'd all march on Anzac Day. They'd all get drunk on Anzac Day too.
- 30:00 There was a very interesting character there I remember. One of our next door neighbours was probably one of the most highly decorated soldiers in the war. He was Jack Curran. He had a Distinguished Conduct Medal and a Medal du Maison, and a Croix de Guerre,
- 30:30 and he had four sons, all of them went to war. John was killed at El Alamein, the eldest son. The second son was in the Middle East when that happened as well. The third son was in New Guinea and the fourth one joined the navy. I went to school with the fourth one.
- 31:00 There were some interesting characters. There was one particular man. He sort of used to carry out the irrigation with long handled shovels to let the water out of trenches into little trenches and if you went to see this bloke, and didn't tell him, you make a noise, and tell him you'd come, he'd come charging at you with the shovel at the high port,
- 31:30 and probably reckoned he'd put a bayonet through you. Oh God, I'll never forget that, yes. That brings back some memories. God... old Bill Edge.

How did growing up in this ex-soldier community influence you in your decision to serve in the war later on?

I don't think I even thought about it.

- 32:00 To be quite honest I don't think we even thought about it. We didn't think there was ever going to be another war until that Sunday night when we were all around, the family around the radio, and here we are with the prime minister announcing we were going to war on a Sunday night.
- 32:30 Nearly everyone, all the men that were there that night, boys all ended up in the [armed] forces. Some are not with us. Some were killed. I'm still here but I'm buggered if I know why or how. But that's it.

What did you think when you heard that announcement?

- 33:00 I just thought it would be something that would be all over in a couple of weeks or something. I didn't think there'd be a war like it turned out. I don't think anyone did and I think one of my friends was in the militia, and
- 33:30 he said, "Oh that won't make any difference to us." He said, "We'll probably get more money to do extra training." So he said, "That's all right." But we didn't think there was going to be a huge war. I'm afraid we were very much in the... very, very wrong and I certainly didn't think I'd be involved in it.
- 34:00 I think that was in 1939. I'd just left school I think from memory.

When did that thinking change? Can you take us through your thinking about joining up and your decision to join the navy?

No. My thinking of joining the navy was from the day

- 34:30 my father said to me one day, "What do you think about taking over the farm when I'm gone?" And I said, "I'm not interested in taking over the farm. I'm going to join the navy." I think I'd have been about 12 or 13 at the time and of course this was enhanced by the fact I'd had a holiday in Sydney with my father's
- 35:00 sister, whose husband was the marine superintendent of the Adelaide Steamship Company, and he'd organised a trip onboard a British ship that was out here, which was the HMS Kent, which was the same class of ship as the HMAS Australia was, and he organised for me to have a trip onboard there. Once I had that trip onboard there, there was just no... it was sort of a one track mind, the navy's for me
- 35:30 and that's it, and I didn't change, never wavered, never thought anything else, any other way.

What was it about the navy for you that influenced you and impressed you?

The navy, the sea, the ships, the camaraderie, all those things. The sea is

- 36:00 still... I'm still not game to live near the sea. That's when I retired, I made sure I went inland away because as long as I was within smelling distance of the sea I would always be wanting to get back out there.

You family had a Naval or a seagoing tradition. Can you tell us about that?

I did some

- 36:30 genealogy on my family when computers became available and I traced our family's history in the marine world back over 200 years. So now it's 280 years with another one coming, with my son carrying on
- 37:00 the tradition. So we've had except for my father, every generation we've had one of our family at sea and not only one but sometimes four or five at sea as Masters of ships, and so the bloodline is there yes. Yes the bloodline is there.
- 37:30 **How much did you know about that tradition when you were growing up?**
- I knew in the background there was something to do with the sea because my father used to be on... when the radio came in and there was a disaster at sea, he'd be always off to town to get the newspaper when the train came in at midday from Sydney to make sure, and I asked him
- 38:00 one day what he was looking for. He said, "I'm looking to see if my brother was on that ship." I said, "Oh," but he wouldn't never ever sort of talk about it. I can understand that because I've got the same attitude in a lot of respects.
- 38:30 I can talk to my youngest son about the sea but I can't talk to my eldest son about the sea because he just doesn't understand, even though he's a highly qualified person. My youngest son, we can sit for hours and talk about things, you know...
- 39:00 how cyclones... what happens, what's the best way out of them, all those sorts of things. That make sense?
- You didn't grow up near the sea though?**
- No I lived 400 miles away from the sea. It was 400 miles from Yenda to the sea and each year we used to go for a holiday to Narrabeen in Sydney,
- 39:30 and I can always remember going over the Blue Mountains, and I could smell the sea from the Blue Mountain. I could smell the sea, yes terrific. No, 400 miles is a long way from the sea.

Tape 2

- 00:42 **Can you tell us what you had to do to join up the navy? You were only 17 years old?**
- First of all you had to fill out an application.
- 01:00 Then they would send you a notice to attend the local doctor to do a medical examination and the medical officer, local doctor would send that medical examination to the navy. Then no doubt the medical was correct. Then they would send you a set of papers, which you would sign, which
- 01:30 contained the fact of what you were doing and how long you were signing on for, and then you'd get another letter saying that in due course you will be required to come to Sydney, and be in the navy, and that happened to me. I got this letter. I did my medical examination
- 02:00 and then probably in a period of six weeks or so, I got the letter to say, If your parents will sign this authorisation... " the rail warrant was in the letter, "...use this rail warrant to take you to Sydney," where I reported to Rushcutters Bay in Sydney.
- 02:30 We spent the day in Rushcutters Bay sort of finding out who you were and what you were, and then swearing you in, and putting you in a boat, and taking you over. I think to look back on that getting the King's shilling, people still say, "You're mad Frank. It never happened." Well it did happen. It happened right up until the class after me. We were the last two permanent navy classes
- 03:00 before the war, before they started again after the war and I said, "It did happen." We went across to the HMAS Penguin and took the oath of allegiance, and took the King's shilling, and we were told then that we were in the navy. That night we were all well fed. Each mealtime that came around there was plenty of food to eat
- 03:30 and then we went from there to Central railway station, and caught the train to Melbourne. It was an overnight trip to Melbourne and at Melbourne we had to change. The train got in, in the morning and the train to Flinders didn't leave until later that afternoon, so we had a little bit of a walk around Melbourne. Then we got to
- 04:00 Crib Point, which is the railway station for Flinders naval depot, we got there at about half past seven at night, and it was black, and it was cold, and it was raining, and this was Flinders naval depot weather. Then we were taken in, given temporary hammocks, boy oh boy. My first night in a hammock.
- 04:30 Yes and the next day was indoctrination, what was to happen. Then inoculations and all that, and then six weeks on the parade ground, three months of seamanship, six weeks in gunnery, two weeks in torpedos,

05:00 a week in signals for memory. It all covered around about a bit over six months and then at the end of six months you just waited, and watched the noticeboard to see where you were going to be drafted to. I watched the noticeboard and my name was there. The first eight names were all to the Sydney.

05:30 In my class the first eight went to the Sydney and then was mine, the ninth, so it was close, to the Hobart. "Aah. What's that? What sort of ship's that?" We only had a rough idea of what

06:00 sort of ships were and when I found out what sort of ship it was, it was the same class of ship as the Sydney, same class of ship as the [HMAS] Perth, then I said, "Oh that's a good draft. That's a good draft." So then I went by train and reversed the story back to Sydney to

06:30 board the Kuttabul, to wait for the Hobart to come in from sea. She'd come back from the Red Sea and we joined her. Of course we were the lowest of the low.

Just before we talk about joining the Hobart, just one question about your training. What surprises were in store for you in adapting to navy

07:00 **life?**

None really because I accepted it. There was no surprises. No, I accepted that whatever I was told had to be done and that was it. I accepted all that.

What about little things? You mentioned sleeping in a hammock for the first time?

You know that was quite

07:30 hilarious really because none of us had ever slept in a hammock and none of us knew how to get them up. Of course there was a big old chief petty officer put in charge of us. He'd come around and slap the things up in about ten seconds and, "Learn how to do this, this way son." "Oh stone the crows." When you'd get in you'd fall out the other side, those

08:00 sorts of things but when you look back on them they're funny. Once you got used to sleeping in a hammock I've never had a good sleep since and they're the most comfortable way to sleep but the first time believe you me, it's funny.

What about the other blokes that joined up with you? What were they

08:30 **like?**

From all walks of life and from all states. There were some from Sydney, some from Queensland, a couple from Queensland. I think the most were from Sydney. I think there were about six from Sydney and some from Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania,

09:00 Western Australia. There was about 20 in the class all together to start with. One of the first inklings I got that the fact that the navy was pretty strict on who they took was a call from the local Melbourne CIB, who came down and

09:30 whipped one of the blokes away, a chap called Harrison. We didn't think there was that much wrong with him. As it turned out he was a criminal and he was later on a very ugly character on the waterfront in Melbourne years later.

10:00 I'd pass him sometimes going to a ship and I'd think, "God I've got to get over to the other side of the road quick," because he was a very bad type. So if you had any sort of police record or anything like that, the navy didn't want anything to do with you whatsoever. So you had to be absolutely clean skinned.

10:30 There were the odd arguments about which is the best state and which isn't the best state, and who is the best jockey, he ordinary every day subjects that are talked over. Mostly you didn't have all that

11:00 amount of free time because you trained from six in the morning until six at night and you'd break for meals. It would probably half past seven, eight o'clock by the time you got back to your dormitory. You didn't have much time.

What about your introduction to the social side of naval life? Was that an eye opener for you?

11:30 Not really. It depends what you call social life.

Well, when you did get leave for example going into Melbourne?

Yes well, I wasn't allowed leave to go to Melbourne because I was too young. I was classified

12:00 as too young. At 17 I would have had to have a foster parent to look after me over the weekend, so I didn't get any weekend leave. When I went home, yes sure the social life, the girls were there. There's no denying that. I don't know about a girl in every port.

12:30 I suppose I had a fair sort of fling at times but it's a hard question to answer that because I'd consider...

13:00 you were given leave, over night leave, we'd call that a run ashore and you'd go with your mate, and my mate, we'd go to the pub, and we'd have a few beers. Then we'd go and have a feed somewhere at some café. Then we'd go to a picture, the old cinema days. Then we'd go back onboard. That was a run ashore.

13:30 Other blokes, they'd go ashore and have a belly full of beer, and go to Luna Park to a dance hall but I didn't do that. I wasn't attracted to that type of life for some reason, not that I'm a goodie. I'm probably a villain.

14:00 **That's a decent answer.**

There's no doubt that the uniform did attract the women. You can't deny that fact.

When you were drafted to the Hobart

14:30 **how many people went with you from your class at Flinders?**

Two, me and Freddy Quinn.

Who was Freddy Quinn?

Freddy Quinn, he was an ordinary seaman the same as me in my class and he lives in Wodonga now. There

15:00 was only two in our class went to the Hobart. The rest went to the Australia. That would be about right, a couple to the Canberra yes.

So you went up to Sydney and you had to wait for her for how long?

We arrived in Sydney it must have been in the April. I know it was around about Anzac Day and then May. I

15:30 suppose six or seven weeks we had to wait for her to come in. I don't think she came in until June from memory. When she came in we joined it then, were allocated a mess on the mess deck and of course believe

16:00 you me, an ordinary seaman in those days you got some really nasty jobs.

Let's talk about that introduction to the ship. What were your first impressions of the Hobart?

My first thought was, "What a beautiful ship." All the paintwork was clean and everything, and all the brass was highly polished,

16:30 and it looked lovely. It was almost picture book. The decks, you could eat your meal of the decks. As a matter of fact, we still had the holy stone decks on the Hobart and the way you accepted, and told what you

17:00 were, and who you were, and what you had to do, and what you couldn't do, and training continued of course, seamanship training continued in the ship. You did boat drills and things like that continuous because you had to learn. You had to come up to their efficiency, not the efficiency you left

17:30 at Flinders naval depot. So you had to come up to their efficiency. I was allocated... the ship was split into three watches, cruising stations, second degree of readiness and action stations. Cruising station was four inch gun deck.

18:00 The first job I had was the least important job on the gun and that was to be able to rake the empty shell cases out of the way of the loading numbers, and that was my first job. Then I progressed up but we were always never

18:30 in less than cruising stations, never ever. The guns were manned, a third were always manned and at second degree of readiness half were manned. At action stations everything was manned. You had dawn first morning out at sea. It was my first day at sea.

19:00 Everyone is waiting for you to get seasick and you don't get seasick, and that disappoints them. I remember turning to at six o'clock and just dawn, and dawn stand to, and before radar you never knew what was going to be there when you woke up in the morning. So you used to have dawn stand to. I remember dawn stand to and I looked out across the sea for

19:30 the first time, and it was absolutely beautiful, absolutely beautiful. I can see it now. As guns crew you slept at your guns and that was it. Later on

20:00 we were to go some... I think we went six weeks without once without even going back to our mess, something like that.

Who took the role of introducing you to the ship and showing you around?

The master at arms. The master at arms would detail off what part of the ship you were to go to, the fo'c'sle, the waist

20:30 or the quarterdeck. There were four sections of the ship and then you'd report to what they called the captain at the top. That would be the petty officer in charge of that part of the ship. So it was the fo'c'sle, the quarterdeck, or the waist, port waist, starboard waist and you report to that petty officer, and he was your boss. There's no doubt about that.

21:00 I was allocated to the quarterdeck. My boss... I've forgotten his name. He would take me round and show me what my particular duties would be from six o'clock in the morning when we started, when we washed the decks down, down decks

21:30 to when we finished at lunchtime, and then after lunch, what we'd do after lunch. He would tell me what I had to do and believe you me he made sure I did it. But gradually I progressed up the longer I was there.

22:00 I got to be number three loading number. That was a step up the rank, you know the hierarchy and then number two loading number, and finally not long after that I got to number one loading number. Number one loading number was a special person. That meant you could belt 20 rounds up the barrel in one minute and

22:30 number one loading number was always... even the captain sees your number one loading number on the gun deck. You've always got that little bit of respect, just a little bit.

We'll come back to the gun in just a moment but you mentioned when you first joined the ship you had all the dirty jobs to do.

Yes.

Can you take us through a day's

23:00 **work as a new arrival on the ship and what you had to do?**

The first job in the morning, wash down decks. On the side of the deck was what they called a scupper, about six inches wide and two inches deep. The water won't completely drain out of that, so bucket and cloth, your job, mop the water out

23:30 into the bucket. Having done that then you had to help lockerman re-stow everything, make sure it was in the right place

24:00 and then by the time you did all that it would be time for breakfast. Then after breakfast you'd be washing paintwork somewhere. There was always paintwork to wash. They always found it for me anyway. So you'd be washing paintwork or washing down gun barrels. There was always something like that, always

24:30 for the cleanliness of the ship. Then of course interspaced amongst that there'd be exercise; exercise action stations, exercise cruising stations. You'd drop everything and go, and you'd be timed from the time you dropped your bucket and cloth to the time you got to wherever your action station or cruising

25:00 station was, and that was the drill of the ship. It was a highly drilled ship, very highly drilled.

How long did it take to get to action stations?

30 seconds. 30 seconds. For me, yes

25:30 30 seconds.

What were the punishments for being slow or tardy at drill or not doing your job properly?

Extra work, more work, more work. Instead of having Saturday and Sunday off you worked. Fortunately it never happened to me because I always do my job.

26:00 I never had a day's punishment when I was in the navy, never one day.

Any other jobs you had to do?

Oh you'd have to go round and check to make sure certain ropes were coiled down properly,

26:30 and so many coils, and things like that but not really. Then when you went down to your mess of course that took you down into a different area, where you became... each mess, we never had cafeteria messing or anything like that.

27:00 We had mess deck messing, where the cooks were two people from each mess. There'd be about 20 people in a mess and two out of 20 would be detailed off as mess cooks for that week, and you'd go to the galley, and you'd collect the food in trays, and dixies, and cans, and come down, and dish it out. You had to take your turn at that. You had to learn that

27:30 and then when it was all over, clean it up, wash up, and take it back to the kitchen, the galley. Yes that was ordinary mess deck messing.

What was the food like on the Hobart?

28:00 Before when we got to the Mediterranean it wasn't bad. It was edible. When we got to the Mediterranean it wasn't so hot. Stores weren't as frequent there as they were at home. You got your share of bully beef. That was a chore.

28:30 Even though it might be done in six or seven different ways it was still bully beef but there was always something to eat. There was always bread and butter, not much butter but always bread anyway. The navy had a system, which I always thought was an excellent

29:00 system. At each mealtime and officer would do a round of the mess, and he would ask if you had any complaints, and if you had a complaint, you made the complaint. If it was legitimate it would be taken up but you had to make sure it was legitimate. I think a lot of

29:30 people like me, thought that process of making it legitimate was far more difficult than what it was eating the food, so you didn't get many complaints.

What was that process?

Well you had to take the meal up to the chief cook. That was the first process, with the officer

30:00 that was doing the rounds and the chief cook had to explain to the officer why it wasn't up to scratch, and boy oh boy you, could bet your life that you'd get a certain amount of feed back from that lot. To get on the wrong side of the chief cook would be about the last thing you'd want on the ship, so that's why there was never very many

30:30 complaints.

Can you tell us a bit more about your mess deck? Can you describe that for us?

The which?

The mess deck?

The mess deck? The mess deck consisted of a long table and a padded seat, a trestle seat like.

31:00 One end would contain all your cooking utensils. The other side up the other end would be your lockers, your steel lockers for your uniforms and places for

31:30 wet weather gear, and stuff like that you use, not very sophisticated. I should imagine it would be a lot different today. It's pretty straight, just virtually very ordinary dining facilities. Let's put it that way.

Where did you sling your hammocks of a night time?

32:00 Above the mess. Down from the deck end would come the hammock rails and you slung your hammock on those hammock rails, and that would be over the top of the mess table, and that's the whole quarterdeck. You'd all fit into that area. The theory is you were

32:30 allowed 18 inches per man and once you got used to it, it was all right.

You said a hammock was a great way to sleep but what was it like at sea sleeping in a hammock?

Fantastic. The ship rolls around you and you don't have any movement. It's like a pendulum. It stays pointing down

33:00 and a rough sea, give me a hammock any day compared to a bed.

Were there any pranks played or any problems with hammocks?

Not that I can remember, no. See we used to have to lash them up each morning with rope.

33:30 That had to be strictly in accordance to seven turns and that was it. All these traditional things that just came and if you didn't do them properly, well you had to undo it, and do it yourself in your own time. So you made sure you did it properly. Then of course having your bedding lashed

34:00 up and confined every night, you used to have period where say once a week you had on a Saturday morning... you'd probably have what they called air bedding, and when they called air bedding you'd go and get your hammock, and you'd take it up on deck, and open it up, and hang it over the guard rail, and let it air for an hour, and then lash it back up again.

34:30 **What did that do?**

It gave it some fresh air I suppose and also to inspect to make sure that your bed cover had been

properly washed, and was clean you know, and things like that. That was a check on cleanliness.

35:00 **What other rules were there to do with your appearance and dress?**

You had to be properly dressed at all times. Initially when I first joined the ship you were issued with a uniform, about seven different dresses all together but

35:30 whatever was the dress of the day would be piped at breakfast time, "The dress today will be number twos or number ones, or number sevens, or number eights." And that's what you got dressed in. If it was going to be a real dirty job day it could be overalls, which was eight, dress eight or not so dirty you could have dungarees, which now

36:00 everyone wears. Jeans. That was the second worst dress we used to have. Dungarees. Then it moved up, trousers with singlets, singlets with sleeves, cotton singlets with sleeves, material, not cotton as we know it and

36:30 the dress changed. The dress rules changed when we got to the Mediterranean. We found that wearing a tight jacket trying to

37:00 punch shells up a four inch at 60 degrees was just a little bit too... so we used to strip down to the waist, the guns crews and that was stopped because we started to get a lot of flesh burns, and so we had to put singlets, and anti-flash

37:30 gear, something that was sort of learned the hard way. Someone could get flashed by a very close bomb burst and you'd get a flesh burn, and if a chap had a single on it would only burn where he didn't have the singlet, so the obvious thing was to put a singlet on, and then the anti-flash gear came in,

38:00 terrible stuff but necessary.

What was that? Can you describe it?

It was a helmet, which came right over your head and down to here. That was the helmet and gloves that came up past your elbows. That was the anti-flash gear. It covers those exposed parts of the body.

38:30 **Was there any other protective gear you were given?**

Oh we all had gas masks but they made good pillows.

What did they look like?

The old fashion gas masks were pretty basic, a headpiece and a head mask, and a

39:00 charcoal gas filter, basically totally inadequate for the gases that were available at the time. I was to learn that later on in life.

What about tin hats?

Yes tin hats, yes. Yeah

39:30 you had the option of wearing tin hats. Yeah tin hats. God I'd forgotten all about tin hats. Yes they were a compulsory item, tin hats, chinstrap,

40:00 not under your chin though, behind your head because if your chins up, and the shrapnel hits the centre it will break your neck, so the strap goes at the back of your neck. Yes tin hats. I'd forgotten about tin hats, yes. Boots, not shoes. Boots, yes.

40:30 If I hadn't have had all those shock treatments I might have been able to remember a lot better than that but anyway that's the best I can do.

You're doing great.

Tape 3

00:39 **Frank can you share with me how you maintained and kept the guns clean?**

Yes. Michael [interviewer] I'm not sure whether...

01:00 put it this way, I was very strict on maintenance of armament. I'd inspect the guns daily. First thing in the morning when everything was all clear, when you knew there wasn't any enemy aircraft around or anything and it was safe you did

01:30 what we call sponge out. You pulled a rotary brush up and down the barrel about three or four times until it was absolutely clean. Then you'd wrap an oil rag around that brush and put that through three

or four times. So when you looked up the barrel it would be absolutely spotlessly clean,

02:00 drop the beach, check the mechanism on the beach, make sure the pressure was right on the return spring, check the whole of the gun mounting for grease nipples to make sure that no one had painted them over or knock the head off them, to make sure that they were properly

02:30 greased, run your fuse setters from zero to maximum. Then you'd train the gun to its maximum stops each direction, training then elevating maximum. Every time you did that you had everything worked out.

03:00 The gun would be fit to fire.

Did you hear of accidents when fellas didn't clean the guns?

Not on my ship, never, no. I've had bad misfires, yes but that's the ammunition, not the gun.

What happened there with those misfires?

Unfortunately

03:30 I was one of those, who people that didn't believe in his half hour wait and see what happens. It was I'd do it myself. I wouldn't ask anyone to do it for me. There was three ways of firing the four inch gun say for arguments sake. There are three ways of firing any naval gun to my knowledge, is the actual firing

04:00 on the main circuit on the main tower, electrical firing on the secondary circuit from the main and percussion firing on the mounting, which is a lever you just bang, and that sends a pin into the primer. So if all those fail and the gun hasn't fired, the chance of something happening are so remote

04:30 that to me it's not worthwhile waiting 30 minutes with a gun out of action. So you'd drop the beach and throw the shell over the side, "Bang", finished, job done. I was criticised on several occasions for doing it but you still had no shells to here and with my knowledge of

05:00 how the construction of a shell, I knew that if it didn't fire on percussion that there was no way in the world it was going to fire any other way. It wasn't going to all of a sudden make up its mind halfway through, so drop it out, bang over the side, which is only from here to the door and I never heard of them blowing up after being

05:30 thrown over the side. So if the proper drill is carried out there shouldn't be any accident but then the proper drill depends on what you're doing and where you are. If it's just a quiet peacetime practice shoot you can

06:00 sit there for a half hour but if you've got 27 or 28 aircraft coming in at you, you haven't got bloody time to wait a half hour.

Onboard the Hobart where was the ammunition kept?

You had ready-use lockers behind each mounting, which had star shell...

06:30 Four lockers... left locker was star shell, centre locker was direct action, right hand locker was HA fused ammunition, direct action fused, and there'd be

07:00 24 of each there, and down the magazine then... then you had a magazine chain from your magazine to the gun deck. In your four inch magazine you'd probably be carrying something like 2500, 3000 shells.

And would those shells be kept down below?

07:30 Down below in tubes, in tubes and strapped in so they couldn't move, and each shell had a little safety cap on it over the primer, and the loading number, when you pulled it out you put your thumb in there, and pulled it out, and dropped it in. After the shoot

08:00 your deck would be covered with these little round felt pads but when it is in the magazine it's covered by that felt pad and it's also covered by a wooden batten with a felt pad on it to hold it in, so the shell would never move in that magazine. There were regulations governing that of course.

How were the shells taken from below deck to the actual guns?

By hand.

08:30 You had what you called your ammunition handling parties and they were made up of cooks and stewards, and all those people that were non-combatant types, and you'd have a magazine crew of experienced people that knew what was wanted, and then once the shell would go up the hatch

09:00 it would go across with the cooks, stewards, and all the non-combatant group would be in the handling line, and then it would end up on the gun deck. That would normally be... you'd get one attack and straight away restock ready for use for the next attack.

Are there different types of shells that

09:30 **you'd actually fire?**

Four inch shells. They are all four inch shells that weight about 37 pound. They are all the same weight. A star shell might be a little bit lighter. That's a shell you fire out to eliminate the target. That could be a little bit lighter but there's no difference to the weight

10:00 between a direct action and a high angle fuse shell. They weight about all up I suppose near enough to 40 pound.

So the star shell illuminates the sky?

Yes.

I presume at night time?

Yes.

The other two shells, what's the difference between them, the short fuse shell and the direct action shell?

10:30 The which?

Was it the direct action shell?

The star shell?

You have three shells, the star shell, the fuse... ?

And the direct action.

The direct action and what's the difference between the fuse and the direct action?

Well, the direct action goes off on concussion. When it hits something

11:00 it explodes. The fuse sets a timing device in the head of the shell to explode at a certain time and distance, and that's for anti-aircraft. It starts off at around about 1500 yards minimum distance.

11:30 and then it goes out to 2400.

Excellent. You don't use any other shells besides those three?

Those three on the four inch gun deck yes and in the six inch turrets they are exactly the same only they're bigger, and bloody noisy.

12:00 We used to use the six inch as anti-aircraft guns but we were one of the rare ships that did that. Fortunately we had a good gunnery officer, who believed in gun drill before paintwork.

Excellent. You also shared with us earlier the three stages, the cruising station, second degree and

12:30 **action stations?**

Yes.

Can you just talk through in detail the differences between them?

You have cruising stations when you are travelling across say Fremantle to the Seychelles or somewhere like that, to your next fuelling point, when you know there's not much likely to happen but if something does happen all

13:00 of a sudden, you can at least put a third of your armament into action within a matter of half a minute, 30 seconds at the most. Second degree of readiness is you are at action stations but you're allowed to sit down and have a yarn, have a smoke, and if the bell goes you can be on

13:30 station within five or ten seconds, you can have them ready to go. Action stations of course you just wait for the order. That make it clear?

Excellent. So you'd describe cruising stations as if you were travelling from Australia over to your next fuelling port, what about in respect to second degree? When would that be the case?

Second degree is a case usually

14:00 adopted at night in a zone where it's considered that there could be possible enemy shipping or submarines, or something that they're not sure, they're not sure enough to go into... they don't want to put everyone into action stations because it takes a

14:30 lot out of the people, and you've got to feed them at action stations. So you go to second degree of readiness. It's more of a compromise. The captain has got to make up his mind and say, "Well tonight I think we should be at action stations or tonight I think we can go to second degree of readiness." That's

up to the captain.

So on your

15:00 **trip over to the Middle East onboard the Hobart What sort of things were being taught to you on that particular trip?**

Gun drill, gun drill, gun drill. I could name it every day, gun drill. Gun drill, gun drill, more gun drill. I'll tell you a very... something that happened to me that I've never forgotten.

15:30 We used to holy stone decks. I still use the phrase today and it's still applicable today as it was then, "It's very difficult to turn a peacetime navy into a wartime navy, very difficult to get away from the nice shiny paintwork and the shiny brass that someone could bloody pick up 20 miles away."

16:00 So... God I've lost my trend... Oh yes. We were painting what they call the screen around the commander's quarters on the quarterdeck. The deck is lily white, beautiful teak deck. I knocked a pot of paint over and of course

16:30 God, that was a cardinal sin, and I had to clean this up, and restore the deck to its original condition before I went to bloody bed that night. That took me about eight hours and I was buggered, and eight o'clock the next morning, you won't believe it, eight o'clock next morning

17:00 we line up, and the painter... they used to carry a painter in the crews. The painter came up and said, "Right the deck will be green from now on." I said, "What?" So we painted the deck green and camouflaged the ship. I said, "Jesus." I tell you what; if I could have

17:30 cut someone's throat I would have done that day. I said, "God. Stone the crows. What I'd spent eight hours getting back to lily white was painted green. So we painted all the decks green. There was no more holy stoning, that was one thing. So the decks stayed green. I thought I'd tell you that because I'll never forget that.

Did that annoy

18:00 **you that sort of discipline onboard?**

No, no. I was never annoyed by discipline as long as it was fair and just, and I tried to carry that through my life.

Now you said on the way over you did gun drill, gun drill, gun drill.

Yes.

What did that entail, just loading

18:30 **and unloading?**

You had what you called practice rounds, which were cut out of wood and made up, wood and brass, identical weight and everything to a normal shell, and you'd have a control party, and you'd follow the director, and follow the gun round, and you'd get the word, "Commence. Commence.

19:00 Commence." And up goes the round into the breach and away you go, and you take the pressure off the spring in the breach, and it allows the captain of the gun to eject the shell, and you catch it, and go back into the line, and come back, and put it up again. I tell you what; your arm muscles get pretty strong. Then there'd be

19:30 actual firings. They'd put a balloon up or something like that and have an actual firing at it. I don't think that was really very successful. Don't tell Rear Admiral Peak that because he was the gunner officer but

20:00 I didn't consider it very successful because we never ever shot a balloon down.

Most of them sailed away did they?

Yes sailed off into the distance.

In respect to the wooden... I guess it's a practice shell is it?

Yes.

Could you just explain how that worked?

20:30 There was just a tube of probably some type of hardwood I suppose and on one end they'd have a nose cap, and on the rear they'd have a base plate, identical to the shell, and the weight and everything was distributed according to the ordinary shell. So

21:00 when it comes to the actual loading of an ordinary shell you'd certainly know the difference because of the feel and the smell of it.

And did it actually fire out of the turret?

Yep.

And just land on the deck?

What's that?

21:30 **The wooden... ?**

Oh no, the wooden shell? Oh no, I see what you mean. You loaded it and it had to come out, so what you used to do is to make the breach work automatically you needed a very high tensile spring in the loading arm of the breach. So you'd take the pressure off that spring, which would allow the captain of the gun to manually operate the ejection mechanism.

22:00 So you'd push the shell in and he'd straight away eject it manually, and you'd catch it, and go to the end of the line back to number three, and then back round.

Excellent. Now you were sailing on the way over, you stopped briefly in Fremantle...

Fremantle to fuel, yes.

Did you get off

22:30 **the boat at that point?**

No, no leave.

And then you sailed to Colombo?

I think we went to Colombo or... no we didn't go to Colombo. We went to the Seychelles Islands, that's right. We fuelled off a tanker in the Seychelles Islands, then to Aden was our next call. Yes I might have misled you on that.

That's all right. So what happened at Aden?

We fuelled at Aden,

23:00 no leave, terrible place anyway.

So you'd had no leave since you left Sydney?

No.

OK. So then you came up to Port... is it?

Port Tewfik.

Tewfik yes. Can you just describe what happened there? did you get leave and stuff?

Well. We came into Port Tewfik and I think everyone was so amazed as what I was to see the number of ships

23:30 amassed in one particular small area, and we took a while to find out that... we had a very good captain, and he would keep us informed always of what was happening, and he come onto the ship's broadcast system, and told us the reason for the build up of ships was the fact that they'd mined the Suez Canal, and they weren't sure whether they were magnetic or acoustic but they had to sweep

24:00 the channel before the next convoy could go through, and the build up had taken place while they were doing that. As I say, the air raid that night when I heard my first bomb drop, I thought it was going to hit me fair and square in the middle of my tin hat. I was later to learn it probably landed two mile away.

Was anyone given leave at that point?

24:30 No. No, no leave.

What orders were you under, cruising stations or second... ?

When we went into Port Tewfik we went in under second degree of readiness because we didn't know what was there. Aircraft-wise we were within the range of German long range bombers, so we would have been at second degree of

25:00 readiness.

Can you talk me through the events just before the first bomb was dropped?

We closed up at sunset and checked the ship was blacked out properly.

25:30 The order for no smoking on the upper deck came through and then the next thing we knew there was a very heavy air raid in progress, and we were given a box barrage, and we were pumping shells into that particular area to chase these planes away or knock

26:00 them down, and that passed. A bomb hit or two bombs hit a ship called the [SS] Gothic, Gothic or [SS] Georgie... Georgie, a French Liner. It was a ship full of troops. She caught on fire. Of course that lit the whole harbour up. She tried to get aground and ran into the [USS] Glennon, and put her aground.

26:30 It was chaos and no other way of explaining it. All we were just told was... we weren't told anything actually. We were all too interested in doing our own job pumping shells. Then when a lull came after about two hours I suppose and

27:00 probably another hour or so later another raid came, the same procedure. Then that was the last. The next morning we had to try and tow the Glennon off the sandbank into deeper water. We did that.

27:30 The Hobart was a very powerful ship, 80,000 horsepower ship and we towed the Glennon off. We couldn't do anything with the Georgie. She was just to hard aground. She was just burnt completely, burnt out, gutted and then a couple of hours later we

28:00 got orders to say we could sail through the Suez Canal, and we went through. That was an experience.

Just before we go through the Suez Canal, a box barrage? What do you mean by that?

When you have a number of navy ships present in a harbour you can

28:30 draw a plan where each ship fires into a square at a certain angle and a certain height, and you just put shells into that, and the ship next to you is just putting shells into this one here, the ship next to that might be down here, and

29:00 that way it gives you pretty good protection. It normally works but it didn't work very good in Port Tewfik though because they let to many bombs go at the right time. I think that was only because our captain said he didn't... he believed that they were guided to where they dropped the bombs by the fifth columnists. In other words, someone with a light

29:30 was guiding the planes in, otherwise they couldn't have got through that part.

In respect to working out what your box is are co-ordinates given?

They are given to the ship, yes. Then you set your gun to that.

With the bombs coming down only two ships were hit on the first raid?

Oh no,

30:00 there were more ships hit than that but they were the two biggest ships that were hit. I think one of the destroyers copped a 500 pounder and it was a sort of a mock battleship there, one built out of hessian but full of four inch guns, and I think it took a couple of 500 pounders too. We got nothing. We got one about 100 yards away

30:30 I s'pose. It wasn't far. It didn't affect the ship whatsoever.

When the French troop ship was hit were fellas jumping overboard?

Yes.

What was happening there?

Yes. I didn't see it but I was told that that happened. I can imagine it would happen too because there would be no other choice.

Did you see anything in respect to the overall battle?

31:00 Of the... ?

Of the air raid and what was happening?

No I didn't. I was too busy. No I was too bloody busy.

The next morning what did you see?

The next morning you could see what had happened and it was rather scary to see what damage had been done, and to know that we were heading in that direction.

31:30 **So share with me if you would the trip up the Suez Canal. You said that was interesting?**

Yes it was interesting. You go up the Suez Canal and then you come to the Bitter Lakes, and what would happen is that one convoy would start from Port Said in the Mediterranean,

32:00 and one convoy would start from Port Tewfik, and they'd pass in the Bitter Lakes. If you were early you had to anchor and wait for the convoy from Port Said to come through, so you could go through. We were early, so our captain decided it was a hot day, so everyone could have a swim, so we went for a swim in the Bitter Lakes over the side, no sharks.

32:30 **So that would have been the first time you got off the boat since Sydney?**

The first time we got off the boat since we'd left Sydney yes.

So you've gone for a swim waiting for the other convoy, what happened from there?

Then when the other convoy came through and the channel was clear, we went on through to Port Said, and from Port Said we went around to Alexandria, where the main fleet was. When we sailed

33:00 in there that was an eye opener to us. God the ships in there, three battleships and submarine tenders and about 30 cruisers, 45 destroyers all in this area, real ships, and a wartime navy too there that lot.

33:30 We were there to relieve the [HMAS] Perth because the Perth had taken a pretty much of a hammering during the Greece and Crete campaign. We exchanged some crew, took some crew off the Perth. I don't know how... I think... that's right, we went alongside the Perth and

34:00 she had a lot of short range 20 millimetre Oerlikons, Bofors, and captured Italian Berettas, anti-aircraft guns. We took those and put them onboard. Also there was a four barrelled Pom Pom. We took that off her and put that onboard us, and

34:30 that made us pretty much like a porcupine. Then Perth sailed for home.

So who was going to operate all these new weapons?

Well, everyone had been trained in how to operate them. I hadn't seen a Beretta gun but I could work it out in ten minutes how it worked.

35:00 I'd been trained how to operate an Oerlikon gun and we had pretty experienced people onboard that were quite capable of doing it.

But surely everyone had their own jobs anyway with all your guns?

As I say, we had some people come across from the Perth. They probably were to fulfil the shortage, which was created by

35:30 the addition of this extra armament.

How did that change the crew's dynamics with new men coming onboard?

They fitted in pretty well, fitted in. We had a couple of guys in our mess. They fitted in pretty well. They'd had pretty much of a hammering, yes.

What were your feelings at that point when you heard that the Perth

36:00 **had suffered a hammering and you were about to do the same sort of thing?**

Nowhere to run. No. I had faith in my captain. I had faith in my fellow guns crew. I think that's what Hobart was.

36:30 Sorry. In the Hobart everyone trusted everyone else.

37:00 You never had to worry about someone guarding your back or anything like that. You didn't have to worry about someone running away. You knew if you did your job they'd do their job and otherwise we wouldn't be here today because we had a highly trained, highly skilled skip, with a highly skilled

37:30 captain. Well when I think of the places we got out of you know, that we should have never ever got out of it must have just been through two things, luck and skill but really I saw an article written by the

38:00 war museum, one of those articles, and I see a blokes put down that my cap... one of my captains on the Murchison said these guns, Mark 16 four inch fired 15 rounds a minute. Good God, we were up to 21 rounds a minute. In the Murchison we had a broad side every three seconds. That was my criteria and so that's 20 rounds a minute. At 15 rounds

38:30 a minute, gee you'd be sitting round waiting for something to happen. God. No, the Hobart was... it all came about through drill and people knowing their job. I think we joined the 7 Cruiser

39:00 Squadron in the Med and we did sweeps in the Med, used to cover Tobruk ferry run, take the aircraft off them onto us, and jobs like that. We did that right up until two days after Pearl Harbour, got ashore occasionally. I got ashore on my 18th birthday too.

39:30 Got drunk.

So when you initially arrived at Alexandria did you get shore leave?

Not immediately no, no leave in Alexandria was restricted from four o'clock in the afternoon until ten o'clock at night and that was your recreation leave. I supposed they worked it out if you went to the wet

canteen and every wet canteen was four

40:00 to eight, so four till ten, that was sufficient time to get drunk.

Tape 4

00:51 **Frank were there rules and regulations in respect to getting drunk and returning aboard?**

01:00 You know, you were never drunk when you got back onboard. There were definitely regulations but you were never drunk. You weren't supposed to get drunk. Well that was the myth but I never heard of anyone being charge for coming back onboard drunk.

01:30 **Because you were so young were you given less shore leave than everyone else?**

No, no once I turned 18 I got normal shore leave, when I turned 18 yes, my 18th birthday.

So where did the fellas go to pubs, what pubs?

They had what they called a NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute] canteen. It was an enormous building. It held

02:00 2000 people and you used to play... you call it housie but it was called tombola in the navy, the game of tombola, which is... what do they call it... Housie? What's the name they use? I've forgotten now but it's a

02:30 game you play, threepence a ticket and a bottle of Stellar beer for sixpence, and you'd be pretty much on your way after you spent five bob. And you had the odd

03:00 puritans, who wanted to go and have a look at the museums, and study Egyptian art, and things like that. I've never met one but I'm told that there were some doing that, but I never met any.

So you didn't come into contact with chaplains or those sorts of people?

We had a chaplain onboard the ship yes. Oh yes,

03:30 we had a chaplain.

Can you tell me about him?

I find it very difficult to talk about this man because he's the only person in the Hobart that actually I ever saw frightened,

04:00 really frightened and he in my teachings, is one that should have been the least frightened, and one day... he used to wrap himself in a wet blanket and go down to the Stoker's mess deck, which was a dressing station, and that was the safest place on the ship.

04:30 One day he didn't make it and I was on my belly under one of the guns, and this form appeared alongside me, and he said, "Are you prepared to meet your maker?" I said, "Christ. Piss off." That's the exact words I used. God. What

05:00 a thing to ask a man. I'm no more prepared to meet my maker than anyone else. Our chaplain, he wasn't an asset in the ship. He wasn't an asset and everyone knew it, and he'd have his Sunday division, and preach all this, and then

05:30 two days later you'd see him like a scared rabbit. That's not a man to me. That's not a man. So we had a chaplain, yes.

So he'd have Sunday services that he'd run?

Yes compulsory service, a compulsory service, yes. It was compulsory until one day was at compulsory

06:00 service and they put a torpedo underneath midship where the bloody crew was assembled, and killed about 400 people, and they did away with compulsory church services after that, so it was purely on a voluntary basis, and they did away with assembling large numbers in set areas, which was the sensible thing to do. You know, to put

06:30 three or four hundred people in a space 50 by 50 is absolute madness.

What ship was that that the torpedo came through?

One of the English ships. I forget what it was. I think it might have been the Exmouth or one of them. I forget now but it did happen.

What did the other fellas onboard the Hobart say

07:00 **about the chaplain?**

The same as I'm saying. I don't think anyone had that much time for him.

Do you know his background and where he'd come from?

I don't know where he came from. Nobody was very interested in finding out either I don't think. I know we were up at Port Haifa in a rest area and he put a notice on the noticeboard he wanted to take us up to the Sea of Galilee to see something up there, and I don't think he got many takers.

07:30 No, our chaplain... I suppose I could be held up for defamation for that but that's the way it was.

Did he have anything to say about the boys getting drunk or even going off to brothels and things like that?

Oh Christ yes, on Sunday yes. He said,

08:00 "You shouldn't commit adultery," and all of this rubbish. Oh yes, he used to give the sermons and you shouldn't commit adultery, and things like this, you know, and read the lessons. Nobody was very interested. All they were interested in was getting over the church service and getting on the first

08:30 leave boat to go ashore.

So what was meant to be the chaplain's role? What should a man of his... ?

Well a man that I knew... I knew several chaplains in the navy and they were all men. He should have been a leader. He should have set the example of why you shouldn't be fearful or frightened of anything. He should lead.

09:00 That's a chaplain's job instead of saying, "Are you prepared to meet your maker." He should have probably said to me, "Frank, don't worry. It will be OK." That's what he should have said you know? Meet my maker. I'm still not quite sure I'm ready to front up yet.

09:30 **Now just looking at Alexandria, I mean obviously some of the men had been onboard since Sydney?**

Yes.

Where did they go? Did they go to brothels?

Oh yes, there were brothels. This street, that was one of the most successful Allied bombing of Alexandria when they... we used to get bombed every night there, every night without a break. We'd get bombed and they

10:00 dropped a bomb on the brothels in Sister Street, and they dropped a bomb on it. They reckoned they got more casualties from that one bomb than they got from any other bomb they dropped. So the story goes.

What can you tell me about Sister Street, the layout of it all?

Don't know anything about it. No, I never went to that place. No.

10:30 I knew where it was and everything but I didn't. I couldn't see any sense in that, not that I was a goody-goody or anything like that. I was quite the bloody opposite but the thought of paying for it was just not in my category, not in my

11:00 vocabulary. I don't believe in that.

So in respect to the locals, how did they and the army get along with you boys in the navy?

The Gippos were a bloody menace. They were dirty rotten wogs, unclean, terrible, terrible people and

11:30 the army people we met were OK. The only army people we didn't get along with were the South Africans. They didn't seem to want to mix with anyone but all the other army people, the Poles and the British,

12:00 and the Australians, New Zealanders, all wanted to have a mix. We used to invite them down to the NAAFI canteen with us and they were good mixers but the South Africans wouldn't mix with us at all. The rest of them mixed but Alexandria is a terrible, dirty, filthy place it was.

12:30 God there were some warships in there. They reckoned there was more damage done by the shrapnel that fell back down to the ground than what the bombs did in Alexandria because you can imagine the amount of... there'd probably be over 1000 guns firing during an air raid. It would be well over 1000 guns and

13:00 it goes up, it's gotta come down.

And the Provos and Red Caps?

No problem, no problem with them. No they were there but they were mainly army. We'd have our own shore patrol. Our own shore patrol's job was to look after us not to

13:30 play heavy handed or anything like that. We used to appoint our own shore patrol. A petty officer, a leading seaman and probably six hands would be shore patrol and they'd go ashore, and they'd go to the canteen, the NAAFI canteen, and see nobody misbehaved or got into a blue, or got into a blue and couldn't get out of it. They got them out of it. That was our shore patrol.

14:00 **Can you share with me what happened in one of these blues?**

Oh I don't know. No I really can't remember much about it. It's all gone now. It's all gone.

What about the area of venereal disease and crabs, and those sorts of things? What was the navy's policy?

14:30 In ship if you got venereal disease you were taken out of your mess and put into a special mess. In the Hobart it was 60 mess. If you got VD [venereal disease] you got to go to the doctor and then you were put into 60 mess until you were cured, and that was a big... you know,

15:00 very degrading exercise but we didn't have an abnormally high rate of VD on our ship. I suppose we were lucky to have five or ten people in 60 mess at one time out of nearly 780, not bad.

15:30 Crabs and things, we never had that. We never had any problem with crabs or anything like that. It sounds like we were a lot of saints doesn't it hey.

Except for the chaplain.

A lot of saints. No I'll tell you a funny story if you'd like to hear it? It's a true story too.

16:00 When I joined the navy we had a chap from Tasmania called Noel Rathray and he was one of these real comedians, a natural comedian. Anyway, Noel gets his weekend leave after six weeks of our parade ground and we pass out, and these people of 18 years are allowed to go up to Melbourne, and have

16:30 leave in Melbourne. So Noel goes off up to Melbourne and comes back. A week later he said to me, "Do you know," he said, "I think I might have something." I said, "Yeah?" I said, "Well you better get over to see the doctor." So he went over and saw the doctor, and it was a famous doctor called Scott Mackenzie. Noel is comical. He went up to the doctor and the doctor said, "What's wrong with you Rathray?"

17:00 Noel said, "Well I think I've got a cold in the penis." Old Scott Mackenzie looks at him and said, "Well son, you stand over there in the corner. If it doesn't cough in five minutes you've got VD." And that actually happened. It actually happened. Poor Noel got killed on the Australia in a Kamikaze attack, in the Lingayen Gulf.

17:30 But that actually happened. God I laughed. That's just what he'd do though. He was an absolute comedian. If it doesn't cough in five minutes. Yes.

One other area to touch in just in respect to sexuality is the issue of homosexuality.

18:00 **Was there anything like that onboard?**

Homosexuality? There was rumours of it but I never ever... nobody was ever pinned down to it. I had people say to me, "So and so is a bit queer you know?" I thought, "Well he hasn't been queer to me or anything like that."

18:30 Unless I know first hand I won't comment on it but we had those rumours. I've got no doubt they were there, no doubts whatsoever they were there but if they were there, they kept to themselves and they certainly didn't... I was a prime target

19:00 for homosexuality, a young 17 year old, clean cut lad, and nobody ever made the vaguest suggestion to be about that. There was always great jokes going on and saying things like, "It's your turn in the barrel tonight," and all those sorts of things but they were just a bit of horsing around.

19:30 But you asked the question and I give you the answer that yes, no doubt they were there but they acted responsibly, and did their job, probably it was confined to cooks and stewards. As I say, it was never ever brought up as a subject. Nobody was ever

20:00 charged with any offence like that but I'd be a fool to think that it wasn't there. It had to be there amongst 780 men. It had to be there.

Just from the captain's point of view, did he ever speak on this subject to warn me, to make sure it wasn't going on?

No, no, no. He'd tell us

20:30 about everything else but he'd never talk about those sort of things. The surgeon commander, they'd show terrible films about what's going to happen when you get this and what's going to happen when

you get that. Christ it frightened the hell out of you. They had these films on VD and they had films on syphilis, and you'd be detailed off, "You're the next batch Smith. You go and watch these films." I watched these bloody films. God, you wouldn't want to

21:00 go ashore for a week. Old Surgeon Commander Lockwood used to say... and he said, "It's no could coming to me and telling me you got it off a lavatory seat." I wish he was still around because I'd tell him that what he said was wrong, because it had been proven now that it is possible.

21:30 That subject was confined to the medical section and they showed the film, and gave the lecture. You had free condoms on issue then in those days, free condoms. If you were going ashore on a run and you were going to the brothels, come and get your condoms, free, no charge. No charge. Free condoms.

22:00 **Coming back now to the ship...**

Yes?

When did you first leave Alexandria to do your first mission? Do you remember that?

About a week after we ammunitioned and stored. About a week after we joined the battle cruisers and the cruiser's squadron, and

22:30 did a Malta convoy. We screened a Malta convoy. In other words screening was that you took the flak off the convoy and I think that was one of the successful convoys. I think four ships got through on that convoy, which was pretty good because probably 12 started out but we

23:00 took the flak for that.

How does a ship take the flak from a convoy?

Pardon?

How does your ship take the flak and the firing from the convoys?

We'd lay down on the horizon in line with where we knew where the airports were, where the operational fields were and we'd put the fleet in line with the convoy, in line with the... of course

23:30 they see these prize ships down there, it's far more attractive than the convoy. Actually I thought it was put very well once by a lecturer I sat in on in England. A similar question was asked and I said, "I can understand there's all these troops, all these transports over here with no air-cover

24:00 and all the fleet here with blazing guns, and planes get shot out of the sky. Why not go for the soft target?" He said, "One word explains it all, ego. You're getting far bigger praise and more Iron Crosses for sinking a cruiser than you will sinking an old tram steamer."

24:30 I said, "Oh well that maybe answers the question." But they certainly came for us and left the convoy alone. Well they were flat out to get through the barrage that we put up anyway.

Can you talk me through actually travelling over and supporting the convoy, what you did and what you saw?

25:00 **Yes well we used to stand around our gun and watch the sea, watch the convoy. You'd see the convoy probably about eight or ten mile away and then when the aircraft warning went up, initially you'd know you were going to be attacked by aircraft when the yellow flag would go up for air warning**

25:30 **yellow. That meant that aircraft were in the vicinity. Then the red flag goes up and that means that they're here, and from then on you were just flat out from ready use locker to gun, ready use locker to gun, and the noise is unbelievable, the scream of**

26:00 **the turrets and the guns, bombs bursting. I think you've got to be there to... you don't have time to think about anything, that's the point. The worst part of those actions is the waiting. The yellow flag has gone up**

26:30 **and you're waiting for the red flag to go up, and you're nursing a prodigy there. When you're number one loading number you've got it sitting in the fuse setting rack and you're sitting there, and the old stomach churns up you see? "Christ, how many this time?" You know? So it's the waiting. Once the action is**

27:00 **on you haven't got time to think.**

What was attacking you on that first trip to Malta?

Junkers, Dive bombers, Torpedo bombers, high level bombers, everything they could get but then once the ships get in that's it, back to Alexandria.

27:30 They lose too many aeroplanes bombing Alexandria, so they only bombed it at a very high level. There was never any dive bombing in Alexandria.

At Malta were they dive bombing you there?

Malta yes, diver bombers yes, Junkers 88s.

Did any of those particular aircraft scare you or the other men?

No.

28:00 You'd hear the shells going over your head. They'd fire and as they came out they'd fire into the ship, see a few holes appear in the funnel. You'd get a shell or two split open and chuck it over the side.

What was your role in firing the gun at this point?

I was number one loading number. I put the gun into the fuse

28:30 setting machine. The fuse setter set the fuse, out of the fuse, up the barrel, back to the locker for another one. You never waited for the gun to go off or anything like that. By the time I got back it would have fired twice.

Was it box barrage or who was controlling your gun at that point?

No that was individual ships, everyone for themselves on that one. No, everyone for themselves as

29:00 controlled by the control parties from the control room transmitting station with the equipment provided to measure the range and fuse required. It was reasonably successful.

So the control room or control tower, they would always determine which was the gun was firing?

Oh yes, yes.

29:30 See the control tower, the officer in the control tower, he's got those planes in his binoculars and he's got special binoculars, and he's giving the orders to fire, and shifting targets from one target to another, and everything follows. The director goes this way,

30:00 the level of the guns go that way and so it goes on.

Anyone hurt onboard your ship on this first engagement?

Minor injuries, minor injuries. I got a bad wound in my leg one day but just stitched it up.

What happened there?

I picked up a lump of shrapnel. I didn't get down quick enough. A lump of shrapnel hit me

30:30 in the leg. I said, "Oh it's only a flesh wound." The old turret head chief gunner's mate said, "It's more than that Smith. Come here." The sick bay attendant on the four inch gun deck just had a look at it, put a few stitches in it and back to work.

So I take it all this time while the planes were attacking you really couldn't see much

31:00 **besides reloading and unloading?**

No. When it was over you'd see a lot. You'd see where all the shells had burst. It would be all black. The sky would be black with expended powder but individually...

31:30 in the Med I never saw any aircrafts in the Med really. No.

So you returned to Alexandria?

Yes.

What happened next in respect to your story?

Next would be probably another cruise up, bombardment of the road between Bardia and Tobruk.

32:00 The tanks used to go along this road. We used to go along and bombard that. You'd have a spotting aircraft for that. Really the Mediterranean tour was not a half the problem that we were to

32:30 get later on.

Let's just firstly talk about bombarding the tanks. What was the case there? You'd sail along the coast?

You'd sail along the coast and three cruisers with six inch guns and you'd just be out about five mile out, and bombard the road along the...

33:00 you could see. We could watch that because that wasn't our department. That was the six inch department.

What did you see?

Oh just see shells bursting and that's all, a lot of dust, and a few tanks on fire, not much.

33:30 **And you also did some runs into Tobruk?**

No, we never went into Tobruk. No we used to go up, we used to sail up about 15 or 20 mile out and try to attract the aircraft to us. I don't know whether that was successful or not to be quite honest. We certainly attracted the aircraft but whether it was...

34:00 they still got a lot of the ships that went to Tobruk. There was a big gun that used a nine point two inch, which was bombarding the ships in the harbour. We had a go at that a couple of times and we couldn't get direct hits on it though.

Where was that situated?

About eight mile from Tobruk.

34:30 **Inland?**

Yes. I don't think we did much good there. People might doubt that but I don't think so.

You've spoken well of the captain of the Hobart.

Yes.

What did he do in these times of attack? How did he demonstrate how good he was?

35:00 Take avoiding action, rapid avoiding action. He put the ship where it could be best, in the right position to be fought, to direct us clear of smoke and all those sorts of things. He was just so good, so good.

35:30 He was just a good captain. He was a wartime captain.

Where else had he served before?

In the Red Sea, in the Red Sea and when the Italians were going in to Addis Ababa, and round there. I don't know what they call it now...

36:00 Yemen I think but the Hobart spent quite a lot of time in the Red Sea earlier in the war before she came home. That was before I joined her.

During your time on the runs to Tobruk and also outside Tobruk, and your runs to Malta,

36:30 **were you ever hit, and were there casualties?**

No, no, never had one serious... we were never hit. We probably got a bit of shrapnel damage but never hit, severely hit or anything like that, no.

So when the chaplain said to you are you prepared to meet your maker, where was that?

I think that was on one of the

37:00 Tobruk runs I think, somewhere like that. I forget now. No, no, no, no it wasn't, no. Yes it was. It was somewhere in the Med. I don't know where.

Can you share with me the story of what happened?

Well, we'd just been ahead and about four or five torpedo bombers came tearing in at us, and we'd been

37:30 firing barrage fire, and we'd got the order, "Lie down." That was the standing order we'd be given, "Lie down," to avoid any shrapnel and we got the order to lie down, and bang, this chaplain is alongside of me.

So you hadn't been injured or hit at all?

38:00 No, no, no, no.

And the order to lie down, that was because the torpedo might hit?

No, that was because of the shrapnel from the bombs bursting would spray across the ship but if you're lying down, well it wouldn't get down low. You had to get down pretty quick

38:30 though.

So you go down, did you have to wait for orders to get back up again or you got up immediately?

Oh you get the all clear, yes "All clear."

So what sort of orders besides lie down was the captain giving to the crew during an action?

- He'd be pretty quiet until it was over and then he'd tell us what had happened, and
- 39:00 any other ships that had been hit, and what problems had arose you know, and keep us very well informed on what was going on, tell us how the convoy was, and things like that.
- So there wasn't an order like, "Lie down to avoid shrapnel" or to do something else that was given by him?**
- I think the
- 39:30 commander or the captain gave that. I think the captain used to give it. I forget now. It would be him, yes. It would be him. He'd get the TDS in his hand. It would be the captain.
- So was there ever a time that the four inch gun was allowed to shoot wherever it wanted to?**
- No.
- Always under the control?**
- In
- 40:00 the Mediterranean, yes.

Tape 5

- 00:42 **Ok Frank, the Hobart was recalled to the Pacific when the Japanese entered the war.**
- Yes.
- Can you tell us about how you got that news and what was happening at the time?**
- Yes. We were in Alexandria Harbour
- 01:00 and the captain came on the speaker system, and told us that we would be leaving that night for Australia, that Japan had entered the war, and that we had been recalled to Australia, to the best of his knowledge we would be picking up a convoy round about Port Tewfik,
- 01:30 and sailing straight to Singapore. We got underway within a couple of hours and took off, went straight through the Suez, no hold up, never stopped at Port Tewfik, Port Said or Port Tewfik, went straight through to Colombo. We fuelled at Colombo from memory and
- 02:00 then we took a convoy, only one ship, one fairly large ship. I forget what it was, the [SS] Arcadia [actually SS Aquitania] or one of those and escorted it to Singapore. Now when we got the news about this business of leaving the Med and going to fight the Japanese, the general consensus was the Japanese had paper aeroplanes, and didn't know how to fly them,
- 02:30 and couldn't see at night, and we said, "Oh this is going to be all right, real good." Anyway, we got this troop ship into Singapore and went alongside the Carling wharf I think it was, and low and behold we got greeted with a flyover of 27 planes. They didn't drop any bombs. They dropped pamphlets. The pamphlets
- 03:00 were the usual propaganda pamphlets, you know, "Surrender. Give up. You're only wasting your time. You're the lackeys of the Poms." You know the old story. I forget. I should have kept one I suppose. If I'd thought of it I would have kept one. About an hour later they came over again but this time they dropped bombs and unfortunately the Carling
- 03:30 wharf had a kink in it, and the bombs went down, straight down the Carling wharf, and we were tied up in the kink. So they went past us down the side, so we ... then our captain was told... he came on the broadcast again, and he said there'd be a directive that
- 04:00 Singapore was in a mess, and that we would be landing parties to pick up whatever stores or ammunition, anything we wanted we could take without reference. So a party did go across the causeway and they were amazed to see the causeway still in one piece instead of blown up in the middle.
- 04:30 They gathered a few stores and came back to the ship. I think they got back that night. The next day they looted a warehouse full of sewing machines or something like that. The boss said that was no good, we're not allowed to do that, so they had to return all the sewing machines, Singer sewing machines. Anyway,
- 05:00 then we sailed out of there, got the hell out and on the way out we went alongside one ship that had been bombed, and was on fire, and there were a lot of civilians on it, civilians and wounded. We took them off. We were bombed while we were doing it and we took them back to

05:30 Tanjung Priok off Batavia, and dropped them, and pulled out back down to Fremantle.

Just a couple of questions about all that.

Yep?

Were there anything other than sewing machines that were taken from the port?

Somebody told me there was a storehouse full of whisky but I never saw any of it. Basically you could take what you wanted but nobody...

06:00 our captain said, "You're not to do it and that's it." So there was no looting.

What was the atmosphere like onshore at that time?

Bloody awful. I went off ashore with a couple of chaps just for a little walk and it was so quiet, and

06:30 the people just didn't seem to understand what was going on. Unbelievable. It was complete desolation, absolutely you know... the feeling of doom was there. You could feel it. I remember saying to my

07:00 mates, I said, "God, we could be stuck in this place forever." Anyway, we got back to the ship and we sailed that afternoon out.

Another question about when you got bombed that first time.

Yes?

What was the reaction to that, having told us what you did about the Japanese having paper aeroplanes and... ?

It changed our minds pretty rapidly because it was pretty accurate bombing and nice

07:30 good formations, and everything. We had to change our minds on that one. So we realised that we had to be just as efficient and serious as we ever was because it wasn't going to be a walkover for anyone.

Was the ship at action stations for much of that time?

All the time, yep.

08:00 As soon as the first planes came over we were at action stations when they dropped the pamphlets and we stayed at action stations for a couple of hours just in case, and sure enough they came over again. We pushed up a few shells into them and they were bombing us at 18,000 feet, which is

08:30 high but they were still getting a fair bit of accuracy, and we discussed that in our know all way. We could get to 24,000 feet with our guns but 18,000 feet is a long way up to really knock anything about.

09:00 So we had to change our thinking about the Japanese Air Force very rapidly and then when we came across this ship that had been bombed, they'd done a pretty thorough job on it, and what they told us was that they'd been dive bombed.

Can you describe that scene for us of the ship you came across?

Yes. The ship was burning.

09:30 We went alongside and everyone... we... it was a clear lower deck job. Clear lower deck means everyone... to get the people off onboard to us and some of them were very badly wounded. Probably some of them were dead and we brought them across but we lost a lot,

10:00 lost a lot between there and Tanjung Priok, which wasn't that far, only 150 miles I suppose if that. But we must have buried 20 or 30 I suppose, that afternoon.

What were their injuries?

Bombs, shrapnel and burns, bad burns, and you know people,

10:30 all their body burnt, not a nice sight. When a body burns it all blows up and swells up. You've got to get something around them to bury them decently. I used to help the sail maker and by this time I was getting a nickname,

11:00 you know that I was a very callous person but someone had to help the sail maker put these bodies in a bit of canvas, and dump them. They were buried decently but a lot of defenceless people. We didn't think very much of that and the captain

11:30 thanked us for what we did, and said, "Unfortunately we lost... " so many, 45 or 46, or something. I forget how many but quite a lot. We took on about 200 of them but we left then and we went down to Fremantle, and had a couple of days in Fremantle. We got

12:00 leave in Fremantle.

Was there any truth to the nicknames that labelled you callous? Had you been hardened a bit by what you'd seen at this point?

I'd been hardened all right, yes, yes. Yes I'd lost my... all feeling of...

12:30 I don't know what it is or how long it takes but I think if you're involved enough and long enough handling dead bodies, you just become immune to it, and when you think of it, we wouldn't have any undertakers if you didn't, would we? But we weren't undertakers and

13:00 yeah, I got very, very... I gradually got hardened to it, and I was still only 18 but I was getting a pretty old 18.

Were there times in which your nerves gave you trouble back then?

Not then, no, no, never ever. I never ever lost confidence in the ship.

13:30 I had doubts sometimes but I never lost confidence. No I thought if it was to continue at this rate and no air cover at all, that we were eventually going to really get hammered, and we'd have to be very lucky to get out of it. I realised that and we discussed it, and the guns crews

14:00 discussed it but when we got back to Fremantle we went ashore. When we got to Fremantle the bloody place wasn't even dimmed out and people were still going about their business. You know, God a couple of hundred miles up north people are dying

14:30 and nobody seemed to be greatly worried at that stage. We got rather annoyed about that, probably had too much to drink anyway but the attitude of the general population in Fremantle amazed me.

15:00 I thought surely the newspapers are printing something about it but they were quite blasé, "Not gonna happen here," business. Fortunately it didn't.

How long was your shore time in Fremantle?

I think we were only two or three days there or something like that and we had open

15:30 night leave, yes, one watch overnight leave, each watch.

Did you know where you would be headed after that?

No. No, we came back to the ship. We sailed out of Fremantle, straight back to Colombo. Then we fuelled in Colombo and left Colombo

16:00 the same day, and picked up a convoy for Singapore, which we couldn't understand because we knew Singapore was no hope of saving the way things were, and I remember the captain saying that he didn't think the ship should be going to Singapore. Anyway, it didn't.

16:30 It ended up going to Tanjong Priok. Sometime later we ended up escorting it out of there and pushing it out to sea, and it sailed down to Fremantle, and those soldiers fortunately didn't get put ashore.

What was the scene like in Tanjong Priok?

17:00 Pretty disorganised... the Dutch colonial rule and the Dutch weren't very popular. The fifth column was raging mad and we went to fuel at one stage, we went to take on fuel, and turned the fuel line on, and got salt water instead of bloody oil.

17:30 Then we had to go out and fuel from a tanker in the harbour, and they came... they really were in heavy rage then, and they came over, and they... I think we got 39 near misses in that lot, and they bombed straight through the tanker but fortunately it went straight through, and exploded underneath it, not in it.

18:00 We cut our lines there and with axes, and shot away from there, and shot out of the harbour to get some manoeuvrability, and stayed out there until we got a berth alongside for oil. Oil was our predominant problem, fuel.

18:30 We got fuelled and then we got told that... that night the captain came on the broadcast, and told us that there was a Task Force, I think it was 12 troop ships, and a couple of heavy cruisers, and destroyers, an invasion force for Sumatra was on the way down,

19:00 and we were to go and intercept it. That's what we tried to do and we got very heavily bombed. As a matter of fact, on one particular Sunday... I don't think anyone that was in the Hobart will ever forget that Sunday. We called it Black Sunday. We got attacked

19:30 by 900 and something planes in the one day and that was more planes than attacked Darwin, and we survived. Even so our guns were red hot and we had a captain there who could throw the ship around, and he threw it around as though it was a bloody cork to get out of the patterns that they were dropping. They were dropping

- 20:00 to patterns, which they normally do. Dive bombers, they just switch from high level to dive bombing, just switch straight away and I think in one day we fired about 1500 rounds of four inch, in one day. That's a lot of four inch, a lot of ammunition.
- 20:30 We had a lot of shrapnel onboard, a hell of a lot of shrapnel but nobody was killed. We never lost a life from memory. I can't remember anyone being killed. Someone might have died from wounds but I can't remember.
- 21:00 There was a lot of shrapnel wounds, superficial wounds, flesh wounds. Anyway, we were with the Dutch and there was a mixture of Dutch, American and French there.
- 21:30 Years later I was asked to describe it and I said, "Well to me it was like a bloody WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK with its head cut off. It didn't know where to bloody go. Nobody seemed to be in command." General Wavell [General Wavell arrived in Batavia on 10 January 1942] had been ordered by Churchill to go back to Colombo and Commodore
- 22:00 Collins [later Sir John Augustine Collins (KBE, CB, RAN (retired))] had gone down to Suez Bay, and here we are with Perth, and we've got this bloody great Jap fleet coming down. Anyway, Collins took over then, that's right and ordered Perth, Hobart, [HMS] Diane and [HMS] Dainty,
- 22:30 which were very old cruisers, First World War cruisers, and [HMS] Tenedos, and [HMS] Scout, which were modern destroyers, to intercept this fleet, plus the [DN] De Ruyter, and another Dutch ship, to intercept them in the Sunda Straits.
- 23:00 So we couldn't get oil. We tried another tanker and that got bombed off from us, and went alongside, and eventually we got enough oil to survive on, and we were starting to get short of ammunition. So we were
- 23:30 actually six hours behind Perth and of course Perth, the [HMAS] Yarra and that, they ran straight into the main Japanese fleet. They turned south and to come out of Sunda Straits they turned south into the main Japanese fleet. Of course, just mince meat. I think 400 got off the Perth out of 800.
- 24:00 Not many got off the Yarra, I think six or something like that out of 180 or something like that. Big losses but of course we were delayed six hours. We missed that main fleet. We couldn't join where we were told but then we were ordered to go up to Penang and evacuate some people up there,
- 24:30 a crowd of Chinese guerrillas and all sorts of people, and we went up there, and the destroyers went into Penang, and brought these people out. We took them onboard. Fortunately for us when we were told to go north, we said, "Christ. Stone the crows. Surely we should be going south?" If we'd have gone south we'd have ended up sunk. We turned north
- 25:00 and went north up to Penang, and took these people onboard, took them to Colombo, and dropped them off in Colombo.

Just a couple of questions about all of that. Firstly what was the reaction on the Hobart when news of the Perth sinking came through?

- We just accepted it. It's bloody bad, that's bad you know? We knew she was in trouble but we didn't know
- 25:30 she'd been sunk. We knew she was in big trouble because we picked up a couple of messages and we knew she was in big trouble. We knew the Yarra was in big trouble because it sent out a mayday. Our last raid was the day
- 26:00 before we left Tanjong Priok and we picked them up, went to Colombo, fuelled, fuel, ammunition, stores, no leave, picked up a convoy of 6th Divvy [Division],
- 26:30 out of the Middle East, and brought them down to Fremantle, and people were quite surprised to see us because when we got there, there was no paint left on the ship. It had all burnt off but there was not one gun not working properly, not one gun not working 100% properly, and our control systems were all intact.
- 27:00 The commander come up on the gun deck and said, "I want all you blokes to paint my screen." "Go and paint the bloody thing yourself." People were getting a little bit snarly at this stage and the thought of painting, painting, paintwork,
- 27:30 with what was going on was completely out of order. He didn't get his screen painted anyway. The Western Australians in the ship were given a week's leave and rejoined the ship in Sydney by train,
- 28:00 coming across by train. We came round to Melbourne. The Melbourne members in Melbourne, who lived in Melbourne were given a week's leave, got to Sydney and I got a week's leave. When we got back to Fremantle we hadn't seen a letter from home or anything for about two months and I think there was 90
- 28:30 something bags of mail waiting for us at Fremantle, and we knew nothing about what was going on. Of

course what we weren't allowed to tell, when we arrived in Sydney we weren't allowed to tell anyone we'd arrived in Sydney. We weren't allowed to ring your mum and dad up, and say, "Look, I'm going home on leave." You had to just go and get there, take your seven days, and

29:00 get back. So that's the way it was.

How did all that action you saw and the tense times you experienced up there affect the relationships between the people in the crew?

The crew got tighter and tighter, and tighter, more camaraderie, the tougher, the more camaraderie. Unfortunately

29:30 a few weak fell by the wayside but I'd say 98% got closer together than any, closer.

What do you mean when you say a few fell by the wayside?

Well, they went off their heads you know. They went insane, jumped over the side and things like that.

30:00 All those things are hushed up of course. They are still not talked about. One day it should be talked about.

Are there any examples of that you witnessed yourself?

I witnessed one example, yes. A bloke came to me and said, "Frank I'm going to jump over the side." I said, "What for, for Christ's sake?" He said, "I can't stand any more of this." Then I said,

30:30 "Don't be silly. Don't be silly for Christ's sake. You've got a chance on here. You've got no chance if you jump over the side." Anyway, about... I saw him again later that day and he was still irrational, and I never saw him again. So I assume he jumped. That's the only way. There's no other way

31:00 and that was my personal experience.

Was he a friend of yours?

He wasn't a close friend but I knew him. I knew him pretty well. I knew where he came from and I knew his mum and dad. I knew he had brothers and sisters, and what concerned me more when we got to Fremantle was if his mother and

31:30 father... he came from Fremantle, whether his mother and father came onboard, and I had to front them. That concerned me more than bloody anything else. I don't think I could have. I don't think I could have because it's hard to tell people that sort of thing. He wasn't a coward. He just reached the stage where he couldn't take any more.

How was that looked on

32:00 **by the rest of the crew?**

Just the same as I looked on it, that they'd just reached the point where they couldn't go on. It got to the stage where they couldn't take any more. You know, I think people get harder and harder. We got harder and harder

32:30 but there were the odd ones that just couldn't take any more. I've got no explanation for it. It's just one of those things that happened unfortunately.

What was the official reaction? You mentioned that this was largely hushed up at the time?

Oh lost

33:00 at sea, you know, lost overboard, not jumped overboard, lost overboard. That's what would be in the log, "Lost overboard." And you no it's easy to fall off a ship. There's no doubt about that but very few people do it purposely. It's easy enough to do accidentally.

33:30 **I believe also during one of those actions you were injured yourself?**

Yes I got hit in the leg.

Tell us about that.

I got hit in the back, in the leg. I just got my legs knocked from under me. I was on the way down with the "Lie Down" and I was a bit slow on the bloody uptake. A bit of shrapnel came and ripped my leg open, and I said, "Oh

34:00 Jesus." There was a lot of blood about but we had a good old-fashioned chief gunner's mate in charge of the four inch gun deck. He came over and grabbed me, whipped me into the sick bay. We used to have a sick bay attendant on the gun deck, a bloke that's a male nurse and he put a tourniquet on it,

34:30 stitched it up, and give me a quarter of a gram of morphine, which is standard procedure, and back to the gun because that's the best thing you could ever do. The worse thing to do would be to send me

- somewhere where I could sit and think. The best place for me was back where I
- 35:00 should be, back with the crew.
- What was happening that day? Can you take us through the incident from the beginning?**
- I'm not sure which day it was. I think it actually happened in
- 35:30 Tanjung Priok harbour that one. I think it was a dive bomber and fighter came roaring in out of the blue, and caught us unprepared, and sprayed the deck with machine gun fire, and canon fire because I could never understand how the hell a piece of shrapnel could get me in the leg. I said, "I'm not that bloody slow. When they tell me to lie down I usually get there pretty quick." But
- 36:00 I think that was when we were in Tanjung Priok and two planes came in, so they tell me. A dive bomber and a fighter came in, Zeroes, came in and they strafed the deck, dropped a couple of bombs that missed up. That's when it happened. It wasn't long after that
- 36:30 there was another big raid on the harbour, on that harbour, a high level raid. So my mind was taken off it and it was bloody sore though for a while.
- Can you tell us a bit more about what you call Black Sunday and the events of that day? How much of that day was spent firing? What sort of workload were you personally under?**
- 37:00 Black Sunday from memory started out about half past nine, ten o'clock in the morning with a single
- 37:30 reconnaissance plane spotting us, which obviously directed a flight of aircraft to us and nobody to this day understands why they picked us out. Whether we had the profile of a larger ship or something like that, we can only assume that.
- 38:00 The first bombers came in at about ten and a raid would take probably 15 minutes I suppose. You'd be firing for about 15 minutes. The aircraft didn't fly as fast as they do these days. About 15 minutes and that
- 38:30 lot came in, and the next lot of dive bombers came in about a half hour after that, and I suppose all day we'd have fired I suppose... personally I would have pumped up something around about... close on 200 shells I pumped up that day.
- 39:00 I was a pretty strong bloke in those days too. But we just didn't think it could go on and on, and on, and the bloody sun went down, and we said, "We're still here." And the rest of the ships around us couldn't believe we were still there because we'd been attacked by 190 odd aircraft
- 39:30 during the day. God, one ship. 190 aircraft, that's really putting you under pressure but it proved to us, it proved to the ship's company that it was possible to defend your ship against land based aircraft, which is a theory they had
- 40:00 been preaching, that once your in land based aircraft, you can't defend your ship. Our action that day proved that you could if you were prepared to fight hard enough and your crew was sufficiently trained to do it. I don't think we were the exception to the rule.
- 40:30 Our captain thought that anyway but it was one long day. They talk about the longest day. Oh dear that was the longest day. There's no doubt about that.

Tape 6

- 00:43 **Frank you mentioned earlier that you'd become particularly hardened in respect to death and to war.**
- Yes.
- What were the situations that hardened you up?**
- I think
- 01:00 when we started to deal with the evacuation of the people off these merchant ships that had been bombed, have to carry them onboard and things, and see them die, then have to bury them. The first one churns your stomach up a bit. The second one it doesn't take much and eventually
- 01:30 you just accept it, and say, "That's it and that's part of life."
- Do you remember the first one?**
- Vaguely I do yes. It was a young Chinese girl as a matter of fact. She was a member of a guerrilla force and she was very badly burnt. She died in my arms, yes,

- 02:00 very sad. That evacuation from Penang was... there was a lot of beaten up people in that evacuation, some of the ones escaped from Singapore. Guerrilla forces had been operating behind the lines in Burma and
- 02:30 few odd civilians had made their way out of Singapore but they did present us with a cup, and they nominated the number of people, and they said, "There's one short." And I said, "I know where that one is." Not that particular one I'm speaking of now but I can remember we lost one, one of that lot.
- 03:00 But going alongside a burning ship in the bloody heat and the screams, you know, that makes you... it eventually gets you down. It doesn't get you down. It's just hell. It's a job and we've got to do it, and we've got to do it.
- 03:30 What is more or less an initial nausea to what you're doing becomes daily routine you know? When you say we're going to bury 20 people, you know? Good bloody day the day you say you're going to bury 20 people.
- 04:00 You know, that's... people stand back in shock. You're worrying enough how you're going to get enough boards to tip them over with, sorts of things like that. That's what I mean. You get hardened to it yourself and that's it. I
- 04:30 don't want you to get the idea that I ever, ever became a person who was utterly fearless or anything like that. I was never ever that. I controlled my fear yes but I was never utterly fearless and I think every person is in
- 05:00 the same boat, that they can control their fears, that is controlling the fear. The fear is there, the fear of the unknown. I don't care who you are, you're going to question yourself. So that's what I mean when you get hardened to it and I think we all got hardened to it in the Hobart because we had no crew changes
- 05:30 for ages and ages. We must have gone for at least a year without a single crew change. So everyone knew everyone, even though we were carrying nearly 700 people but you knew Charlie Jones was on the midship Pom Pom and Bill Smith was on
- 06:00 the left gun of S2, and you know? You just knew all these people and they knew you, and you could trust them. That's the point really. You could trust them.
- After all these engagements though did people start to become quite stressful onboard and yell at each other?**
- No. I didn't see any loss of temper
- 06:30 or... I think we let our hair down when we got ashore, that's for sure. There's no doubt about that but I think that's when it came out if it came out at all, when we got ashore into a pub.
- 07:00 **You mentioned though that the CO wanted the bridge window painted and people said no.**
- Yes, no. The grease nipples on the gun are more important than the bloody screen. So it wasn't disobeying his orders or not. It was just a case of bringing him back to reality and I think he
- 07:30 knew it, otherwise he could have really put his foot down but he said, "Oh yes." He could have had his screen painted if he wanted it but you know, there was no disobedience orders or anything like that really, to the contrary. It wasn't necessary to give the
- 08:00 orders.
- The Coral Sea? What can you tell me about your involvement there?**
- Oh the Coral Sea. May... May... May '42 wasn't it? We had a quick refit in Sydney, stored
- 08:30 ammunition. The Australia was there with us and we sailed out of Sydney Harbour, and headed north in late April. We fuelled again up in the Barrier Reef on the tanker. I forget the name of the tanker,
- 09:00 Morundah [actually HMAS Kurumba]? One of the fleet tankers. We fuelled there and then we went out. We had our own flag flying. A chap, Rear Admiral Crace flew his flag in the Australia and we steamed out into the Coral Sea. Then probably
- 09:30 on about the... early in the month, the first week of the month anyway. It might have been the third or the fourth, up over the horizon came this enormous bloody aircraft carrier and cruisers, and destroyers, and bloody Tom Cats flying over the top of us. We hadn't seen a friendly
- 10:00 aircraft in nearly two years. We said, "God. We've got air cover at last." We'd never seen a friendly aircraft for nearly two years and everyone was all... you know, "Great. You beaut." We joined up with that fleet and then we got
- 10:30 detailed off into a task force, which contained the [USS] Chicago and a couple of other cruisers. I forget

the name of them now. I know the Chicago was one because we operated so much with it and there was four cruisers, and tow destroyers, and we became a special

- 11:00 task force, a cruiser force. We steamed with the [USS] Yorktown. That was the [USS] Saratoga we ran into. The Yorktown came the next day. She'd already been stuck into Tulagi. The Yorktown came the next day and still these
- 11:30 Wildcat [F4F] fighters were flying over the top of us. We said, "Bloody beaut. No bloody aircraft." As soon as a Japanese reconnaissance plane would appear on the horizon it would get shot down. "This is bloody the way to fight a war. This will do us." Anyway, that was all to come to a sudden end because that night we were
- 12:00 at action stations, at our guns, sleeping at our guns at action stations and the ship's broadcast system came on, and the captain came on at about two o'clock in the morning, "Jesus." So we knew something was up. Something was going on. So he said, "We've been detached to
- 12:30 the convoy left Rabaul. So many troop ships and so many cruisers, and so many destroyers, and it's because the Americans had the Japanese code broken. Its object is to come down through the Jomard Passage and take Port Moresby, and you are to go there, and stop it." Oh well, away we went.
- 13:00 The next morning we were away from our main aircraft carrier and our Wildcats had disappeared. We were steaming along at about 25 knots or something like that and the Japs spotted us with a reconnaissance plane. I will say that a Wildcat got onto that
- 13:30 eventually and knocked it down. Then nothing happened right up until lunchtime. We steamed along and we were all ready to go into action, surface action on this fleet and then all of a sudden the aircraft started to come, and I don't
- 14:00 know how many planes bombed it. Certainly the first flight was about 27 and it straddled the Australia, and dropped a couple near us but the Australia got the most of them, straddle, bloody near misses. We managed knock a couple of those planes down and
- 14:30 then the next lot that came in. We saw them coming around. We knew what they were. They were up about ten feet off the water, so we knew they were torpedo bombers. So we just loaded and waited. You know they've got to come into a certain range, so you set the range and
- 15:00 throw up a barrage at that range, and that we did but Jesus there were torpedoes bloody flying everywhere. Two went down, one down each side. I remember that very well. I thought Chicago was gone because the torpedo was going straight for it and all of a sudden it turned right, and it just went down the side of it. I
- 15:30 think they sent in... in official Japanese records was that they sent in 20 planes and they lost 20. We reckoned we got 18 of them because they were sitting ducks. They were almost at the end of your bloody muzzle of your gun. So we really sorted that lot out but then the dive-bombers came and it was the old story over again,
- 16:00 and then the high level bombers, and so the day went on. Then to give us a final salute for the end of the day, three planes and we identified them as being friendly, and they dropped bombs on us. It was three B17s out of Townsville and they bombed us.
- 16:30 Thank God their bombs were filled that far away it didn't matter but they stilled bombed us. Boy, there was a few words said over that. Then we steamed across the Jomard Passage and eventually the Japs pulled off their invasion fleet, and wouldn't have a go at us. So
- 17:00 they went back to Rabaul and so we stayed there for about three days until we made sure that they had completely dispersed, and then went back to Brisbane. That was the Battle of the... [Coral Sea] then of course in the meantime the aircraft carriers were battling each other and they hit the
- 17:30 [USS] Lexington I think it was, hit the Lexington. She was damaged but then they had an internal explosion. They were carrying high-octane fuel, thousands of gallons of it and she blew up. She had to be evacuated. We helped to pull the survivors of her out of the water.
- 18:00 The [USS] Saratoga I think was the other one. I forget the names now. They only had two carriers. But the Japs had had enough because I think they'd lost two carriers and they withdrew. Of course that was the Battle of the
- 18:30 Coral Sea over and had we of lost that battle it would have been a different outcome of the war because Port Moresby would have been occupied. There would have been no Kokoda Trail, nor the Australia be under bombs and
- 19:00 so then the Battle of Midway of course eventually got the Yanks on top, and gave them superiority because they knocked out all their carriers.

So just coming back to the aircraft carrier Lexington, were you there when it was hit?

No, not when it was hit, no. We were there the next day after it had this huge internal explosion.

19:30 **Who were you able to save from the water?**

I don't know how many we picked up. A lot got off. She had a fair size crew. She had about 2,500 in the crew. I don't know. We must have picked up 50 or 60 I suppose. We picked them up and transferred them to one of the Yankee ships.

20:00 **Many fellas hurt and injured from it?**

Not the ones we picked up, no. They just jumped over the side. There was no injured. We didn't pick up any injured strangely enough. They had a couple of destroyers in close alongside. They would have taken the injured I think.

Where had you

20:30 **sailed from?**

To go to the Coral Sea? We sailed from Sydney, from Sydney.

But when you went to pick up some of the survivors from the aircraft carrier?

We were in the entrance to the Jomard Passage in the southeast tip of New Guinea.

21:00 The passage comes down from Rabaul, down through there. We'd been there and we thought that was it, they're not coming and we were told they were not coming, so that we could head for home but then we heard that they were evacuating the Lexington or the Saratoga, I forget now. Anyway,

21:30 we got these people in the water. A lot of them were in the water without early floats, just on life jackets. I suppose we pulled 50 or 60 out of the water. One of the American destroyers came alongside and took them off us, and we continued on our way down to Brisbane.

Did the fellas mention anything about sharks and those sorts of things?

No they didn't.

22:00 Well, there was always after heavy raids like that... you'd always see a lot of dead fish and a lot of sharks on top of the surface, dead after the bombs had exploded in the water. I never thought of that though. It would be good fishing.

22:30 I never thought of that one, yes. Yes it used to be... the most I ever saw was when we went into the Guadalcanal. I never saw so many sharks killed on top of the water as around there.

23:00 That finished the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Yanks withdrew, and prepared for Midway, and Midway came, and it was an American victory, and they got on top of them. Of course while all this was going on they were building carriers flat out and in the next few months a new carrier would be coming on station every few

23:30 weeks.

You mentioned the B17s dropping bombs nearby. Were there occasions when you were hit by friendly fire?

Oh stupid bloody Yanks, yes. Bloody ships. I'm glad you asked that question because when we first went to operate with the Yanks we'd never operated with them before.

24:00 We had operated with one in the Java Sea, the [USS] Huston but that was just one ship. When we steamed in with these bloody ships. They've got holes in the bloody funnel. Bloody high level bombing getting holes in the funnel? What the hell is goin' on you know? Anyway,

24:30 our captain sent a notice to the admiral that he suggested that all captains of the task force meet immediate to discuss this friendly fire problem and it was a problem. We found out that the Yanks never had any safety officers on their guns, whereas all our guns, every gun mounting had a safety officer issued

25:00 with other ships and if your gun came into bearing on a friendly ship, you got a tap on the shoulder, and that was it. You stopped firing but the Yanks never had that. They just blaze away and bloody God. Crazy buggers. Anyway, they had a meeting and the

25:30 Yanks agreed to put safety officers on their guns. They either do that or we weren't going to bloody stay. That was as simple as that I think. That's what they were told. The Yanks are funny people.

So you're saying that the ship was hit by Yanks fire?

Oh yes, by 40 millimetre stuff,

26:00 you know. Oh yes, there was a few holes in the funnel and the aft of the control tower. I said to the captain of the gun, I said, "Bloody funny thing. They must be firing funny bloody guns up there to get

down to there." "Yeah" he said, "Over there."

26:30 **So after the Coral Sea you went and did a gunnery course? Is that right?**

I came back. No, I came back... we came back to Brisbane. We had about a week in Brisbane and then we went back to Sydney, a quick refit in Sydney, and left Sydney, and went

27:00 to Auckland to pick up a convoy that we were to take to the Solomon Islands. That was in August '42 and that was a very disastrous campaign for the Yanks naval-wise.

27:30 Land-wise it was a success but it was all highly planned and of course we were a bit cynical about the way these Yanks operated, got to have breakfast before you start firing and all this, yes, yes. The fact that you could eat a sandwich and keep firing didn't appeal to them. Anyway,

28:00 we landed in the Solomons with a big force, a big back up, two carriers backed up and we got some heavy air raids. They hit the transports but they never hit any of the

28:30 warships, a few near misses, but nothing startling, plenty of torpedo bombers really, but we always used to pride ourselves. If you send out 20 torpedo bombers we'll knock 20 down and we did again. I think we knocked 18 down out of the 20 and being in harbour you were limited in your

29:00 manoeuvring, which made it difficult but that's when we saw all the sharks. The bombs were dropping into fairly shallow water and it devastated the bloody sea life. We were steaming through bloody sharks and fish, and God. That's when the Canberra was sunk

29:30 in that battle at midnight on the 7th, I think it was by a lack of communication on the part of our organization. The Japanese managed to send three heavy cruisers down from Rabaul, which arrived at about one o'clock in the morning

30:00 unreported, yet they'd been sighted and reported by our reconnaissance but the message was sitting on someone's desk in Townsville, and they steamed into the harbour in the middle of the night. They took out the Canberra. They took out three American cruisers and we weren't involved in that. We were on the other side of the

30:30 entrance. Our job was to control the shallow draft craft, like landing craft and things like that. If any of those came that was our job to stop them. So we had a sort of armchair view of this battle but nobody knew what went on until the next morning. We'd lost three cruisers. We found out the Yanks weren't even at their

31:00 action stations. You know, I said, "I can't believe that." They said, "Oh no, they had to get out of bed and get up, and go and man their guns." By the time they got up and manned their guns the Japs had sunk them, and I think there was 2,000 killed in that little episode.

31:30 the Canberra had to be sunk.

You said you were watching on. What did you actually see?

We just saw the gun flashes and we knew something was on but we didn't know what because everything was garbled. It was a disaster, bloody disaster and they called it the Battle of Savo Island.

32:00 They should have called it the disaster of Savo Island because three cruisers come in and knock over four heavily armed cruisers without loss, and then steam off, and not get caught. There's something wrong somewhere. So when you start talking about it people say, "Oh yes, but this and but that." No buts at all. The fact is they weren't at action stations. They weren't

32:30 ready. They weren't waiting. They should have been waiting for them and said they had a guard boat out. The guard boat is a boat you put out to report anything that's coming and the guard boat missed them. I said, "Well they couldn't have been looking very hard. God it wasn't that dark that night." Anyway, the Canberra got hit by a stack of 18 inch shells

33:00 and she got beached. No, she wasn't beached. She was dead in the water, so they had to torpedo her. One of the Yank destroyers had to put a couple of torpedos into her and sink her but the Canberra, that was her only action, the Canberra... God. Some people said she was... I read a book where she was engaged in the Battle Coral Sea. She wasn't nowhere near the Coral Sea when

33:30 the Battle of the Coral Sea was on but with the Canberra, I can remember when we steamed into Brisbane after the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Canberra was tied up alongside Hamilton Wharf and we steamed past her. She was still immaculately white and polished brass works, and it looked...

34:00 it had no extra armament anywhere. It looked nude you know, to us. That's the only way of expressing it. It looked bloody nude and we said, "God. If I get a draft for that ship I'm bloody taking off. That's it. There's no way I'm going to sea in that ship." God. It was just so unprepared.

So in the Philippines, what sort

34:30 **significant... you were up there I take it with the Hobart?**

No, I didn't go to the Philippines. We only went to the Philippines in the ammunition ship.

I'm sorry. Just up where the Canberra was, what area was that?

That was in the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands?

Yes.

So what significant things were you doing there on the Hobart?

Normal, just the normal... protecting the troop ships at anchor and

35:00 bombarding, and fighting off aeroplanes, and just the normal procedures. The Japs had an airfield almost built on Guadalcanal and the Yanks successfully took it, and eventually after a long, long battle,

35:30 they eventually secured Guadalcanal. It was pretty high casualties for them there but they eventually won that one.

Where was all your fuel and ammunition coming from at that point?

Usually from that at the Solomon Islands it was coming from tankers, what they call fleet tankers. A tanker would follow you up.

36:00 We'd get orders to go to a certain place and fuel. In that particular case we used to get our fuel from inside the Barrier Reef, a tanker inside the Barrier Reef. The Barrier Reef was a protection against submarines. They used to go in there and fuel.

So what happened after

36:30 **the Solomon Islands?**

The Solomon Islands? We went back to Brisbane and went back to Sydney, and I left the ship. I went to Flinders [HMAS Cerberus Victoria], back to Flinders.

What course were you doing at Flinders?

I was doing an anti-aircraft gunners course at Flinders. That was only for about six weeks or something like and then I got drafted to the [HMAS] Vendetta

37:00 with that qualification.

So these things, the anti-aircraft? Was this new to you or were you already familiar with what they were teaching?

Oh no, I knew what they were teaching. No, we knew what they were teaching.

Was it necessary to do?

Oh yes, highly necessary because it was for small arms anti-aircraft, like two-pounder and 50 mill.

37:30 We knew what the score was in that but it was a good course. It gave you control of a gun of your own.

38:00 When I went to Vendetta I got a Pom Pom two-pounder mounting, which was mine. "That's Frank Smith's gun." And you're responsible for it.

So that was a promotion up from the four inch?

Oh not a promotion but more or less taking

38:30 experienced people and getting them ready for other things. They wanted the experienced men. They didn't want to put anyone on these ships that were going to start jumping over the side or bloody running around. Although the Vendetta to me is... they were built in 1917

39:00 and she'd been refitted in Singapore, and spent... in fact it was one of the last ships we saw towed out of Singapore back to Sydney. The living conditions were appalling on those ships. They were built for the North Sea and here we were operating in the tropics, and they were narrow gutted,

39:30 and they carried 39 tonne of water for 180 men. You were allowed a gallon of water a day. That's living rough. But the work we did was rewarding.

40:00 We did all the island hopping and right up to Hollandia. That's the old Dutch New Guinea. We came back. I spent nearly two years in there I suppose, close on two years.

Tape 7

- 00:45 **All right Frank as I, said we haven't got a lot of time to spend on the Vendetta or the next ship.**
No, don't need to because the Vendetta was just a routine anti-submarine escort
- 01:00 duties for as long as I was on it.
Was it a happy ship?
Oh it was a happy ship, yes. It was a happy ship.
You mentioned before that it was surprising for you to join this ship because you'd seen it before in a very different situation.
It was. I was surprised
Can you tell us about that? When did you see it the first time?
I saw it being towed out
- 01:30 of Singapore. It was in dry dock in Singapore and they decided that they'd better get it out of there otherwise the Japanese would have it. So we saw it being towed out. That was just before Christmas in 1941 and we passed the Vendetta under tow, and the next thing I heard about
- 02:00 the Vendetta I got a draft to it. I said, "God."
How did anti-submarine work differ from the anti-aircraft work you'd been doing earlier on?
It didn't affect me really. Anti-submarine was a separate division, as deck had our own specialists that didn't interfere
- 02:30 with us. We were anti-aircraft and if we got in close enough we could give the Japs a bit of a hurry up with some two pounder bombs but my time in the Vendetta, except for the shocking living conditions... see we never had a bakery onboard. So it meant that two days out and as I say, the ship were built for the
- 03:00 North Sea, and they were terribly hot, and very limited water, and no bakery, so two days out the bread started to go green, so therefore you go onto hard biscuits until you find someone going to a port where someone will bake you some bread. So we went for ages but it was a
- 03:30 happy ship. I used to say for me it was R & R [rest and recreation]. Some people can make a story about it but I'm afraid I can't, just because I'd come from things different.
You were only about 20 years old when you joined it?
Yep.
- 04:00 **And you were an old hand. How was that? A strange situation?**
Yes, you know. People used to look at me and say, "How do we do this or how do we do that?" But I got made leading seaman when I was in that
- 04:30 ship, passed the exam for leading seaman and got made up to leading seaman. So, "How do you do this Frank?" "How do you do this?" Because by that time the navy was all reserve, very few permanent service people around. They were either dead or gone somewhere else and
- 05:00 so in a way sometimes I used to get a fair bit of responsibility chucked in my shoulders because of my knowledge but that didn't worry me greatly. I was Cox of the motorboat and the captain wouldn't have anything to do with anyone else unless Smith [he] had the motorboat. Jesus Christ.
- 05:30 I asked for a chart to see where we you going, "We haven't got one. You don't need one. You can see. You know. You can pick out coral clumps." "Oh yeah." When you hit them, "What are you hitting?" I know when we took Madang the Japanese had deserted that area
- 06:00 and we took the army in, a company. I forget what it was. We took them in and I took them in, in the motorboat, and landed them, and when I came back everyone said, "What about souvenirs?" I said, "Oh souvenirs? I'm not interested in souvenirs." And there was plenty of them,
- 06:30 Japanese rifles everywhere and ammunition everywhere. They deserted the whole... things were getting towards the end in New Guinea at that stage, moving up, up the Sepik [River], and around there.
After the Vendetta you spent some time on an ammunition ship.
Yes.
How did that come about?

I wish I could answer that question.

- 07:00 This is an assumption but I was sent to that ship, which was entirely reserve crew, captain was reserve, the first attendant was reserve, there was no permanent service people on there. They didn't know any seamanship and
- 07:30 here we are being loaded... I arrived at that ship with my bag and hammock on a Saturday afternoon, and it was moored at Darling Harbour in Sydney, and I looked down, and I see them loading eight inch shells into the bloody ship. I said, "Oh that can't be the ship I'm going to." Anyway, I went down around and I said, "I'm looking for the [SS] Mulcra." They said, "You don't have to look. This is it."
- 08:00 I said, "God. How long you been loading those eight inch shells for?" They said, "Oh the last four days." "Sheez, that's a lot of shells." Each eight inch shell weighs about 260 pound and it's one heavy piece of equipment, and of course to send that 260 pound on its way it needs
- 08:30 another 80 pound of TNT [high explosive] behind it. Somewhere in that ship had to be that much TNT to send those shells on the way, so I said to him, I said, "Have you loaded any explosives?" And this wharfie said to me, "Oh I don't know." I said, "Well where's the ship's manifest?" They said, "We gave it to a bloke
- 09:00 that was here yesterday." God, I thought, "If ever I felt like just taking my bag and hammock, and going back to the RTO [rail transport officer] in Melbourne, the railway station, and saying I can't find the ship it was then." Anyway, we left Sydney. The crew came aboard and they didn't know how to tie a knot. They didn't know how to stow the gear. They didn't know how to work derricks.
- 09:30 "Why me?" I kept saying. I went to the skipper one day, I said, "Look what am I here for?" He said, "You're here because you're needed." "Well." I said, "I don't feel very needed." He was an old... he was 65, an old merchant marine
- 10:00 captain and he said, "But none of these people know anything about seamanship. I've been watching you stow the derricks for sea," and he said, "I've seen you do it. You have to show them how to tie a knot even." I said, "Yeah and that's what I'm... how long can this go on for?" He said, "Well I don't know. I don't even know where I'm going."
- 10:30 God, stone the crows.

You went up to the Philippines in that ship?

Yes.

Can you explain how it was received when the other convoys saw it coming in?

Yes they disappeared quickly, very rapidly out of the way. We had ammunition for Shropshire and Australia onboard mainly. We had a lot of small arms ammunition, two pounder Pom Pom ammunition.

- 11:00 That was for the Australia and Shropshire, and we have four inch ammunition for the Corvette, and we had a stores officer, who managed the store, grocery store. He was the stores officer and wouldn't know the front end of a shell from the back.
- 11:30 Anyway, when we got out of Sydney I went up to the skipper and I said to the skipper, "Where are we going to?" He said, "I've just opened the letter." He said, "We're going from here to Milne Bay, first stop Milne Bay." I said, "And how fast are we going?" He said, "Eight knots." I said, "God.
- 12:00 Eight knots. Eight knots." That rather staggered me when I'd come off a ship that... even the old Vendetta, we'd give her a burst one day and got 34 out of it, and the Hobart used to cruise consistently at 30 knots, and
- 12:30 anyway, we got to Milne Bay. Then we went to Madang. At Madang we ammunitioned a couple of corvettes. A corvette came alongside and wanted four inch ammunition, and he wanted it now. I said, "Where are you going to fire it?" He said, "At the Japanese." I said, "They're real bloody frightened. You better be careful." I was being sarcastic again, funny man.
- 13:00 That chap ended up being the captain of a ship I was on later. Anyway, we ammunitioned them. Then we went on to Palau, a group Palau. At Palau we went across towards Lingayen [Gulf] and that's when we
- 13:30 just stayed out at sea, and we sent the code off to all of them to come, and get their ammunition, which they did.

How did the procedure of arming those ships take place?

All we had on that ship was a single Bofors and two point 45 machine guns.

What I meant was how did you transfer your ammunition to arm the Shropshire

- 14:00 **and the Australia? What happened when they came alongside?**

Derricks, derricks, palates, palates and derricks, not a difficult procedure if you know what you're doing

but unfortunately my crew, it took them a long time to learn what to do.

When did you hear that the war was over?

14:30 We knew the war was over when we were on our way home from there and we were at anchor in... God where was it? We weren't at anchor. We were alongside at Lae in New Guinea. We pulled in there to get some fuel that's right, at Lae and we heard the war

15:00 was over, and that was a great, great big relief, a big relief, and we had a pleasant trip home back to Sydney, and we discharged what little bit of... we didn't have much ammunition left but we discharged it, and loaded a civilian

15:30 cargo for Adelaide, and sailed around to Adelaide. At Adelaide we had Christmas in Adelaide. You get a bonus eventually.

What was it like to suddenly have the war over having been away at war for so long?

Hard to explain, such a relief you know, to know that you're still here.

16:00 I suppose it's a feeling of relief and sadness all mixed in one. You're sad because you know who is not coming back. You're relieved at the fact that you're here still and you find that it's most difficult to... it takes you days, and days,

16:30 and days to settle down to the fact that there is no war you know? It takes days. The war was over and Frank was... I left the Mulcra in Adelaide and went back to Sydney, and got drafted to the [HMAS] Warramunga,

17:00 a triple class destroyer in Japan. So I went up to Japan with the BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupational Force] there until October I think it was. Then I came home in the October and then we were all ready to go back up there, and on the 16th of December in between, when we came back to Sydney I went and

17:30 sat, and did my examination for petty officer. I passed that and that made me very young. I was still very young to be doing that exam. In fact the blokes taking the records queried me birthday. I said, "That's it. The 8th of the 9th 1923." Anyway, I topped the class in that,

18:00 come back onboard and Alan Nelson Dollard was first lieutenant of the Warramunga at the time, and he was later to be my captain in Korea. I said all my goodbyes and we were going to sail the next day, and bingo, in comes a draft to Frank Smith to Flinders naval depot to qualify as gunnery instructor.

18:30 I said, "Oh this can't be right. There's something wrong. I'm only a leading seaman. I'm only an anti-aircraft Gunner Two." I said, "To qualify as a gunnery instructor I should be at least an anti-aircraft Gunner One. I should be a PO [petty officer]." So they said, "Off you go." So

19:00 off I went to Flinders naval depot and eventually got my wife down there, and we spent the next couple of years studying, and becoming a gunnery instructor, promoted to petty officer, and youngest ever gunnery instructor. The youngest ever. God when I think of it. I was

19:30 a terrible fitness fanatic in those days. We used to live at Shoreham out of Flinders, which is about three and a half mile. All these blokes used to ride their bikes to work. I used to run. One bloke said to me, a chap called Alan Mull, he was a nice bloke, very particular friend of mine, he said, "A chap came and spoke to me about you the other day."

20:00 I said, "What was that Alan?" He said, "Is that bloke right in the head? I ride a bloody bike in from bloody Shoreham. This bloke runs along and passes me running. He goes off over the fences across the paddocks. He's here in the bloody mess before me. Is he right in the head?" But they were happy days. I qualified

20:30 GI and I was still in round rig. I wasn't into square rig. That hadn't happened before. There had never been such a thing as a round rig gunnery instructor. A gunnery instructor is equivalent to a regimental sergeant major and there was never ever such a thing as a round rig. When I went up to be confirmed petty officer

21:00 and that was to go into square rig, I remember the captain of the depot saying, "I've never ever seen this before." And I said, "Well things happen." I said, "You know that's it." I instructed then for about six or eight months and I got sent for again, and said, "Well look, we think you are officer material, so

21:30 if you'd like to grab yourself the higher education test, which is matriculation and do the exams here, we'll send you to England for courses." And that's what happened.

I'll stop you there.

Actually I ended up in England sitting, waiting for the time to go past for my birthday

22:00 to get to the right age, so I could be promoted. I was too young.

I'll stop you there so we can skip forward a bit. You mentioned before that you were on your way back from England when the Korean War broke out.

Yes.

When did you first get the news that you would be going to this conflict?

Going to Korea? We were in Hobart at the Hobart regatta. It must have been...

22:30 when would that have been... '41, '41, '51, '51, '51... oh of course. When does the Melbourne Cup

23:00 run?

November.

Well that's when we were there.

November '51?

November '51. November '51, when I joined [HMAS] Murchison in Sydney, when I came back from England, she was the anti-submarine training ship working out of Sydney training the anti-submarine operators and we went down to the Hobart regatta,

23:30 which was always held on Melbourne Cup weekend, and so it would have been in November '51. The captain sent for me. He said, "Frank we're going to Korea." I said, "Oh that's interesting. That's interesting." He said, "What's interesting about it?" I said, "It's interesting." He said, "Oh well."

24:00 I asked him point plank. I said, "Have you got doubts about me working this ship up into a fighting unit and because of my age?" Because I was still very young and he said,

24:30 "I've got no doubts in your ability Frank." But he said, "We haven't got the crew. We're going to have to get crew from Flinders naval depot that have only just finished their recruit parade training." I said, "It doesn't make any difference." I said, "We can't get to Korea in a day. It's going to take us two or three weeks to get there at least." I said, "In two or three weeks a lot

25:00 can happen." I said, "Provided you put the paintbrushes away and get on with the gun drill." The first lieutenant's job is to keep the ship clean and tidy, and nice and sparkling. Anyway, I'd see something and I'd say to a chap, Robert Wok... unfortunately he's dead now Wok, and I'd say to Wok, "You've got brass shining

25:30 on the bridge. Paint the bloody stuff over." "Why?" I said, "If you don't know why you'll never live to find out." So I said, "Because it reflects and it gives an angle." So he'd always be looking for paintwork to be done and I used to tell him, "No paintwork. Gun drill. Control parties close up. Gun drill."

26:00 And we worked that ship up and before we left Garden Island I got stuck into the ordnance department, and I got every test possible done on the guns starting from the very bottom, and worked right through. When we left we did a trial shoot before we left and nobody could believe that you could put four inch shell at 10,000 yards,

26:30 four shells in a cricket pitch at 10,000 yards, and we could do it because we trained, and trained, and trained, and the day came when we had to do it, and we did it.

What did you know about where you were going and what the Murchison would be doing in Korea?

We understood we'd be on patrol duties on the east coast, which didn't mean much. We knew it was going to get bloody cold in the winter.

27:00 Otherwise we didn't know much. That's about all. We were relieving the Warramunga and when we relieved the Warramunga I had a talk to the gunner on there, and asked him what the score was, and he said, "You don't have to worry as long as you stay out, keep 10,000 yards out and you'll be right because if you sneak inside that you might cop something."

27:30 So I understood what he meant, that the shore batteries were only good for 10,000 yards. If you were outside that you'd be right and other information he gave me. So we went off on our first patrol

28:00 and I'm fast asleep having done the middle watch, that's the 12 o'clock till four watch. I'm fast asleep in my bunk at seven o'clock in the morning and the steward is shaking me, and bloody action stations sounding, and I thought, "Christ. What's happened?" This sounded like a real war. I go up and what had actually happened, our captain had been

28:30 directed to go close inshore to inspect something, and we were sitting at around about 5,000 yards out I suppose, and there was shells falling around us. By the time I got into the director tower and I saw what was happening, a tank

29:00 was sitting up on the hill having pot shots at us. So I soon finished that off very quickly and took him out in about three, four five, five broadsides, took him out clean as a whistle. That

29:30 was impressive. I must say my captain said, "Well shot guns." I said, "Yeah a bloody bit of luck too." I said, "I wish they'd do it later than seven o'clock in the morning." I said, "God I haven't had any sleep."

Perhaps at this moment you can just tell us a bit about the Murchison's guns and about your role on the ship?

30:00 Yes the Murchison was armed with twin four inch guns forehead and aft. It had a complete gunnery control system, admiralty control system. That was the latest up to date at the time. It had an anti-aircraft control system, up to date.

30:30 They called it an AFC, an admiralty fire control clock and we had five hydraulically controlled 40 millimetre Bofors guns, two on each side, and one facing aft.

31:00 We carried a Hedgehog, which is an anti-submarine device, 24, 25 pound mortar bombs go out. We carried 60 depth chargers on the stern, 350 pound each. My job was the armament, to look after the armament. I had a gunner's mate and a gun instructor

31:30 to help me, assist me. I had a gun sweeper on each gun, one man just to look after the grease nipples and make sure everything worked. Every day we would do control party drill, that is you'd close up. You wouldn't close up the loading numbers and all those. You'd close up your layers and your trainers,

32:00 and you direct the control, and you had control party drill for an hour everyday, whether you were in harbour or out of harbour, every day. The only way to become proficient is practice and that saved the ship eventually. Later

32:30 on in the piece we went down to... that's right. After that little tank episode we got a direction to find a way into the Han River to pin down a Chinese Division on the north bank.

33:00 The Han River comes down and it bursts off into several estuaries, and to find the right estuary, there was no charts, so we had to send boats ahead, and we had a ROK [Republic of Korea], Royal Korean Navy ROK helping us find a passage in. Eventually after 24 hours I think, we made 30 miles on the first day

33:30 towards the entrance. The next day we got about another 25 miles and from then we just extended our areas around the river, and as we extended we got closer, and closer to the banks. Eventually we were up to sometimes 200 yards from the banks

34:00 and this was absolutely suicidal if we had aircraft attacking us as well because we couldn't do it but we had supremacy in the air. We kept going. We kept bombarding and causing

34:30 a lot of trouble for the Chinese, and eventually they got sick of us, and they decided they'd do something about us, and rolled a bit of artillery down to the foreshore, and lay waiting for us. We poked our noses around the corner one day and low and behold, there we were gun for gun down to 600 yards, machine guns,

35:00 rifles, 75 mills, mortars, Bazookas, unbelievable. I said to someone, I said, "This is unbelievable." In the director tower you're up above the bridge and you have in that

35:30 director tower, you have a layer and a trainer, and you have a bank of lights, which tells you what's happening at the guns, so you know when the guns are ready. So the first lot that came at us we let fly and

36:00 we quietened them down the first lot. We were pumping out a round, a broadside every three seconds so I'm told and that's what we aimed to do originally, and we took a couple of direct hits that day, nothing serious.

36:30 We had a cynical American Admiral onboard, who said what was happening couldn't be done, so we proved him wrong. He said it couldn't be done. What was his name? Dyer [later Vice Admiral George C Dyer], that's right. We fought our way out of that but

37:00 it was entirely foreign and navigation was difficult, and the terrain was different. As gunnery officer you don't expect anyone to put a bloody machine gun on your director tower or send bullets flying through your radar. When they come you've got to take it, accept it.

37:30 Anyway, we did that first trip. We knocked them back out of the picture, so we won the first round and then the next day our captain generously offered to show one of the Kiwis [New Zealander] the routes around because

38:00 one of the Kiwi frigates were taking over from us, and we were going to go out. Holy hell, they wondered what happened that day. They really let go yes, mortars. You could actually see the people loading the mortars. That's how close we were and we could also see our four four inch shells go into that mortar pit.

- 38:30 You saw bodies go up in the air. We could do it but what come up behind them was a bloody white streaks of bazookas and I know what a Bazooka looks like. I thought, "God if one of those hits us we'll be in big trouble." Anyway, it didn't hit us. I think we got... we turned and tried to go back.
- 39:00 We had to find our way out of it. That day we knocked out 75 mill mortars, Bazookas. We also lobbed a broadside into a trench with 40 Chinese sheltering,
- 39:30 hiding from us. They all went up to the fairyland and we came out of that, and we got a lot of praise for that trip but we took seven direct hits that day.

Tape 8

- 00:45 **You mentioned that you got hit by seven broadsides?**
- Yes seven shells.
- Where did you get hit?**
- From stem to stern, one into the engine room,
- 01:00 some under the [ship's] focsle. Fortunately none of them... they made the fatal mistake of firing anti-tank ammunition at us, which is armour piercing. It was going through one side and out the other in some places. It's only when they hit something upright and solid that they exploded. So we were fortunate, very fortunate.
- 01:30 If they had been firing HE [high explosive] ammunition it could have been a different story. There would have been a lot more damage.
- How did the New Zealand frigate fare?**
- Pardon?
- The New Zealand ship that was with you?**
- The [HMNZS] Rotorua yes.
- How did that fare?**
- It fared it because they only had a single four inch and they'd only go up so far. They wouldn't
- 02:00 go up the full run. They'd only go to a particular point where they could throw a few shells into the command post.
- So your roles seem absolutely chaotic. Can you describe to me what orders you were issuing and what you were telling the captain, and the gunners?**
- 02:30 Well the first order is, "Stand by broadsides. Broadside. DADA load. Broadside." Up come your ready lights, means every gun is ready and on target. You give the order then. The captain then is ready to give the order to
- 03:00 engage or not engage. The captain gives the order, "Engage. Shoot." They order shoot, the guns reload and the lights come on, so you watch those shells go out, tracers, and see where they fall, and you make your correction. You might want to go 200 yards to the right and up 50 or down 50
- 03:30 and you pass to your operations room. The chap sets that on the admiralty fire control clock and the next round's on their way. One you establish, once you get on the targets you're on, you order rapid broadsides. That means to fire as quick as possible, a round every
- 04:00 three seconds. So you've probably six shells in the air at once coming down and you see what happens after that. If you've destroyed the target, well that's when you move onto the next one but you don't worry about the other target. You know there's another target there but you can only do one target at a time. So you've just got to take what's coming from the other one
- 04:30 until you can move left or right onto another target. If a target becomes more imminent and more dangerous... once case there where they had this mortar set up right on the edge of the river. It wouldn't have been more than 600 yards at the maximum. Everyone reckoned I exaggerate the distance.
- 05:00 They reckoned it was less than that but I don't think it was. I think it was about 600 yards. I saw the mortars coming through the air towards us and I could see them coming through the air, and I saw them dropping another four mortars into their battery, so there was four more on the way. So that was a more dangerous target

05:30 than the one inland. So I swung the... , "All guns follow director. Load. Fire. Bang." Fortunately we got them in the first round. The first broadside we got four shells straight into that pit and that got rid of that

06:00 threat but that was a threat, a very immediate threat, but you've got to think of these things.

Are all guns aiming for one target or does each gun have a different target?

No, no your guns are aiming for the target you choose, only one target, one target. The Bofors guns, they're firing at targets of opportunity,

06:30 like a bloke gets up in the high grass and aims a rifle at the ship, well the bloke on the Bofors gun has a go at him in the Bofors gun, targets of opportunity, whereas the four inch control, that's selected targets.

And the captain predetermines the targets does he?

No. I determine them. The control officer determines the targets. You've got to

07:00 assess it and determine the targets.

So is someone advising you of possible targets coming up like this mortar?

No. No, my eyes and unfortunately by binoculars got shot away at one stage but I still had to do it with the naked eye. It was so close it didn't make any difference. I didn't need binoculars anyway. I asked them to send up

07:30 a set of binoculars to me but they never got there. I don't know why but it was close enough to do with the naked eye. I wasn't worried greatly. So no, I had to choose the target, evaluate it, do something about it, yep.

To identify the target to the guns are you giving

08:00 **coordinates or describing what it looks like? How are you defining it for them?**

They had a habit of putting guns inside old houses and poking them out through the doors. Well I'd look at that and I'd know where we were in the river. I'd know roughly the range. So

08:30 if I had serious doubts I'd do what they call a spread line. That's fire, rapidly fire three rounds spaced apart and that will give me the... whether I'm on the right... then I'd choose one of those three, and I know what setting that's on. So a spread line shoot is that and

09:00 then if you're not sure of the range, you do what they call an up ladder shoot. You go 200 up, 200 up, 200 up and then depending how you fall, you do it as quick as you can because time is essential. They're having a go at you. You've got to be quick and as you've gone up 200, up 200, up 200, that's 600 yards you've gone up.

09:30 You see you're second round. You know that the last round you've fired is at 600 yards on your up ladder. So if it looked to be 200 yards over the target you'd come down 200 and then you'd put a broadside in there, and see what happened. Does that explain it?

10:00 **In respect to your orders, you've spoken about the ladder up for going up 200 or down 200.**

Yes.

You've also spoken firing wide to work out which setting you're on.

Yes.

What other orders can you issue in regards to working out your target and identifying?

I'm afraid that's up to the control, up to the director. That's your responsibility.

But what other orders or other patterns

10:30 **of firing can you use?**

Oh you can describe whether you want rapid fire or you might... if something gets difficult and you can't get at it, you want to burst your shell 25 feet above the ground, an air burst. You say, "I want an air burst" and give them a certain... you know what range it is. You say, "I want an airburst

11:00 at 211" and they set the fuse at 211, and you get an airburst 25 foot above the ground, and the explosion will go down. How come I remember all that. After all these years. Jesus, 60 years and I still remember it.

When would you use an airburst?

11:30 Airburst? Well I used to use it when someone was hiding behind a mound or something like that with a machine gun poked over the top of it. It was far easier to fire an airburst and you cover a fair area than

panning down with a broadside. It's a waste of ammunition.

12:00 So you give them a good airburst and that shuts them up pretty quick hopefully.

So I understand properly, the ship at this stage is still cruising?

Still going along, yes.

At what speed were you travelling at?

We were travelling at about 14 knots when this was taking place, yes.

Are you manoeuvring at all?

Yes, much so, very much so but that's taken care of

12:30 with the settings you put on the clock. You set your speed, your course change, that's automatically fed into the system and so you don't have to worry about that.

Fed into the system? We're not talking obviously computers. We're talking manual operations?

No, well not computers. They were mechanical computers yes. The fire control clocks were very...

13:00 they were the forerunners of computers, yes. They're basically cams and things like that all cut to do certain jobs, and speed of the ship would give you a rate of change of range, so you had a time clock in there giving you the rate of change of range.

13:30 If you were doing 14 knots that would be changing your range and that would change automatically because you'd set 14 on there, and that would change at that rate.

How often was the captain changing courses?

God. Every ten minutes, every ten minutes, very difficult, very difficult navigation.

14:00 **Were there any obstacles in the river that he had to watch out for?**

The river. That was the obstacle. There were shifting sandbanks and things like that but we used to send survey parties up, and they'd get shot at. What we used to do was send a survey boat up and I'd cover them.

14:30 For wherever they were working I'd fire over the top of their heads and that's when I used to use a lot of airburst to keep them down, keep them fairly safe. The navigator always used to say, "There's always dead bloody [meat]..." He didn't know what he was more scared of, whether he was scared of their machine guns or my bloody gunnery.

15:00 **So during this particular battle you mentioned that the binoculars were shot out?**

Yes.

What happened there?

A bullet came from somewhere. I don't know where, from the shore or somewhere.

Were you looking through them at the time?

I was looking through them, yes but it didn't break the glass. It took the mounting piece out, so I had a... it's a very sophisticated

15:30 set of binoculars too but once the mounting is gone, forget them, better do it with your eyes.

Was anyone hit around where you were? Any casualties?

Oh gee what did we have? On that first day we only had one casualty. The second day we had quite a few, one serious,

16:00 quite a number of light wounds, bullet wounds. I forget the numbers now, probably a dozen I suppose that day.

So the first day, who was shot then?

One of the Bofors loading numbers [sailors] standing up on a

16:30 Bofors and he was always the joke of the ship. He was so skinny this bloke that they reckoned he'd want to stand there to want to cast a shadow but he got a bloody rifle bullet through his bloody shoulder. It wasn't too bad but yes.

And the second day?

The second day mainly

17:00 the guns crews copped it because they were out in the open. The loading numbers were going back and forth to the lockers, and of course there was bloody shrapnel screaming around, and we were very, very lucky, very lucky, very lucky.

17:30 It's one of those things I suppose that we were sent there to do a job and we did the job. We pinned down that division. We did 60 days in the river and the other ship, we kept that Chinese Division pinned down on the north bank while they negotiated the peace talks.

You kept them pinned down

18:00 **60 days after this particular action?**

That's what we were sent in there for yes, to pin them down. They didn't like it but some say they could have done a lot more about it, but they did just about everything they could do. What more could they do? You know, I said to a chap, I said, "Well if I was faced with that situation on the other

18:30 side, the only thing I'd change with the defence of the shoreline would be that I'd put more mortars close to the water and I'd use a lot more Bazookas," because the Bazooka is a nasty weapon against a ship. They're built for anti-tank warfare but they'll go through two inches of steel no worries.

19:00 So I said, "I'd use Bazookas." They only sent two bazookas on their wave. Whether they had any more left or not, or whether they got knocked out of the picture or not, I don't know. We might have been lucky enough to knock them out of the picture. You never know.

You mentioned also that they were using the wrong shells, armour piercing.

Yes they were using anti-tank shells, armour piercing shells,

19:30 which we only had three quarter inch plate in our ship. Of course the armour piercing shell would go straight in. Yes they were using anti-tank shells, which are armour piercing, built to go through two inches of steel, where our ship's side was only three eighths of an inch thick

20:00 and it goes straight through, and out the other side unless it struck something, one of the metal upright stanchions inside, which happened in the engine room. One hit a stanchion and exploded in the engine room but fortunately it didn't do any damage. It had to hit something substantial

20:30 to stop it, otherwise it just goes out the other side.

So even the ship's hull wasn't thick enough for these shells?

No. They should have been using direct action shells.

Where was the ship's weakness of where they should have been aiming for?

Quarterdeck, 60 depth chargers. Each one contained 350 kilograms of Amatol, an explosive.

21:00 Hit one of those and the whole ship would go up.

Was anything done to protect the ship there?

I said to the captain one day... when it was all over he said, "What was your biggest worry Frank?" I said, "You're going to laugh at this." I said, "Everyone has been talking about this, talking about the steering gear, talking about this

21:30 and that." I said, "I never thought for one minute." I said, "I was worried about that 60 350 pound Amatol depth chargers on the stern. One direct hit into that and you've got no ship." And he looked at me and he says, "Frank," he said, "Honestly I never thought of it."

22:00 He said, "Honestly I never thought of it." I thought, "I bloody thought of it." That's what he said to me. If you asked him today he'll tell you exactly the same. He said, "I never thought of it." He said, "I was worried about the steering gear." I said, "I wasn't worried about the bloody steering gear. My main worry was as long as those... but nothing." I said to myself, "God don't let anything

22:30 hit one of those depth chargers because dear God, it's bloody enormous bloody explosion."

How many times did the ship go up and down the shoreline?

60. Over a period of time, 60. Yes, 60 times, 60 patrols but it was never

23:00 all like that.

But on the particular day, the second day, how many times did you go up and down engaging the enemy?

Only once, only once. It would be suicide to go back. We'd done our damage, which slowed them up for a while. They could have brought down more, more guns, more mortars. So we let them have that day. We went back 10,000 yards and just kept dropping them on them, go back to

23:30 what we called our safe anchorage, and do a long range job on them because they couldn't get us, couldn't get the range on us from there. They tried but you'd see their shells falling short.

How long time-wise was this particular engagement on the second day?

24:00 About an hour I suppose. About an hour.

So you were travelling down the riverbank?

Yes. Actually we were under fire for about an hour I'd say, about an hour, yes. The whole trip used to take about two and a half hours I think it was, that particular strip.

So how far out

24:30 **or along were the Chinese divisions spread?**

They were well back. They were probably 10,000 yards back.

And how far along the riverbank were they spread, one mile, two mile?

Probably 20 miles. I couldn't count the number

25:00 of times... they had the big railhead at Yuman. I couldn't count the number of times I bombarded Yuman but we bombarded from 10,000 yards. We'd get in close enough, get 10,000 yards in. I couldn't count the number of times we bombarded Yuman [Yuman-ni, Korea].

Did you see yourselves as you said off camera, a floating tank?

That's what we were.

25:30 We were an amphibious tank. There's no other description for it. Ships don't get fired on with rifles and machine guns. I had a big set of radar ariels about that high above my head, right across and they had one hole there

26:00 was... we measured it later. It was eight inches across. A big shell went through there and there was about a half a dozen bullet holes in it as well. So the bloke down in the operations room wanted to know why his radar wouldn't work. I said, "It's not going to work until we put a new dish in it."

You mentioned earlier in the day how useless the chaplain

26:30 **was onboard the Hobart. Was there a chaplain onboard at this point in time?**

No, no chaplain onboard, no, no, no. Yes perhaps I was a bit hard on the chaplain but that's the truth as I see it. See chaplains should be a moral booster.

27:00 He should give you confidence and he did the absolute opposite. The absolute opposite.

While you were on the Han River did the Chinese ever try and attack the boat via the water?

No but that was to come if we hadn't got out because the Han River freezes over in the winter and towards

27:30 the end of our last trip I think it was or second last trip, we were getting pancake ice, and large ice chunks were starting to come down the river, and it was only a matter of time before froze over, and could be used as a byway then. If we'd stayed there we'd have been a most convenient ten minutes for the

28:00 Chinese Army, not much we could do.

During this attack on you on the Han River did you ever call for air support to help you?

Oh God, you call for air support... yes I called for air support, never got any though. I called for air support and I got it...

28:30 they gave me some napalm at about five o'clock that night. They wanted the coordinates and put a bit of napalm down at five o'clock at night. So they didn't want to come in. I don't know why.

29:00 Perhaps they reckoned we shouldn't have been where we were but anyway, that's where we were told to go.

So are you suggesting the air support was very slow or that they weren't willing to come?

I can't answer that question because we asked for air support for the whole of the operation and we never got it.

29:30 We never got it because they said we were out of the big zone and didn't need it. Well, we never ever had an air attack in that river, so I suppose they were right. So we had no problem with enemy aircraft.

You mentioned

30:00 **the sandbanks would keep shifting?**

Yes.

Were there times that the ship ran aground?

It touched but we always checked the passage before we did it. So we always knew where the sandbanks were. That's what I can't understand. The Chinese let us mark our course out, not very sensible. I'm afraid Confucius

30:30 let them down there.

Earlier in the day you were talking about World War II, there was action stations and there was... I've forgotten the other two. What were you on the Han River? Was it action stations the whole time or were you at secondary stations, or what?

We were at action stations to do a trip up river and when we came back to the anchorage we'd go to

31:00 defence stations, second degree of readiness. Sometimes we'd fire all night, just pick some particular area and send off a couple of shells in that direction. It was a psychological effect but the psychological effect went both ways because as I up

31:30 said to the captain one day, I said, "We might be waking them up but we're also waking the crew up." I said, "The crews get tired and I don't think," I said, "There's two ways to the psychological. You can't fire a four inch gun without waking the crew up."

32:00 You do it often enough you get the same results. You wake your crew up to wake them up, so these psychologists. Psychological warfare is not for me thanks. Anyway, we cut it down a fair bit, made the last one at ten o'clock,

32:30 the first at six as I suggested.

What changes had happened in the Royal Navy and in respect to engagements from World War II to Korea?

Very few really, very few. No the big changes hadn't come. We still had battle ships

33:00 and aircraft carriers. We still had all those hangovers from World War I, World War II I should say but basically there wasn't much change. It was still the same navy. The only difference

33:30 was that the manning had become a problem but otherwise there was no change.

What about from the medical point of view of helping the men, casualties?

That had improved because we had choppers [helicopters] to take out the serious wounded when it happened, yes. American helicopters would come in and take out the wounded.

34:00 **That happened at the end of this... ?**

Yes they came in and took out one badly wounded chap. Very good of them actually because it was bloody dangerous because we weren't built for... we had bloody wires running everywhere and it was very difficult to put a helicopter on the stern of a frigate in those days. Now they've got a landing deck on them

34:30 of course but in those days the helicopters were much like the ones you see herding cattle up in the high country. That was the sort of helicopter that used to come in. They used to come in and have two stretchers on each side, and used to hoist them up onto the stretcher, and takeoff for the hospital. There used to be a

35:00 hospital at Seoul.

Were you given shore leave at all during your time in Korea?

Not in Korea, in Japan, not in Korea, no. No, I went ashore behind the lines at one time. We were trying to get hold of a nasty little anti-aircraft nest that the

35:30 air force couldn't get and they asked us to have a go at it. I went ashore, took a party ashore about 70 or 80 miles behind the frontline. I took a party ashore and tried to get a spot. It was so well camouflaged you couldn't find it and I told

36:00 them I wanted an aircraft to fly over it so I could see it. Well they wouldn't be in it. It was the only way you could find it, it was so well camouflaged. I tried a bit of bluff but it didn't work. So that little trip ashore wasn't successful. I did land in North Korea, so that's something.

And what was your bluff?

36:30 Oh I put a couple of airbursts over the ... I knew the damn well where this thing was roughly but it was

in the side of a hill, and I know they were coming in, and going out. So thought I'd put a couple of airburst there to see what happens, see if they take the bait. I thought they might come out, not a movement, not a twig moved. It didn't bluff them. I couldn't bluff them out.

37:00 **Were you ever afraid on that shore landing that there might be North Koreans around?**

Oh no, we had good armaments.

How many men were with you?

A wireless operator and two

37:30 AB's [Able Seaman] with me, and we carried Thompson submachine guns, and a Bren gun, and I don't know what we were going to do with them. I said to the captain before I left, he said, "What do you want to take with you?" I said, "A bloody tooth pick and I'm not being humorous." He said, "Why?" I said, "Well." He said, "Well

38:00 you might win a VC [Victoria Cross] if you go in there." "Yeah" I said, "If I go in there with a great stack of arms they're going to start shooting at me and I'm a sailor. I'm not a bloody soldier and I'd be far better off with a bloody toothpick. I'd just say I'm very sorry, I haven't got any arms and go into a prisoner of war camp." He said, "That's a defeatist attitude."

38:30 I said, "It might be defeatist but it's sensible."

Tape 9

00:39 **Frank you mentioned earlier on today that you experienced some nervous problems later on after the war?**

Yes.

Can you tell us about what happened to you?

I lost my memory. That was what happened. I went walkabout for about five days

01:00 and nobody could find me.

Where were you at this time?

I was at Griffith at this time and I just took off, and went walkabout, and lost my memory, and I ended up DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] got hold of me, and brought me down to Concord Hospital in Sydney, and had a look at my wartime experiences,

01:30 and said, "Well it's not possible not to have something wrong with you." I had a lot of treatment, shock treatment and therapy, and things like that. I think that they put things back in perspective

02:00 but then again, I had another nervous breakdown later on. I just got terribly depressed for no reason. That was in Melbourne and

02:30 I had a good job, and they put me into Heidelberg Hospital, and the same story. I had shock treatment there and I don't know whether it did any good or not. It's supposed to take away the memories and things like that but today

03:00 I still don't sleep well. I suppose I've got to live with that.

How are these nervous problems linked to the wartime experiences you had?

Oh I wake up sometimes thinking I'm back in the director tower of the ship or back onto the gun deck talking to people that are not there, and frighten the hell out of the neighbours.

03:30 It's something that... you can take so much medication but in the end you've got to learn to live with yourself and take the dreams, wake up, and say it's another day, and that was a dream,

04:00 not a reality. If you can do that you're all right. As long as I can do that I know I'm all right.

What are the particular experiences that you had that affected you the most?

I'd say

04:30 that the hammering we got in the Java Sea would be the one that affects me most because I can still vividly remember that and it lasted for so long, and you can't change it but you think

05:00 you're a tough bloke, and all this, but basically down inside there's still the person isn't there? There's still the person there and I wake up sometimes sweating, and thinking that we're under another air

attack or something like that

05:30 but it goes. You say it was just a dream and you get back to sleep eventually, things like that. Makes sense?

Very common in fact. I'm sure that there are thousands of people that have had the same symptoms and many people we have talked to.

Sometimes I should ask for counselling if I'd have known.

06:00 I don't know.

Who have you been able to talk about your war experiences with?

I haven't spoken about my war experiences until today, not really. I've spoken about incidents to friends I've met, bumped into over the years but I've never ever spoken about my...

06:30 a full day of war experience , no. No I've never unburdened myself.

Why do you think it was important to speak to us today and put this in the archives?

Well I thought of the younger generation growing up, maybe this could help the younger generation,

07:00 to tell about how bloody horrific war is, that it's not some glamour thing. It's blood, sweat and tears, and takes a lot of good lives. That's basically why I agreed to do this. I thought seriously about it you know? I thought I'd do it

07:30 because maybe it could help some future generation.

With that in mind and considering that this will be kept for 50 or 100 years, are there any last words that you might like to say to someone in the future, who might be watching this?

08:00 Try and negotiate your problems. Don't go to war. That's all.

How do you feel about war in general these days so long after the wars you took part in?

08:30 I find that I must accept the fact that it was necessary to keep our way of life, yet I find that the people that we were in a position to extract us from that position before it happened

09:00 greatly wanting and to allow the circumstances which arose to build up into the war that it was, when you consider that 20 million people died, for what you know? Because somebody wasn't

09:30 prepared to negotiate. I'm not saying you could have negotiated with Hitler but you could certainly ... in 1934 is when they should have started thinking about Adolph Hitler, not 1939. That's in hindsight and North and South Korea,

10:00 I don't know. I don't know what the answer is there. Negotiate but then you've got to think if we knew what was going on in North Korea, maybe I would say well a war is the only way of fixing it. I always remember a little boy when I was ashore in

10:30 enemy territory. I had a Mars bar [chocolate] in my pocket and I gave him this Mars bar, and this little boy out of the village, and he didn't know what it was. He'd never seen a lolly you know? But he was about the age of my eldest boy at the time. This little kid had never ever seen a lolly. He didn't know what a Mars bar was.

11:00 So I don't know. It's too much.

Well thank you very much for speaking to us today. Are there any last things that you'd like to put down that you think we haven't covered or you'd like to talk about?

No it's all covered. I hope the padre doesn't sue me for defamation.

11:30 **I'm sure he won't and thanks again for taking part Frank. It's been a pleasure speaking to you.**

As long as I have got some sort of message over.

INTERVIEW ENDS